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the COMPASSION issue

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EDITORIAL

I don't really intend to do themed issues but, as I start putting together the contributions, a central idea emerges - and this time round it is compassion. I guess that's hardly surprising because that's what the Quaker testimonies all boil down to really - peace, equality, truth, simple living. If we think about it, it all comes down to compassion. But sometimes we get caught up in the need for action, and we forget why that action is needed.

So, true to the Quaker dictum that there is no difference between the sacred and the secular, this edition's contributors look at compassion in many different facets of ordinary life. How we conduct our spiritual practices, how we go on holiday, how we help others in small ways and - most importantly - how we try, every day, to do the compassionate thing.

The emphasis, of course, is on the word *try*, because we are all human and fallible. And we all hate to be fallible, so we sometimes fall into the trap of self-righteousness, we cling to tried and tested truisms, and we struggle to take that bold step out of our comfort zones to confront what really needs to be done in the world.

And Rory's discussion of how we have evolved as humans, Graham's review of Richard Oxtoby's book on the evolution of the Church, and my review of Douglas Rushkoff's fantastic exploration of how we have changed the way we think, communicate, work and worship, put compassion into perspective. It's really all about choices. Choices and change and growth.

That's why I love the advice from Richard's book - when asked to choose between being right and being kind, choose kind.

COMPASSION

Compassion, which is central to most faiths, was highlighted for Quakers when we were invited by the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative to embrace the Charter for Compassion, which we did at Yearly Meeting 2011. So, three years on, perhaps it's a good time to assess what this has meant for us as individuals and as a community.

Bridget Nomonde Scoble sent the Charter for Compassion and the poem quoted below for inclusion in this issue - and the compassion theme just blossomed from there.

Many Quakers are actively involved in working for peace, but many are not. We are so busy getting by in our daily lives that we struggle to find the time to take a hands-on approach. But, as Gabriela Mistral states in the poem below, we need to act now.

His Name is Today

We are guilty of many errors and many faults,
but our worst crime is abandoning the children,
neglecting the fountain of life.

Many of the things we need can wait.

The child cannot.

Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his
blood is being made, and his senses are being
developed.

To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow,'
His name is Today.



So perhaps we should do the very little we can today - rather than hoping that we will be able to do more in the future. Because acting today almost certainly does not preclude being able to act in the future and - possibly - it makes it easier and more likely.

The drowning child

But not everyone has to be at the front line, as Peter Singer, in *The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle* (first published in *New Internationalist*, April 1997) explains. Singer was focussed on financial contributions to aid organisations, but there are many other ways in which we can contribute - whether it is by writing letters to the press or to politicians, signing petitions or just trying to do our best in our own communities every day.

The following excerpt from *The Drowning Child* has been shortened. The full text can be found on www.utilitarian.net and many other sites.

To challenge my students to think about the ethics of what we owe to people in need, I ask them to imagine that their route to the university takes them past a shallow pond. One morning, I say to them, you notice a child has fallen in and appears to be drowning. To wade in and pull the child out would be easy but it will mean that you get your clothes wet and muddy, and by the time you go home and change you will have missed your first class.

I then ask the students: do you have any obligation to rescue the child? Unanimously, the students say they do. The importance of saving a child so far outweighs the cost of

getting one's clothes muddy and missing a class that they refuse to consider it any kind of excuse for not saving the child. Does it make a difference, I ask, that there are other people walking past the pond who would equally be able to rescue the child but are not doing so? No, the students reply, the fact that others are not doing what they ought to do is no reason why I should not do what I ought to do.

Once we are all clear about our obligations to rescue the drowning child in front of us, I ask: would it make any difference if the child were far away, in another country perhaps, but similarly in danger of death, and equally within your means to save, at no great cost – and absolutely no danger – to yourself? Virtually all agree that distance and nationality make no moral difference to the situation. I then point out that we are all in that situation of the person passing the shallow pond: we can all save lives of people, both children and adults, who would otherwise die, and we can do so at a very small cost to us: the cost of a new CD, a shirt or a night out at a restaurant or concert, can mean the difference between life and death to more than one person somewhere in the world – and overseas aid agencies like Oxfam overcome the problem of acting at a distance.

He continues to say that many people lack fulfilment. They work hard and earn a lot of money in order to be able to consume more, but their despair only goes to prove that 'once we have enough to satisfy our basic needs, gaining more wealth does not bring us more happiness.'

