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Short Version

THE FUTURE OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN BRITAIN:

ANSWERING THAT OF GOD

Short Verson

The short version of the essay is intended to be printed in *Friends Quarterly*.

Broadly, the short version consists of summaries of each of the main section of the essay. Each section of the main essay consists of a series of essays on topics within the subject of the section.

Contents

Introduction - short version.

Is there a problem - short version, strengths and limits of present day Quakerism.

Embrace science - short version, integrating science and Quakerism.

Spiritual craftsmanship - short version, crafting spiritual personal interactions.

Master Quaker - short version, Quakers as masters of crafting and restoring good personal relations.

Vision For Quakerism brings it all together. (An essay shared with teh main essay)

Move on - short version, where we might go next.

A New Framework For Action (An essay shared with the main essay)

Barriers To Overcome (An essay shared with the main essay)

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Introduction Short Version

TOP

Long titles were once the style of publishing when the title was a sort of abstract and summary of the content of an essay. The first part of my title was given by the competition's organisers. My response is the second part. So in my title we have both a summary and a dialogue.

The phrase "...answering that of God..." comes from a well-known and much-loved quotation from George Fox.¹

The phrase stops before the last words of the sentence - "in everyone" - to allow a broader interpretation. So that we can move on to answer that of God not only in everyone but also in ourselves and in the wider non-human world.

Answering implies a dialogue - speech, language, and interaction in many different ways. This points to my vision of the future Religions Society of Friends.

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Footnotes

1. "Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one." George Fox, 1656, quoted in "Advices and Queries" *Quaker*

faith and practice, BYM, London 2007.

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Is There a Problem? - Short Version

TOP

I have for many years felt dissatisfied with the state of the Society of Friends, as I have experienced it. In raising this essay competition the organisers imply that they and others are also in doubt about the Society's future. I read this as some sort of validation of my own feelings.

Skipping lightly through some historical perspectives of the society I was struck by a discrepancy between the path of the world and the path of the Society through it. In part this is a mis-match between the science of the world and the spirituality of the Society. It seems to me that most of the Quakers whom I come across do not have a sound appreciation of what science is, what it is about and how it does its business. In part too it is because the Society has lost its way spiritually and in the conduct of its practical affairs. Tolerance, faith and trust in one another are very important but without a strong core to anchor and ground the individual and the community they have led to the rootlessness that I see. One of the critical aspects of this is how we reach important decisions. I explore both the secular ways of reaching decisions and the Quaker methods of discernment in a meeting for worship for business. In particular I find shortcomings in the way people are appointed to fill key roles in our life and service.

I conclude that the society is facing a crisis.

There are many possible ways to deal with a crisis. Arbitrarily, I thought it likely that the solution to the crisis, like the crisis itself, might be rooted in the past. It seemed to me that to be acceptable to Friends, an approach must build on the strengths that we have and reflect the testimonies and achievements of our tradition.

Let me show what I mean by an illustration. Our Advices and Queries characterise Quaker faith and practice. I grew up with them and they are a fundamental part of my personal life. They suggest general directions and aims. They give general comfort and guidance. What they do not do is provide details or suggestions as to how to move in any specific direction. "Be honest with yourself." It is an aim: a suggested direction. It does not tell me how to recognise honesty in myself when I see it, or how to be honest, what to do to travel towards honesty or what

difficulties I might encounter on the way or how to deal with them. These are matters of behaviour, technique and craft.

Going on a journey, a map shows me where some things are: its my choice where I want to go. The timetable tells me when the trains, busses and planes run but I choose which to take and when to take them. Understanding and being able to execute the how of travelling enables me to journey where I want to go. Without this ability my journey remains only a longing - the Emerald City without a Yellow Brick Road.

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Embrace Science - Short Version

TOP

Having identified a difference or a lack of coordination between Quakerism and science, in this section I explore what Quakerism might usefully learn from science. I am not interested in prolonging the historical antipathy of science and religion. I am looking for a way forward not a way back.

