

*Making three points:*

*1/ whilst Quakers have no central creed, we each have an individual relationship with God, and from that relationship we each deduce an INDIVIDUAL creed.*

*2/ whilst we have an individual creed, the Quaker experience over the years has led us to a number of insights: what we call the testimonies, and the testimonies have wide support within the Society.*

*3/ Because we have been entrusted with the testimonies we have a responsibility to continue developing them so they speak to people now, and to present them to society, a multi-faith society, as a way forward. Each faith has a different 'creed' but there could be unity around the testimonies.*

*How beautiful upon the mountains  
Are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
Who brings good news, who announces salvation  
Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns".*

*Isaiah 52:7*

The future of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain.

I am a religious person - I believe there is a force for good out there - let's call this force God.

I believe there is that of this God in everyone.

I believe that we can listen to this inner God or we can ignore this inner God, but each of us has the power to contact that of God within ourselves if we choose.

*"Take heed, dear friend, to the prompting of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life."*

I belong to a Religious Society which is a group of people who acknowledge this force for good and acknowledge that of God within themselves and within me. This is the central and most important statement.

We are a society with the central meaningful statement: 'what is your experience?'

My experience has led me to believe that Jesus had a special relationship with God. What that relationship was, is something I am trying to work out. What is clear is that relationship led to a unique body of teaching

that helps me to relate to my fellow man/woman and helps me to relate to that of God within me.

There will be those within the Society of Friends who cannot accept the statement I make. That is up to them. We each were created individuals and each must find their own truth, their own creed.

A creed must be more than a notion, it must be a way.

It is said that the Society of Friends has no creed. That is not true. What is true is that there is no central creed. Each individual must find their way themselves. Their truth, their creed.

For some their experience leads them to make a central statement which is different from mine, but my experience has led me to make these statements. This is my creed.

Historically the Society has been essentially Christian. I believe for the essential identity of the Society we must remain essentially Christian - or what has been called 'post Christian'. There must be a point of reference to which each member can relate and for me that point is the teachings of Jesus.

The Society of Friends is a group that has no unifying creed, but is centred on a method of worship - the silent worship - and a method of administration.

We can sit together in a meaningful silence.

The Quaker Meeting for Worship is centred on a 'meaningful' silence. Being silent the worship can contain several 'languages' and still be a united and meaningful silence. For those whose creed is different from mine, they and I have to accept that we are speaking a different language. To manage the practical affairs of the Society we have to speak to each other, so we have to speak the same 'language'.

Over the years a way of conducting business has evolved, and it generally works. For it to work the participants have to be schooled in its methods, and disciplined in using the method. With discipline the method works.

Jesus taught one prayer, that prayer contains the statement 'Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven'.

That statement is the future of the Religious Society of Friends.

The prayer which contains this statement gives us an idea of what that Kingdom will be like. A kingdom that is like heaven; that is people at peace with themselves and with each other. A kingdom where each of us have, each day, 'our daily bread'; where we forgive those who trespass in the way we hope we will be forgiven if we trespass,

Are we there yet?

If not the Society of Friends still has a job to do- a reason to be.

The founders of the Society, (to quote Marion McNaughton), thought that the Kingdom of God was coming into being and that their task was to live in that Kingdom now, to help to bring it about.

Are we there yet?

Historically the Society has considered the contribution it can make to bringing God's Kingdom on Earth, as it is in heaven, and this has led us to our testimonies. There must be something right about the 'testimonies' because whilst within the Society there is considerable debate on every issue, there is unity behind the testimonies. The testimonies have been refined into five statements about:

1/ truth and integrity;

2/ simplicity;

3/ equality;

4/ peace;

5/ sustainability and the environment.

*"The church does not have a social strategy, the church is a social strategy"*  
(Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:43)

Quakers are unusual in that their social strategy is central to who they are. We are not necessarily a worshipping group, in the sense that our objective is to 'worship God', as other religious groups do. Though individual creeds may lead to individuals 'worshipping' and our meetings are called, historically, 'Meetings for Worship', we are a group with a social strategy.

In the testimonies Quakers do not outline their social strategy, Quakers are their testimonies, and they are a social strategy.

Are we there yet?

Any group that calls itself 'religious' must be a 'servant' group, servant to the leadings that their creeds have led them to.

Are we there yet?

Examination of the testimonies leads the examiner to see that they have a particular relevance to today - now, (though I suspect that each age has examined the testimonies and found them relevant to that age.)

We live in a world of plenty, yet half the world has not got enough to eat, (and the other half is concerned with obesity.) That cannot be right.

We live in a world where the level of consumption by the few is threatening the living standard of the many. That cannot be right.

We live in a world where the provision of guns takes precedence over the provision of medical care for the people. That cannot be right.

Individual 'leadings' historically lead the Societies to the testimonies, and modern day members have questioned and adapted them and still found them very relevant. (See, for example, 'Engaging with the Quaker Testimonies: a Toolkit' QP&SW)

It is of considerable wonder that though individual members of the Society would find it difficult to subscribe to a central creed, there is unity around the testimonies. That says something to me about their importance and makes them, according to my creed, God given.

There are many wonderful things about the testimonies. One is that, whilst the Quaker experience that led to the testimonies is Christian, based on the teachings of Jesus, there is agreement amongst men and women of all faiths of their validity. We live in what is called a 'multi-faith society', a society, in Britain, that is not necessarily Christian. If we want a society that is at peace with itself, a place where children can grow and individuals can be cared for we cannot necessarily use the Christian concepts and language once common, but we can use the testimonies. Amongst each faith group, and amongst those with no faith, there is an acceptance of the ideas of the testimonies: truth and integrity in our dealings with each other; a simplicity of life style so that others may live; equality before the law; peace - dear God, peace, but a peace that is more than the absence of war; and respect for the environment so that we can hand to our children a world that is not irreparably damaged.

Are we there yet?

So what is the future of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain?

It is to encourage people to recognize that of God within themselves and each other.

It is to work towards the coming of God's Kingdom on Earth 'as it is in heaven' whatever that may mean.

It is to proclaim those insights that we call 'the Testimonies' which show a way to live at peace with one another and with the environment.

Greg Mortenson, an American, builds schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan: 'when I look into the eyes of the children - I hope we each do our part to leave them a legacy of peace instead of the perpetual cycle of violence, war, terrorism, racism, exploitation, that we have to conquer.'

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