Here ethics offers a solution. An ethical life is one in which we identify ourselves with other, larger, goals, thereby giving meaning to our lives. The view that there is harmony between ethics and enlightened self-interest is an ancient one, now often scorned. Cynicism is more fashionable than idealism. But such hopes are not groundless, and there are substantial elements of truth in the ancient view that an ethically reflective life is also a good life for the person leading it. Never has it been so urgent that the reasons for accepting this view should be widely understood.

Rushkoff continues to say how a shift from a life of material self-interest to an ethical stance is an extremely radical one, but he compares what affluent people might spend on a night out or a good bottle of wine to what that money could do for a starving person. But he also emphasises that:

an ethical approach to life does not forbid having fun or enjoying food and wine; but it changes our sense of priorities. The effort and expense put into fashion, the endless search for more and more refined gastronomic pleasures, the added expense that marks out the luxury-car market – all these become disproportionate to people who can shift perspective long enough to put themselves in the position of others affected by their actions.

If the circle of ethics really does expand, and a higher ethical consciousness spreads, it will fundamentally change the society in which we live.



Compassion and armchair activists

Although the above excerpt by Peter Singer was written well over a decade ago, the principles are still very sound. What has changed, though, is the way we communicate, and the way we interact with people in authority, people in need, and people in general.



As Douglas Rushkoff says in his book *Playing the future* (reviewed on page 17) we are no longer mindless passive consumers of media, and we are no longer passive bystanders watching world events unfold. We challenge the world, not with guns and nuclear missiles, but with our cell phones, tablets and computers. Having your say

is just a mouse click away. It's a huge and - to the uninitiated quite scary - world out there, so start with a really user-friendly way to speak up about injustice, and to call to account those in power.

The online campaigning community www.avaaz.org enables us to have our voices heard by decision-makers all over the world. We can comment on existing campaigns, or start new ones to gather support from like-minded people literally all over the brave new world.

Compassion in practice

People deserving compassion are sometimes not the needy. Instead they are talented individuals who simply, because they lack formal training in their field, find themselves stuck in unemployment or dead-end jobs. To get beyond those dead-ends, they

Alex Kuhn and David Thomas report on the Gervaise Leg-Up Trust.

need training and qualifications but very often cannot afford to pay for training courses.

The Gervaise Leg-Up Trust exists to help such people. It provides grants of up to R8000 to individuals, of whatever age, to enable them to undertake training courses or to improve their skills and thus compete more effectively in the job market.

Dorothy for instance, never gained a matric certificate and her chances of finding a job were minimal. She had stars in her eyes and wanted to become a make-up artist but without formal training she remained stuck – until the costs of a training course were covered by the Leg-Up Trust. Having successfully graduated from that course, she is now in a position to earn a very respectable income and has already completed her internship at a start-up community TV station.



This is also the story of Maxwell, a young man with a matric and lots of talent for IT work, but no way to afford formal training. Now with the help of the Leg-Up Trust he has been doing an advanced course in an IT training institution and will soon be able to find a job in the IT industry.

If you need to do a course to help your career or know of some promising young – or older person – who could benefit from the Leg-Up Trust, please contact Alex Kühn on akuhn@mail.ngo.za or David Thomas on dg.thomas@unsw.edu.au

Compassion takes a holiday (not)

Rosemary Mattingley muses on the lessons learned on an ethically responsible tour to Cambodia.

My travel with Uniting Journeys on an ethically responsible tour to Cambodia earlier this year turned out to be a journey

questioning whether I truly live the values I espouse. I had not foreseen this inner journey, but as I had been selected as a conversation partner for possible future tours, it was extremely valuable.

Part of the role of a Uniting Journeys conversation partner is to encourage tour participants to think about ethically responsible travel, to be aware of how it is put into practice in the different aspects of the tour and how they might travel responsibly as an individual, and to facilitate conversation about what participants have seen, experienced and thought.

The Choeung Ek Killing Fields was central to this inner journey. The first nudge came when the tourist guide spoke of his experiences as a three-year-old during the Pol Pot regime. He was also willing to come in with us to this place that held such horrific memories, as were many other guides with their tourists. I was very moved that, despite the terrible things they and their families had been through, the guides could be present and work in such a place. This suggested that they had worked through their experiences in order to rebuild their lives. Guides also mentioned that their Buddhist belief helped them to move on without thoughts of revenge, believing that those who had harmed them would reap the consequences in this or another life.

Because of its history, I was in some trepidation at the thought of entering a place with potentially very negative

energies. Yet I found it to be a surprisingly peaceful place, perhaps partly because of the stupa containing skulls that had been respectfully disinterred and placed in full view. As the stupa was built, many prayers and chants would have been offered at the site, which would have helped to dispel the negative energy. The negative energy would be further dissipated as many tourists would think over what they had seen, taking the stories to the world for others to ponder.