I see science as the complement of mysticism not its antagonist. A balance of the two gives a powerful platform for the future. Mysticism allows us to contemplate, to wonder at and to appreciate what we don't understand, to accept what is paradoxical but true, to have fun and to cope with adversity. Science shows how things work and exposes the eternal behind the everyday world.

Science is the search for reliable and trustworthy truth about the world and about ourselves – human behaviour. Reviewing science's knowledge of the world and evolution uncovers a number of interesting trends among them is the idea that science and the universe are open knowledge systems in contrast to the closed systems of traditional religious and political belief systems from which new properties emerge as development progresses. The review justifies moral values in the context of human community survival. It also suggests, at least to me, a new view of God with an external objective aspect and an experienced, personal aspect.

Science was known to the ancient Greeks most notably Aristotle, Pythagoras, Euclid and Euler. In the Middle Ages advances in astronomy put science in opposition to the accepted Bible-based theories of everything. Modern science was born when Newton and others founded the Royal Society in the seventeenth century and developed the experimental method of testing theories to give us objective, trustworthy, reliable information about our world and ourselves.

In the nineteenth century Darwin's Origin of Species set Victorian Britain aflame with controversy and in the early twentieth century Hoyle and Hubble's public debate was finally settled when the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe was established experimentally. This was the coup de grace for the literal interpretation of the Genesis story, but there are still many Christians and religionists who maintain its absolute truth.

The development of science in physics, chemistry, biology, psychology and sociology has transformed the world in which we live, our culture and our behaviour. In spite of this, religion, and Quakerism in particular, has not adapted its beliefs, philosophy or teachings to reflect our new understanding or our new way of life.

Science has given us a body of knowledge and understanding that is independent of personal opinion or belief, and based on objective verifiable evidence. The facts are organised and coordinated into abstract theories and models with application across a range of real practical situations. This has been achieved through careful observation, rigorous testing in controlled experimentation and vigorous public examination.

Clearly science is a search for truth, the truth about the physical tangible real world in which we live and the intangible realities that describe it and make it understandable. Science is an open knowledge system in several senses. It is public and open to scrutiny. It is a growing and developing system with new evidence, understanding and methods emerging all the time. There are very few absolutes or constants in science, but the most important is the scientists devotion to the truth. For me the parallels with Quakerism are compelling.

A brief review of my understanding of religion showed that it too is 'a theory of everything', an attempt to explain and understand the world around us. Unlike science religion provides authority for the way things are and the way they should be. It provides a moral code of conduct – an ethic. The basis for religion is belief, authority and tradition. The basis for science is objective evidence. I see these as complementary quests for truth not mutually exclusive alternatives.

Under the spur of the early Kindlers¹ sessions in 2008, I re-examined my understanding of science and Quakerism. In particular I asked myself whether there is any objective justification for a moral ethic, a virtuous life, based on the experience of science.

My reading of the origins of the universe, the origin of life, the origin of species and the origin of modern man led me to conclude that there is indeed a moral justification for a virtuous life beyond self-interested hedonism. The core ideas were that the whole of creation is an open system in which we have evolved with new abilities that were at best potentials in the dawn of the Big Bang. Emergence through evolution is fundamental. There is no reason to believe that emergence or evolution themselves have stopped or changed in any fundamental way.

Another core idea is that in humans self-consciousness and subjective experience have emerged. This phenomenon opened the whole world of spiritual life.

Taken together these two ideas changed my idea of God to one that has an objective aspect that is explored in science, technology and engineering and a subjective aspect that I experience internally. What links the two is the understanding that subjective experience and all that it brings with it has emerged in the course of our evolution.

It has been suggested that the reason that modern man *Homo sapiens*, survived and populated the world much more successfully than our now extinct closest relative Neanderthal man, *Homo nenderthalensis* is that we have the greater ability to create flexible, adaptive societies. This is fundamentally different from the instinctive organisations of bee, insects, herd animals and so on.

Here lies the clue to the moral imperative. Successful societies (and hence our species) require that self-aware, spiritual individuals choose to act responsibly to cooperate in forming and in operating the society as it changes in its own maturity and in response to external changes.

I find it comforting that both science from an objective view and religion from a traditional, subjective view, arrive at similar moral and ethical imperatives.

Science also has a method to teach in the quest for truth. Science uses a method of questioning and testing, of looking for objective evidence – free of distracting personal bias. Scientists are also creative, artistic and intuitive. The pursuit of knowledge and understanding is a passionate and spiritual exercise. What use can Quakerism make of rigorous questioning and testing?

Thirdly science teaches mechanisms and models – its theories – that when applied in real practical situations give us reliable ways to change the world.

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Footnotes

1. *Kindlers* is the name of an informal group of Quakers and others who began meeting in 2008 under the guidance of Beth Allen and Alec Davidson to explore and revitalise the Society of Friends.

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Spiritual Craftsmanship - Short Version

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Having established to my own satisfaction that spiritual experience is a characteristic and fundamental part of being human, I turned to another widely recognised aspect of humanity – man the toolmaker.

The ability to make and use tools to change the world in which we live is an ability that we shared with the Neanderthals. Recent research has suggested that our closest living relatives, the chimpanzees, not only make and use tools but have been seen teaching one another to use stick tools.

Craftsmanship, skill and expertise in making and using tools to manipulate materials and change the world, is probably as old as humanity itself. Certainly there were highly skilled craftsmen in the Stone Age and Neolithic periods before the ancient Mesopotamians, the ancient Egyptians and the ancient Greeks. There is evidence of mature and sophisticated furniture and decorative technologies (dovetail joints, inlay work and gold) by 3000 BC.

I explored the notion of craftsmanship stimulated by Richard Sennett's recent work on the sociology of craftsmanship, and also from my own experience in both practical and intellectual crafts. Crafts are always about working with a prime material using tools to manipulate and change the world. There is an aspect of design about this, which perhaps echoes the intentional design of the universe. In my view, design with the intention of realising a vision of some sort is a typically human activity.

Quakers care about, work at, develop and encourage good relationships between people. Fundamentally, I work at relationships with those around me and with those with whom I come into contact. For Quakers this is a simple extension of our beliefs about the nature of God and our relationship with God. It is also a simple extension of the basic Christian message. Thus Quakerism is, in part, the promotion of good relations; skilling, equipping and enabling individuals to improve relationships.

My craftsmanship as a Quaker, lies in the skill with which I interact with others for personal and social benefit, improving all our lives, lies in the effectiveness with which I can mend social relationships. For reliable insights into human behaviour

in general and my behaviour in particular, this takes me into the area of academic and practical psychology. It also takes me into the area of spirituality for insights into my personal subjective experience (in the widest sense).

Mending and improving social relationships is the focus and core of my suggestion for the future of the Society of Friends. It leads to a 'how' or a mechanism for answering that of God.

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Vision For Quakerism

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A vision gives focus to one's thinking and action; a powerhouse for motivation and enthusiasm. In Quaker terms, it is the point for application of our beliefs and principles and for the integration of our testimonies. Quakers of the past have all had a vision to which they were committed and which drove their efforts to mend their world.

Martin Luther King famously said, "I have a dream". I wish I had half his complaint. I hope that Quakers will one day lead us to a better society.

I am up in a balloon. Laid out below me is a landscape: a countryside, a village, a city. At a great distance, the landscape looks passive almost static. As I watch I see it change, through the day and the seasons but it also develops and evolves. Closer, I see animals and people moving about. I identify some of the people with imaginary grey bobble-hats, I watch how all the people move in patterns and how they interact and build relationships. They keep doing the same things over and over again and yet the patterns evolve and mature, die away and give rise to new patterns. The patterns are not random; the people encounter one another and work together (or against each other) in dynamic tension.

I focus on the interactions. They are not easy to see, so I think of them as music. At first it's a cacophony of noise. As I watch and listen it begins to sound like an orchestra tuning up: there are snatches of order, finger exercises, adjustments of pitch, even a tune or two. I keep watching and listening. The snatches of melody become longer and more frequent. Here and there I see some people pushing and pulling others trying to create structure and order but mostly it doesn't last long. I can't see any orchestral conductor, but gradually the music of the interactions becomes coherent and melodious.