Places and stories around the site made me reflect, sometimes for the first time, sometimes more deeply on what I had already been engaging with. If I were given the choice to kill or to be slowly and brutally killed, would I have the courage to choose the latter? I would hope so, especially as I am not a teenage boy, as most were. But I am human, so I can't say that with absolute certainty. What would I do to protect my loved ones or myself if they or I were faced with violent death? Might I harm others in the process? How do I handle 'lesser of two evils' choices in my life? Can I find another way through?

Pol Pot and his henchmen initially did what they thought was right to build a new society. Not the way I would try to build one, but they acted according to teachings that seemed right to them at the time. No doubt there are things I do that seem highly inappropriate to others and could be better managed in totally different ways that I haven't thought about.

A small negative thought can develop into something huge that affects millions. What seeds of ill-will am I harbouring in my heart and mind? Do I have the courage to face them and to eliminate them? And if I can't eliminate them now, can I at least contain them so that they do the least possible harm to myself and don't unduly affect others?

Although I believe that someone who has hurt me will reap the consequences and I don't need to do anything to make that happen, I still tend to dwell on the hurt. The vast majority of the Cambodian population have suffered far greater hurt and loss than I have, yet they are able to move on and rebuild their lives. What stops me from doing the same?

The questioning journey set in motion by the tour certainly expanded my inner horizons. As I follow through on the reflections, I hope they will ultimately translate into positive effects in my outer world and those whose lives I am part of.

Uniting Journeys, with which I travelled, is an initiative of The Uniting Church of Australia (Synod of Victoria and



Tasmania) and an Australian travel agent. It organises ethically responsible tours open to all of any faith or none, which show the church's ethics in action without proselytising. For more information about Uniting Journeys and thoughts about ethically responsible

travel, related issues and tours, please see their website: www.responsibletravel.org.au

compassion of everyday heroes

This year, the wisdom of *What can YOU do?* has come home to me.

Late one Wednesday night, after a long day, I walked to the central Cape Town train station to find the last train of the night was delayed,

expected after 8:30 pm. It was a summer evening, and even the air felt spent. The station was quite empty.

After a while, a man sitting nearby asked me 'Lady, why are you so cross?' I replied that I wasn't cross, just tired, and noted that perhaps he should be cross given the current state of politics and government. He and his friends on the bench said they had given up on politics. We discussed the state of affairs and then, I have no idea why, I said, 'It is actually up to us – can I tell you a story?'

Farzaneh Behroozi, a CWMM attendee, muses over the wisdom of action, and how each one of us can do something - no matter how small or commonplace.

Last year, I had been working in Ixopo in deep rural KZN, visiting clinics. It had rained for two days, and we decided that it would be foolhardy to visit the remote clinic we had planned, and decided to visit the closer Gwala Clinic instead. The roads were thick mud off the main highway, and on ascending a hill near the clinic, the bakkie skidded off the road over the embankment, coming to rest 20 metres below in a depression with standing water. My colleague who was driving was hysterical, and I was just amazed we were alive and seemingly unhurt. We got out, sinking into the mud and water to our knees, then climbed out to stand on the side of the road on the hill as it continued to rain. Our other colleague joined us from the clinic and we three looked at the bakkie, half submerged and peacefully sinking into the mud. We had no idea what to do.

Shortly thereafter, a local man drove past, and seeing us soaked on the side of the road, stopped and offered to help. After attending to his immediate errands, he returned to help us. He had an air of quiet confidence, and proceeded to get into the bakkie and drive it out of the deep water and mud, up the gentle rise towards another local road. We were so thankful for his help, and stood and chatted for a while. We found out that Philip Dumisani Dlala is truly a pillar of the community. That morning he had been en route to the local primary school, where he had started a feeding scheme to make sure that children were well nourished so they could learn. This was only one of his projects.

do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world

He had lived in Gwala all his life, he told us, and had never seen any car end up in the dam. Seeing us standing there with the car half submerged had been quite a shock but he decided he would just try something. 'It is only the Lord's hand that helped us there,' he said after he'd got the bakkie back to the road.

'We all need everyday heroes, like Philip Dumisani Dlala' I said to the man at the station. Soon after, it was time to catch the train, and he told me he was our security on the late train – protecting the passengers. As I stepped out at my stop, he waved from the lighted car as the train rushed away into the night towards Simons Town, doing his small part of good in our world.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu always says, '*Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.*' It is up to each one

of us to see what it is we can do in this world. And yes, it really does matter. Through such acts of faith, no matter what the circumstances, we can together create our future.