I notice that the grey-hats often seem to be there when the snatch of order appears. The grey-hats ebb together in small groups, interact among themselves and then flow out again into the other people. I begin to realise that the grey-hats are working with the interacting people so that they are more harmonious, helping them craft their relationship to work together more enjoyably in a better society. Grey-hats are a part of the concert without being players or conductors but they have the effect of moving the whole concert towards a harmonious performance. The grey-hats are the catalysts that transform the cacophony into harmony. They don't write the score or the script, but they help to make the concert.

As my balloon goes down I no longer see the big picture. I see a smaller and smaller piece of the action. I begin to see individual encounters, sometimes happy and sometimes violent. I hear sounds and conversations. But now I can't see the patterns so easily, it's more confusing. I can't see inside the people, I don't know what they are thinking or trying to do. Further down still, I am bumping into people and they are bumping into me, I talk to them they talk to me, some encounters are good and pleasant, others are rough and uncomfortable. Some are fruitful some draining and exhausting. I am joining the people-scape and taking a part in their patterns. I am trying to make the best of a very difficult and confusing situation. Sometimes it's very, very good and sometimes it's horrible. Sometimes it's my fault, sometimes things just go right. I find it frustrating not knowing what people are doing, not knowing how to work with them or how to get them to work with me.

I notice I am beginning to encounter grey-hats. My hand touches my head and I realise I am wearing a bobble-hat; just its bobble is grey.

I find I am meeting the grey-hats. I begin to feel them encourage and support me as I execute my own routines and habits and move round my daily and weekly patterns. I realise that I understand more of what the people round me are doing and how they are working with each other. I can see I am getting better at working with them too and sometimes they seem to work with me, my life is richer and more satisfying, the music seems to be getting better.

After a while my hat is now all grey and I am working deliberately with my personal encounters, crafting, tuning and restoring them so that they make good music for me and for the people in the relationships with me. I get mentoring, training and education from the grey-hats and I find myself working with them as my own experience and spirit deepens. Some grey hats have special experience and, knowledge and insight in particular areas.

Looking back I realise how much my attitudes and thinking have changed, and now much better my life is compared to what it was when my balloon first landed. Working with peoples' relationships in this way I find a profound experience, uplifting and truly mystical.

My vision of the Quaker future is a vibrant community that reaches throughout the general public (at least of Britain) working at a personal level (as well as at corporate and institutional levels, as at present) to enable and help individuals to craft, engineer and maintain good relationships with each other. Quakers will create a new Pennsylvania: an ethical and Spirit-led community. Quakers will embrace science and find new conceptions of God and a new basis for ethical and moral behaviour that is fit for purpose in the twenty-first century – the mystical 'glue' that holds us all together as a community. Quakers will craft the relationships in its Meetings, and committees to build the secular strength of the ethical community. I see Quakers speaking to the condition of all men with the passion and commitment of early Friends, but appealing to the jaded and

sophisticated twenty-first century consumer. I see Quakers working in local groups in Britain and throughout the world to address the pressing issues of justice, equality, poverty, peace, Integrity, abuse and sustainable environments, enabling local people and powerful people to form constructive well-crafted relationships that will enable them to solve the problems. I see individual Quakers as happier, more fulfilled and more secure in their own relationships and with strong, effective support from other Friends.

I see Friends answering that of God - in themselves, in each other and in the world around them,.

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Move on - Short Version

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Creating and mending good personal relations is what I mean by answering that of God: the relationship I have with myself, my relationship with the external and internal experienced part of God, the relationships that I have with other people and the relationships that people have with each other.

The cost of moving in this direction is personal, in the commitment to engage in crafting better relationships.

Through Master Quaker Restorers (people who have mastered the craft of mending good relationships) our institutions will change: change to support Master Quakers and change to work more effectively and efficiently. Through individual Master Quakers, and the institutions they transform, we may transform our future and realise our dreams.