To support Philip Dumisani Dlala and his NGO Light-Khanya, which teaches youth driving skills, runs a garden project, feeding scheme and education centres, and hopes to start teaching English and additional skills, you can phone him on 073 148 8289.



grassroots compassion

Everyday heroes John and Kelitha Schmid report back on another year at the front-line of Zimbabwe Food Relief Action - an example of compassion in action, and the cumulative effect of those little bits of good .

Last year we asked you for emergency help to enable us to complete our 20th distribution at a time of great need. We are very grateful to the many individuals and organisations who responded to that appeal. It allowed us to conclude the 20th distribution to our three wards before Christmas 2013.

The early part of 2014 saw more hunger than we can ever remember, and luckily, thanks to your generosity, we were able to finance another partial distribution to one ward of seven villages. But then the funds ran out and we had to leave the hungry villagers to fend for themselves. The good news is that the harvest this year, starting in May, was the best for 10 years and many of the people who were desperately hungry are now

smiling! We have stopped our action for the present and are taking a rest. But farming is such a precarious business under the fierce African sun that just a week's extra rain at the critical moment can spell the difference between success and failure. No one can predict whether next year's harvest will be good or bad, but the signs are worrying: there has been no rain since February. We at ZFRA have to prepare for the worst possibility by fundraising for a future drought, so that in the event we can at least respond quickly with one full distribution. As of 24 October we had just over R178,000 in the kitty (enough to feed one ward) against a total requirement of about R410,000, this last figure depending greatly on the fluctuating price of maize meal.

We have been able to keep transport costs down to 11% of expenditure and other incidentals to 1%, leaving 88% of incoming funds to buy food. For detailed accounts please e-mail us at nuru@mweb.co.zw. You can also keep an eye on our doings and on the accounts by visiting our website at www.zfra.org. If you wish to help us, please send funds to the account below, which is administered by Colin Glen on behalf of C&SAYM. You can pay though any FNB bank or autoteller, or by electronic transfer. Please notify Colin at colin.p.glen@gmail.com if you send funds, and he will forward them to us.

Christine Agar Quaker Trust

First National Bank

Bryanston branch,

Branch code 25-00-17

Account number 620 562 914 39

SWIFT/BIC code FIRNZAJJ

Reference - ZFRA

CHARTER FOR COMPASSION

The charter for compassion, which was written by Karen Armstrong, was embraced by C&SAYM in 2011.

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others – even our enemies – is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

look into your own heart, discover what it is that gives you pain and then refuse, under any circumstance whatsoever, to inflict that pain on anybody else

(Karen Armstrong)

We therefore call upon all men and women

- to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion
- to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate
- to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures
- to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity
- to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings – even those regarded as enemies.



We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in a polarised world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and peaceful global community.

Future shock, culture shock

REVIEW

Jen Stern comments on

Playing the future

by Douglas Rushkoff

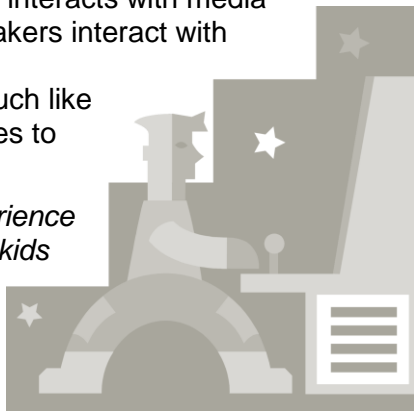
Harper Collins:New York, 1996.
ISBN 0 - 06 - 017310 - 6

Although dating from 1996 this book is still relevant. The author explains all those aspects of youth culture that older people find most distressing - the body art, the obsession with social media, video

games, graffiti and more - by relating it to fundamental changes in our society. Changes as radical (and as inevitable and as positive) as the reformation. He describes a coherent development of symbolism from a half-naked, muscular Jesus bleeding on the cross to pierced and tattooed Goth kids flirting with vampirism. And how the ramifications of the internet information explosion will challenge religious institutions and leaders just as the Gutenberg Bible changed for ever the hold priests had on a "direct line" to God.

His dubs 1990s Generation X teens "screenagers" and describes how their attitude to authority, information and life opportunities is affected by, for example, videogames in which the player can change the universe of the game by a simple twist of the joystick. And, interestingly, the way the present generation interacts with media resonates with the way Quakers interact with God - and the reactions of contemporary parents is much like the reaction of the authorities to the early Quakers.

Thanks to their experience with video games, kids have a fundamentally different appreciation



of the television image than their parents. They know it's up for grabs. While their parents sit in the living room passively absorbing network programming, the kids are down in the playroom zapping the Sega aliens on their own TV screen. The parents' underlying appetite is for easy entertainment or, at best, prepackaged information. Meanwhile, they bemoan the fact that their kids don't have attention spans long enough to endure such programming. The kids, on the other hand, rather than simply receiving media, are actively changing the image on the screen. Their television picture is not piped down into the home from some higher authority - it is an image that can be changed. When [TV presenters appear] on the evening news, the screenager doesn't experience this broadcast as the gospel truth. To him, it's just a middle-aged man playing with his joystick.

As a Quaker, much of this makes sense. Rushkoff likens the evolution of society to the growth of a child, first experiencing no distinction between itself and its mother, then learning to speak and to become a separate individual...

... and, as any parent will tell you, the most common word in his early vocabulary is "no!" The child celebrates and enforces his individuality. When the child gets to nursery school, the new word is "mine" as the child learns to fight over toys with his peers. Part of what makes all this safe to do is the presence of strong parents who provide boundaries, rules, and the resulting sense of security. The big people serve as much-needed role models for the now self-determining child.

He continues to describe how humankind has gone through a similar evolution towards self-awareness. But how, in the process, we 'ceased to see the earth as mother/provider,' and we started looking on it as a resource - something to be used, cultivated, mined and plundered. He then describes how we humans also established "big people" to make us feel safe. These are the authority figures like kings, popes, saints, priests and - yes - even gods. These "big people" wielded authority and gave us laws and boundaries that enabled us to feel safe, to know our place, and to live a secure but relatively mindless life.

Just like Adam and Eve, we [had] moved out of the Garden and lost our sense of fusion with god and nature. Now God was this guy above us, and we were the children below.

Like the child who fights for his individuality, we developed tools and ideas to preserve our sense of identity. Weapons, dualistic ideologies, reductionist sciences, and self-righteous religions helped us to stave off nature and feel secure about the permanence of our personhood.

The next stage, he says, is for us, the children of gods, to grow up. That's what the youth of today are doing - and that's what makes something like an Arab Spring possible. It's scary but, like puberty (which is also pretty scary), it's essential for our growth. I think this echoes one of the most important things about being a Quaker - not fearing change. We are hardwired to constantly question our actions and our beliefs so - I like to think - we are well qualified to learn to live in a world that doesn't necessarily follow the rules that we grew up with.

Rory Short of JMM muses about what makes us human and what being human means in an ever-changing society.

Evolution

The more that any community of life forms is in tune with nature, the more sustainable that community will be. That is as true for ourselves as it is for any other life form. After all nature gave birth to and sustains all the life forms on earth including ourselves.

How do humans remain in tune with Nature? We need to recognise that this is a life-and-death question for us and that it involves investigating many different aspects of human life in our search for answers.

In recent times, in my search for improved understanding of things that particularly interest me, I have been trying to see them through the lens of evolution as I understand it. This has proved very enlightening for me and hence this paper, which is my attempt to share some of the insights that have emerged as a result.

Looking at life, and ourselves in particular, life's evolutionary trajectory would seem to be summed up in the phrase: *an organic impulse towards greater and greater consciousness*. We are the current end product of this impulse because not only are we conscious but we are self-conscious. What this means is that there is an opportunity for each of us to choose to have a conscious relationship with the over-arching consciousness, which, I sense, is the consciousness that gave birth to Creation and is present everywhere within

it. However, as self-conscious beings we can only enter into this conscious relationship voluntarily. The entry cannot be automatic because that would be a negation of consciousness.



There is no halt to evolution but for self-conscious beings, once self-consciousness emerges, evolution is dependent on the being entering into a conscious relationship with the over-arching consciousness. When we do so then our evolution under the guidance of the over-arching consciousness becomes, in a sense, super-charged. As I see it, striving for a conscious relationship with the over-arching consciousness is what has traditionally been known as leading a spiritual life.

Sex

Like most humans I am interested in sex and have, over the years, grappled with my own sexuality and my relationship to sex in general.

And this comes back to evolution. We need to start with a question, why are some life forms, like ourselves, differentiated into two genders? One theory suggests that sexual procreation is nature's strategy for speeding up genetic change in order to enhance the long term survival prospects of our life form. But if the two genders were not very strongly impelled into completing the necessary actions for procreation then the differentiation into male and female genders would have had no survival benefit whatsoever - hence the powerful attraction that exist between the two sexes to ensure procreation and exchange of genes.

life is an
impulse toward
greater
consciousness

But, as conscious beings, how does our sexuality impact on our lives given the reality of our consciousness?