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A New Framework For Action

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1 INTRODUCTION

To say what is wrong is not enough. Not just what needs to be done but how, when, where and by whom. What barriers must be overcome? What threats and dangers (risk) must be managed? What will it cost and how long will it take? What spiritual resources (skills, knowledge, methods, facilities) will be needed? What judgement, wisdom, discernment will be needed? What inspections, corrections and preventive measures will be needed? What should be celebrated?

Reasonable and expected these questions assume a closed knowledge system, a fixed determined simple world. What we are dealing with is an open spiritual world through which we are journeying and from which the future will emerge as it will.

In this essay I'm looking for a pressure point where a small effort, a small change, a different attitude can make a significant difference and magnify the benefit of Quaker action in several areas. Business jargon calls this gearing or leverage.

"Give me a place to stand and a lever long enough and I will move the world." Archimedes, 280-211 BC

Tinkering with human beings and with our real social relationships is rightly hedged around with ethical and moral taboos. We can only move forward to improve our personal behaviours and mend the world in a strong, ethical, moral and deeply caring community. Only then can we know 'experimentally'. Here we can listen to God objectively and by experience; listen to others and interact with them to improve our craftsmanship in spiritual interactions. This is answering that of God – in myself, in the world, in others – as George Fox enjoined us.

The state, the media, the traditional Christian Church and I suspect other religions, are not equipped or empowered to create, maintain and use an ethical spirit-led community of the sort needed to craft interpersonal and spiritual relationships with morality and integrity. Quakers, already a spirit-led community with a philosophy of open revelation and a reputation for integrity might be able to do it.

2 LEVERS

2.1 Individuals

I aspire to be a Master Quaker and I hope others will do the same.

We can all work on improving our personal relations and our behaviour within them. We can explore and develop relationships that are new to us, new-to-us sorts of relationship. We can all make more use of the relationships that we already enjoy.

I might do this through reading. One way is to read (with discernment and wisdom) in psychology, sociology, life skills and self-help books. I might work with new groups of committed people, by seek new contacts (networking), take training courses, study days, workshops and so on.

My single most important action is to observe (pay attention to, take note of, think about, interpret) the relationships around me, to observe my actions and their results. Observation alone is not enough. I must engage with others: smile, start a conversation and keep it going, take the initiative, join or create a new group, respond positively and with encouragement to even the most negative behaviour of others, take time to be with people and time to be with myself. I also need to live adventurously and experimentally: to explore new relationships but to try new (to me) ways of thinking and feeling about a relationship, to try

(after proper consideration and discernment) new acts and conversations.

To improve my interaction skills I need to learn (and perhaps research) more about how interactions work, how to control them through my own behaviour.

In face to-face encounters there is not much time for careful consideration, thought, planing and so on. I find thought and speech difficult and if I don't do something I get sidelined in conversations and thus socially ignored. The most practical time for though and planning is before the encounter. The best time for observation understanding and interpretation is after the encounter. Too often I rush off to the next encounter, deal with the next interruption or the next panic. Sometimes these are indeed important and urgent but more often it is useful to take a moment to consider.

Through my better craft I hope to make my life happier and more successful, help the people around me improve their relationships and have better, happier lives. An important part of this is to spend time and use my skills to restore decaying and broken interactions and relations that I find around me.

Master Quakers do all these things deliberately, with courage, dedication and persistence. They craft and restore relationships with themselves, with God and with other people.

2.2 Local meetings

As an existing community, whether thriving or failing, my local Meeting is a theatre for improving existing relationships and building new relationships. It is a face-to-face community that evolves and changes over time with a lifecycle of its own. It is created by the lives (spiritual journeys) of individuals weaving through it. It lives and works as long as there are people to make the whole cloth: otherwise it wears thin, frays and falls apart.

Meeting for Worship is a time for building my relationship with God. It is also a time for corporately deepening our commitment to each other and for building the fundamentals of our relationships in the Spirit, corporately as a community.