The differentiation into two sexes was already in existence long before humans evolved,

so our sexuality was already a reality when we emerged into consciousness. But, because of its power, our sexuality presented us, both individually and collectively, with a problem. It could not just be left to operate unconsciously, and thus instinctively, as it thrust itself into consciousness. But the problem is in how we dealt with it there.

Nonetheless it would seem that our collective decision has been to try to ban sexuality from our consciousness. This was not a very clever thing to do because to gain control of - and maximise the benefits of - our sexuality it needs to be fully accepted into our consciousness.

Sexuality, like anything we take into our consciousness, requires both individual and collective learning. As sexuality can't actually be switched off, trying to ban it from consciousness has resulted in our inability to reap the benefits that would have derived from accepting it fully into our consciousness. This *banning from conscious* response to sexuality has historically been particularly prevalent in the West. For example, 70 years ago, I learned from society that my sexual urges and actions were shameful, and that they should not be acknowledged or discussed with anybody - not even a sex partner. And most definitely not in a public space.

Thankfully this oppressive/suppressive attitude is changing for the better. Now there is public acceptance of increasingly explicit sexual information. This change

has been aided and abetted by things like the *Kinsey Report*, HIV/Aids and particularly the ready availability of "live" pornography on the internet. While exploring sex and sexuality on the web I have found three interesting sites - makelovenotporn.tv, Sophia Wallace's discussion about cliteracy on YouTube, and juicypinkbox.com.

Juicypinkbox.com is a lesbian porn site that is more about making money than educating people about lesbianism. Drawing on the power of sex, it is indicative of how commercialism permeates everything in modern culture, and is only incidentally - if at all - educational.



But the first two sites seem to be trying to move human sexuality into the mainstream in a positive way – into public acceptability.

Pornography, as the creators of *MakeLovenotPorn* say, is a staged performance of a sex act that provides viewers with a very misleading educational experience of real life sexual activity. But

because of the continuing attempts to ban sexuality from public consciousness, pornography has evolved from an underground response to public disapproval of sex to possibly the major source of sex education for web-enabled individuals.

MakeLoveNotPorn.tv is an attempt to provide viewers with an alternative viewer experience based on real every day and unstaged sexual interactions. The second site *Cliteracy* is an attempt to educate people about the female clitoris, which is physically almost totally hidden from public and individual view and thus largely absent from public discourse or, if present at all, it is only in a negative and ill-informed light.

Spirituality

In my understanding, because we are conscious beings, we humans can all have active spiritual lives if we so choose. Traditionally society's understanding of a spiritual life was that it could only really be conducted within the confines of a religion. There are two problems with this understanding. One is that it is wrong, because our spirituality does not have to manifest within the confines of an already recognised religion. Two is that it is restrictive because most religions are created as a result of people striving to formalise the possibility of a conscious relationship with the over-arching consciousness in a way they, and their fellows at the time, could understand.

As our overall understanding of life evolves, the understanding encapsulated in earlier generations' religious dogmas and creeds needs to change. The bedrock, i.e. the possibility of an individual conscious relationship with the over-arching consciousness, does not change but the religious constructions that people have seen fit to erect on the bedrock inevitably need to change in line with people's changing understandings. The trouble is that most religions do not find these changes easy to accept.

I was raised and confirmed as an Anglican, and completed my secondary education at an Anglican boarding school. This schooling was later to prove spiritually useful to me in that I gained a basic knowledge of the New Testament by rote, but it was only once I started regularly attending Quaker Meeting that I developed any kind of meaningful connection with these spiritual



teachings but my spiritual journey, in the company of Quakers, only began in my mid-twenties.

Our Quaker forbears recognised the immutability of the bedrock that, amongst other terms, they called the Light of Christ. They also recognised the constant need for change and adaption in the cultural accretions built on the bedrock. Thus they did not formulate any dogmas or creeds because they realised that attempting such things in an effort to pin down their living personal experiences of the Light would be counterproductive. They realised that each and every generation needs to experience for themselves the workings of the Light. But they passed on to succeeding generations their central practice of regular participation in silent meetings for worship plus an ever-growing body of associated spiritual practices.

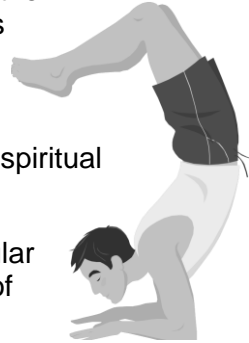
After I became a practicing Quaker, I gradually became more open to exploring other spiritual traditions in a search for more spiritual knowledge. It was a gradual process because having been brought up within the confines of

Anglicanism I had been conditioned to be fearful of corrupting my Christianity by meddling in other spiritual traditions.