The Master Quakers come to meeting for worship for business with mind prepared with understanding of the matter to be considered, with researched consideration of the people who might be affected, both now and in the future; come with heart prepared by recognising their own biases, limitations and feelings; by being clear on the critical moral issues in contrast to the 'simpler' factual, scientific or legal matters; by centering themselves to be open to the Light and to work with the sense of the meeting.

Master Quakers see some people in the Meeting with skills and relationships that they value. They try to emulate them. They work with them, talk with them, share their activities, cooperate with them and learn from them in the formal and informal activities of the meeting, chatting before and after meeting over coffee.

Meetings will help and support its individual members with training days and courses, interaction clinics, mentors in interactions and spiritual journeying.

The local Meeting has a critical function, to create and maintain an ethical community first among its own members and then in its local community (religious, commercial, public service, local government, leisure activities and so on). Training mentoring and so on can be extended into this community. Also important are things like whistle-blowing, non-executive directors.

Every meeting has activities outside formal worship and committees: outreach, workdays, study courses and social activities. Master Quakers take a prominent role in these: organising them, managing them, leading them and taking part in them. Master Quakers take special interest in the craft-building parts of these activities – seminars, conferences, workshops, clinics.

2.3 Core meetings

As I understand them Area and other meetings upto and including BYM gather together to conduct (among other things) the administrative and management of several smaller more local meetings and cover a wider geographical area with a larger population.

The Master Quakers' role in theses gatherings is similar to their role in local meetings. Their church is larger and their responsibilities and resources are correspondingly greater. Master Quakers collect and share craft knowledge and skills over a wider group, particularly where one Friend has special knowledge or skill needed elsewhere. In applications for membership Master Quakers look for seeds of Quaker craft to nurture. In testimonies to the Grace of God in life of departed Friends, Master Quakers highlight the Friend's craft that informs and inspires others in the use and development of their own craft. In considering our methods, procedures and principles for the administration and governance of our society, Master Quakers pay particular attention to the use and development of Quaker craftsmanship. New Quaker Testimonies capture and reflect our Quaker craft as earlier Testimonies have done on specific social issues.

The area Meeting also supports its local meetings in the same way that the local meeting support its own members.

2.4 Supporting Organisations

In addition to our core worshipping community from individual Friends to yearly meeting, we have organisations and institutions (that may also be worshipping communities) which provide a range of supporting and specialist services to Quakerism. I include the central organisations of Meeting for Sufferings, the Recording Clerks' Office, QPSW, QL, Quaker centres such as Woodbrooke, and international organisations such as QUNO and FWCC. One might also include smaller or more specific organisations like QSA, Six-weeks Meeting, QHT, and so on.

Master Quakers will deploy and develop their craft in the administration and management of our physical and spiritual resources as they do in smaller communities. Master Quakers have special opportunities for academic and practical research to develop the theory and knowledgebase of the Quaker craft and to package it for use by Master Quakers and others elsewhere. Some of this involves interpreting, applying and coordinating results for other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology and philosophy. Some of it involves collecting and analysing the experience of Quakers and others in practical fields such as social work, counselling, commerce, social action, politics and peace work. Some of this work gives rise to principles and practices that are amenable to field studies, and trials as is done in many practical branches of science and engineering.

We are already familiar with packaging our experience and insights in journals from The Friend to Quaker Studies and in newspaper reports and editorials. We understand packing ideas in training courses, seminars, resources for children's groups and so on. Quaker craft might also be packaged as websites, films, computer games, apprenticeships, mentoring, commercial publications, exhibitions and so on.

Master Quakers in some organisations are custodians of craft resources, making books, films, and electronic media assessable to and available to Master Quakers and others who need them.

2.5 Action in the field

Quakers in commercial organisations, Quakers in politics, Quakers in local government are as much in the front-line as Quakers in Ethiopia, Afghanistan or Bolivia.

All the usual areas of social action: poverty, homelessness, politics, money and finance, justice, prisons, health, law and order, education, business and

commerce. More recent concerns: parenting, heritage, media, terrorism, global ecology, and governance.