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Twenty-three years after I started attending Quaker Meeting it still took the near collapse of my body for me to take up the practice of yoga. Luckily for me I did so in the school of BKS Iyengar, as my initial motivation for doing so was purely physical. I wanted to see if yoga would help to counter the progressive collapse of my

body under the, at that stage undiagnosed, impact of Multiple Sclerosis. Even going to a yoga lesson once a week began to improve my bodily condition so, in addition to the weekly lesson, I embarked on my own regular daily practice. My intention in doing so was still in pursuit of physical health, but gradually the knowledge that the practice of yoga was intended to be a spiritual discipline began to enter into my consciousness. So some 20 years after I started yoga, I recognised it as an essential part of my spiritual practice.



About 18 months after I started the regular practice of yoga the dichotomous view of life, which I now realise was part of my Christian upbringing, began to create great inner distress in me. At the same time I was struggling with the fact that Quakers have no formal teaching on meditation and in my search for such teachings I attended a lecture on Compassion given by Rob Nairn, a Tibetan Buddhist. Meditation is a central practice within Buddhism, which also, I found out in due course, subscribes to a unitary view of Creation that gradually undid my dichotomous view.

Two days after attending a week-long retreat given by a high Lama in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, I awoke and just knew that I needed to take refuge as a Buddhist. Still knowing very little about Buddhism, I thought I may have to give up my Quakerism, but the high Lama assured me I would not have to. So I took refuge as a Buddhist and, as a consequence, my spiritual learning received another boost, and continues apace.

I have struggled with integrating my Quaker experience and understanding with my understanding and experience of Tibetan Buddhism which, in complete contrast to Quakerism, is hierarchically organised, both organisationally and spiritually. The higher up the organisational hierarchy you ascend the more you are expected to have evolved spiritually to warrant the position. It seems to me that the hierarchy works in a fashion because the incumbents of the positions are supposed to be genuinely spiritually advanced, and usually are. However there is no absolute guarantee of that, so things can go awry and have done so in the past and, I guess, will do so in the future. My sense is that Quaker spiritual egalitarianism as expressed through our collective decision-making processes that seek collectively to be responsive to the Light is a much more certain way to proceed both for our individual and collective spiritual futures.



Graham Thomas reviews

The authoritarian corruption of Christianity

by Richard Oxtoby

New Voice Publishing, Cape Town 2012,
ISBN 978-0-620-53917-3

The Advices and Queries adapted by C&SAYM reminds us that our Religious Society is 'based on people who experience the Living Christ and That of God in every person,' and to 'remember the importance of the bible...and all writings which reveal the ways if God....While respecting the experiences and opinions of others, do not be afraid to say what you have found and what you value. Appreciate that doubt and questioning can also lead to spiritual growth and to a greater awareness of the Light that is in us all.'

In this book Richard Oxtoby presents an expanded version of the two presentations he gave at the 30th International Congress of Psychology in Cape Town in July 2012. In it he examines the spiritual insights at the heart of Christianity, and how these have been overlaid in a negative way by the authoritarian thinking of individuals and church organisations.

He contends that the modern church 'is a mish-mash of two completely different systems of thought. Generally regarded as a religion based on the humanistic ethical teachings of a charismatic Jewish religious teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, these ethical principles cohere around the concepts of compassionate love, forgiveness rather than punishment, meekness and humility.'

Richard lays out what he believes is the essence of the humanistic ethics preached by Jesus, and then critically examines the essential nature of authoritarian organisations, and the beliefs of an authoritarian church that have been overlaid on 'what looked set to develop into a basically humanistic religion.'

**the kingdom of
god is within you
- people are more
important than
religion**

He mentions the fact that it is impossible to know the exact words that Jesus spoke or even be sure of the overall tone of his message. The manuscripts on which the New Testament is based were written long after Jesus' death. And they were written in Greek, and not Aramaic, the language used by Jesus. They were then edited by members of the early church to reflect the theological understanding of Jesus' life by those who called themselves Christians.

For three centuries many different groups believed that they had "the true faith," and rivalry sometimes became intense. Eventually the Roman emperor Constantine called a conference of the major Christian leaders at Nicaea so that a united front could be presented to the world and become a unifying force within his empire. This strategy was only partially successful, and divisions continued and increased as time passed. The Great Schism of 1054 saw the division of the church into the Eastern and Western branches, and the Roman Catholic and Protestant split took place in the 16th century.