Master Quakers in work programmes to mend the great social issues of the day (peace, justice, exploitation, commerce, politics and so on) not only deploy their craft in managing their organisation but use their craft at the 'coal face' of their operations and, through their front-line work, help those they work with to mend their own relationships. Of course first-aid and emergency care are needed but so is treatment of acute and chronic dis-ease, restoration of mal-function and prevention of ill-ness. Front-line and back office workers use the packaged resources that are appropriate to their work situation and to the start of their personal journey. Deploying Quaker craftsmanship in supporting front-line workers through the difficult times and the bad times is perhaps the most demanding of all the Quaker craft situations.

The internet and the media, now such a large part of our lives are relatively new to the social scene and need some special care. Most (but not all) Friends are on the internet and use the web in one way or another. Most (but again not all) Friends have a use a television for four or more hours a day. Most (but not all) friends have an use a mobile phone. Electronic communication is a different from written communication as the written word is from the spoken word. Texting is not just a new language, it's a new social phenomenon. Gaming is as old as human society but allied with the power and addition of computers it has become a new phenomenon. Sport has always been a simulation of and a training for more serious life activities – war, work, spiritual development. Through the media it is now a massive business that sets example for young and old. Soap-operas and reality TV have come a long way since The Archers and Mrs Dale's Diary (if you are old enough to remember them). For many (too many?) people they have perverted the gossip among friends and neighbours that informally maintained the fabric of a community. The challenge is not to bemoan the past or to walk away in horror but to find ways to make the internet and the media work for us – turn their swords into real ploughshares.

3 A PLACE TO STAND

We all have interpersonal skills and relationships with other people. We have membership of a Quaker community and its organisation. So we can all start here and start now.

4 WHO SHOULD DO IT

QPSW, QL and Quaker charities are already working with people and their interactions. We have organisations and structures in place. Many Friends are trained, psychologists, counsellors, life coaches, managers and technologists of many types. Many are craftsmen in their own fields and careers. Many have academic and research skills as well as practical crafts. As many Friends have found, 'retirement' is a time to walk away from the demands of the instant consumerist individual society and use those lifetime crafts in the service of a better society – even a Quaker one. IN short the seeds of Quaker craftsmanship are already with us and struggling to grow.

In short each of us should work at our Quaker craft. Local meetings, Area meetings, 'Quarterly' meetings and Yearly meeting should be actively and positively supporting individual Friends at the coal face of their spiritual journeys answering that of God. QPSW, QL, Woodbrooke and the retreat centres have special roles in research, education, training, resource development, and publishing to develop and deploy Quaker craftsmanship.

5 WHAT WILL IT COST?

The fundamental cost is not money, which is just as well since none of us any to spare. The real cost is in personal effort. The challenge is to the spirit, not the pocket, in courage, dedication, persistence, discipline, initiative, leadership, stress. The challenge is to wrestle with the angel of God, to be changed by it and to realise the vision.

6 HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

There is no 'silver bullet'. It took 30 years to take on board John Stephenson Rowntree's reforms. I expect it to take about the same time to turn round our present Society. To use an un-Quakerly analogy, it takes a mile or so to turn round a battleship, but a person can turn round in a single step.

One thing is for sure if we don't start now it will never happen.

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Another thing that's for sure is that the more resistance we put up the longer it will take and the more difficult it will be.

1 MONEY

One common objection to a new programme is that it will cost too much, there is no budget for it and so on . people typically look for a payback or even a profit.

In the first instance, individual Friends and local meetings will be making their own efforts and doing their own thinking, I would expect the money cost to be small to non-existent. Later as the new orientation and efforts take hold I would expect the to become self-financing and eventually profitable. However the financial payback from investing in training, conferences and so on is indirect.

The ethical community, like any other community, must be sustainable and self-financing, At this time it is not clear to me how this will be achieved.

2 MANAGEMENT

Contemporary Friends dislike the word management and all that it involves and stands for. For our future community to be viable we have to change that. The new ethical spirit-led Quaker community needs leadership and management (that is organisation, deployment of resources, feedback and learning from experience, management of risks, caring for people and so on) at every level and in every enterprise. I think this will mean an internal culture change. It will take a long time because a large number of people will need to make small changes or orientation – not easy or quick.

3 NOT WHAT IS WANTED

What I am suggesting is not dramatic or glamorous.

It does not focus on whatever you see as the one big urgent problem that will save the world. Its not Band Aid for Ethiopia, wells for India, or justice for crime victims or Ban the Bomb. Its not Formula 1 racing or the Olympics. Its not the latest Pop group or Tracy Emmin's newest shocking work. It is not a new iPod gizmo or a new technology to change the world overnight.

If you are looking for that sort of roller-coaster high, this programme is not for you.

Over the years I have noticed that most people seem to want absolutes, certainties, simple ideas and simple actions. They want instant reactions, comfort and convenience. If you are looking for any or all these, this is not the programme for you.

4 NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM

It seems clear to me that if most of us work at crafting our relationships better the world will be changed. However you might not agree. Even if the world is changed it might not be changed in the necessary way or fast enough and so on. All I can say is have faith and try it. I make no guarantee that BYM has a future or that BYM will adopt this programme or that the program will save it.

5 ACADEMICALLY UNSOUND

There are two issues here. I have tried to ground my ideas in easily available mainstream published work. However the essence of science and Quakerism is validation by others. So its for those of you with deeper, more specialist understanding and more recent knowledge to examine and revise what I have done.

I have not appealed to established authorities, demonstrated my command of the technical jargon and generally been a good scholar. For many people these are grounds for rejecting the whole essay.

6 CHALLENGES PREVENTING DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS

We take our social and interactive skills for granted. We take them as a given. Its only when other people don't behave as we expect or want that they are blamed for poor skill, thoughtlessness, rudeness and so on. Many people will find their skill and knowledge adequate for their needs and see no reason to change.

- Personal action takes effort - can't be bothered
- Everybody behaves badly - prevailing culture and conforming to fashion

We can all walk, but that does not mean there is no need for athletes, for medicine, for bicycles and aeroplanes or dancing.

We can all talk, that does not mean there is no need for literature, for education, for, writing, Television or for singing.

7 JENNIFER BARRACLOUGH'S YES ... GAME

At BYM 2009 Jenifer Barraclough introduced us to a game that caught my imagination: the Yes game. The game is in two parts and it's a game for two people. In the first part, A makes a suggestion and then B responds with "Yes but ...". In the second part, a makes the same suggestion and this time B responds with "Yes and ...". Jenifer invited us to compae the results of the two parts of the game.

I invite you to play the game. I have made a suggestion about the future of the Religious Society of Frineds in Britain. As B you might reply:

7.1 "Yes, but ..."

"... science has nothing to do with Quakerism", "... craftsmanship does not apply to spiritual matters", "... my social skills are very good, I don't need this stuff.", "... you can't teach practical skills or craftsmanship.", "... we are already doing all this, our team is very successful.", "... this idea is not very exciting, dramatic or inspiring.", "... it will all take too long, cost too much and take too much work.", "... it doesn't deal with the real issues of today's society," whatever they happen to be today.

I have tried to address at least some of these responses. If you unite with one or more of them I feel the future I have outlined is not for you.

7.2 “Yes, and ...”

“... it is within the reach of everyone to improve and make their world better.” “... it uses reliable knowledge from science and practical experience shared from other fields.” “... it revives our roots and branches.” “... we don’t need to change our structures.” “... it celebrates our traditions and history.” “... it enhances and builds on the work we are doing in every area.” “... it will deepen the life of our meetings.” “... through craftsmanship we have a way to work with our relationships and realise the practical meaning of loving God and our neighbour Penn’s ‘true godliness’ and answering that of God.”

If these or others that you can think of excite your imagination then we may have a future together. Remember it only takes twelve, convinced and dedicated people to change the world.

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