Richard states that 'the bedrock of the ethical teachings of Jesus is love: affirming love for all living creatures, and compassionate love for all those who suffer physically or

mentally: the oppressed, the downtrodden, the outcast and rejects of society. The most profound human need is to be loved, and those times when we know we are loved by another person (or other living creature), or God, or perhaps most importantly, by ourselves, are the moments in our lives of deepest happiness and satisfaction.' He contends that the ethical teachings of Jesus accord with modern psychological wisdom about the most effective way to influence behaviour in a

**when asked
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positive way. When asked to choose between being right and being kind, choose kind. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is within you - people are more important than religion.

'Probably the most damaging contribution authoritarian thinking has made to the corruption of

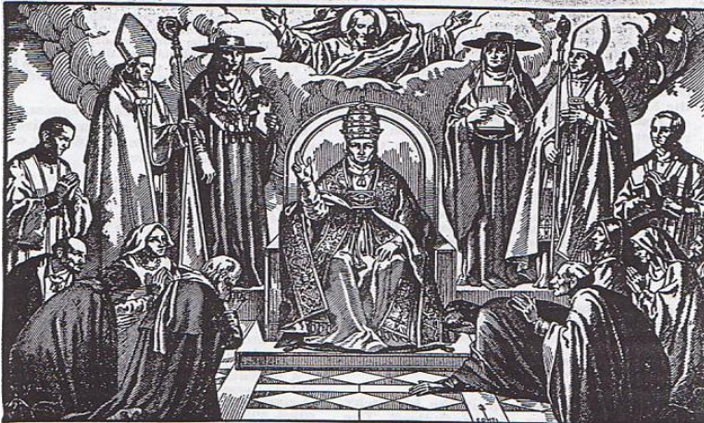
the powerful, love-based ethics of Jesus, is the idea that suffering punishment is a necessary precondition for experiencing forgiveness for wrongdoing.' Why God should offer his son as a scapegoat for human wickedness is proclaimed a mystery by the authoritarian elements of the Christian church. And questioning the church - either the rules, the structure or the myths - is discouraged or forbidden.

Richard gives the example of the doctrine of atonement, which was not universally accepted in the early church, and only crept into Christian thinking 'thanks to the efforts of some of the more sadistically-minded authoritarian leaders of the early church, of which group Paul was an influential member.'

Richard goes on to explore the idea that, according to authoritarian people, suffering is a good thing, that sex and sensuality are the enemies of spirituality, and the unassailability of Christian dogma. There are disturbing examples of evangelical and Pentecostal churches led by people who become extremely rich by "saving" as many people as possible.

As a psychologist Richard is concerned about the alarming number of Christians who are encouraged to say 'I am a miserable sinner, and there is no health in me'. He regards this as a 'psychological cancer eating away at the mind/soul/spirit of huge numbers of people, whether they regard themselves as religious or not.'

He concludes, 'to the extent that those within the Christian Church approach issues of human and spiritual relationships from a perspective of authoritarian control...they will be rendering their religion incapable of achieving the full potential of the profoundly humanistic ethical principles at its heart to make the world a better place.'





Catherine King Ambler

C&SAYM Friends were shocked and saddened to hear of the death of Catherine Ambler, who had meant so much to many of us. *Hamba Kakuhle* Catherine. We will continue to hold Rex in the light.

Paul Mooney of JMM shares some reminiscences

Catherine King Ambler had an enquiring mind and a sharp wit which would have made George Fox himself sit up and take notice. She was a woman of great hospitality and charm, her smile and laughter filled any room.

She made Experiment with Light a powerful practice, spending many hours creating a global movement for deep change based on the work of her husband Rex, who re-interpreted early Friends' spiritual practices for a modern world.

I spent ten days with Catherine in 2013, and each day, I found myself sitting at her breakfast table and lunch table, knowing that there would be a beautiful question, or a challenging statement that would provoke my thoughts in a deep and worshipful way. We even shared a family name, and she was able to contribute greatly to my understanding of my British ancestors.

As a partner to Rex, in his mission work as founder of the Experiment with Light movement, I am certain that she will be sorely missed - as she will be by anyone who ever met her.

RESOURCES

C&SA Yearly Meeting

C&SAYM clerks hpvales@iway.na and Justine@limpitlaw.co.za
www.quakers.co.za, www.facebook.com/csaym

Monthly meetings, allowed meetings & worship groups

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Quaker projects and other organisations

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SAFCEI (Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute)
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SANE (South African New Economics network) +27 21 762- 5933,
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BE AN EVERYDAY HERO



Do your little bit of good where you are;
it's those little bits of good put together that
overwhelm the world.

(Desmond Tutu)