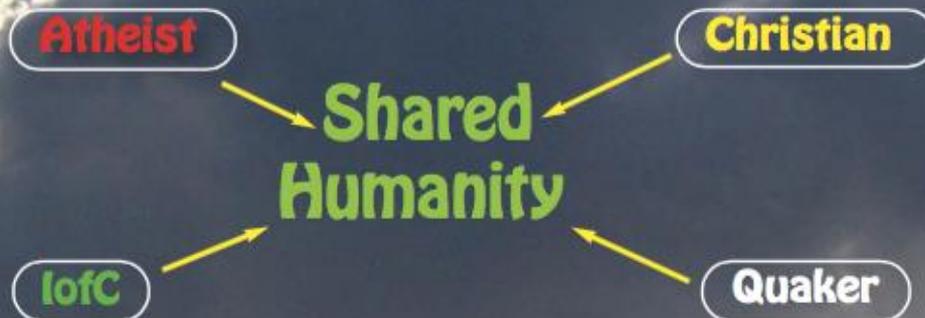


*To thine own self
be true*

A spiritual journey



Howard Grace

When I was in my early twenties, I heard someone say, “Some people have the advantage of more years ahead, and some the advantage of more years behind.” At that time, I was in the former category. Now in the latter, I hope this can pass on a few lessons experienced on the way.

Setting the scene

In 2016, I wrote a booklet titled, 'Questioning Answers'. The idea for this title came from a notice outside a Quaker Meeting House which said, 'Come to Quakers and have your answers questioned.'

The booklet did indeed do some questioning.

However: **'To thine own self be true'**



is a booklet reflecting specifically on my spiritual journey, questioning some beliefs along the way, but laying a foundation for the Shared Humanity focus that has emerged in my conviction, after



eight decades. It starts from my birth - till the present day.

One concern I have in writing this is that I don't want to undercut anyone's deeply held faith. That is a problem which I (and I'm sure many others) face in life anyway. It is good to challenge beliefs which one feels are false. But how does one do this in a way which enhances faith and vision more fully in all those we engage with?

If the reader is untroubled within his/her present religious, or non-religious position and doesn't want to question outside the box, it may be better not to read any further. But, if you are up for questioning some of your answers, do join me in how I've questioned mine.

It helps to seriously think beyond our personal bubbles. A recent statistic on religious trends in the UK really struck me. *The British Social Attitudes Survey for England and Wales (Harding, 2017) found that among 18–24-year-olds, the answer 'none' (no religion) was given by 71%, compared with 27% of those of 75 years or over.*

Beliefs within these groups will, of course, vary. Nevertheless, do the 73% of my generation who identify with formal religion hope that the 71% of the younger generation who don't will come round to our understanding of 'the truth'; and vice versa? Another factor to consider is that there are a growing number of people who think of themselves as spiritual but not religious.

So, what might be the bridge between people whose perspective is from some sort of a belief in God, and others to whom this is meaningless? Can we explore together whether there is an encompassing World View which transcends ‘beliefs’, which we can all more fruitfully engage with? That is the purpose of this booklet.

Having been a militant atheist until my early thirties (I’m now a Christian, though not ‘orthodox’) I have been in both ‘worlds’. What follows explores those different stages and transitions.

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To thine own self be true

Reflecting on an eight-decade spiritual journey

by Howard Grace. May 2020.

As I celebrate my eightieth birthday, my wife Maria and I are self-isolating together due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Having three of the ‘at risk’ health issues I need to be careful, and try not to catch any nasties. We have lovely neighbours, a young couple, he is Polish and she is Brazilian. They happily do our food shopping when they do their own. Other friends and neighbours also help us. Although there is a really caring spirit generally, I have no idea what their beliefs are in terms of religion or non-religion.

Those who work for the NHS and caring professions are also a really mixed bunch. I suspect that most people are responding to the pandemic out of a basic human instinct, irrespective of their beliefs.

I also recently joined in the international *Initiatives of Change* (IofC), on-line Zoom meetings and was inspired to be able to have contact with such a variety of friends on different continents, also many people I didn’t know. This represented a wonderful diversity of people – of nationality, culture, religion and experience of life! I asked myself what brings such an array of people together in common cause.

In the Zoom discussion, one person, from a different continent and culture to my own said of IofC, “We all believe in God.” This may be true from her perspective. But from mine, I sense that for most people the factor behind our solidarity in facing Covid-19, as well as what has held the IofC fellowship together through the decades, lies elsewhere. Is it really ‘beliefs’ that are the primary root of the affinity of such an amazing mixture of people, or is it something else?

This seed thought prompted me to look back over the decades, and to think about the very varied phases of my own beliefs and spiritual journey. I thought it would be worth reflecting on that and applying pen to paper – or rather, fingers to keyboard. The result of that is what follows. It starts with my early years.

Growing up. The challenge of war

My mother and father were born and brought up in East London. They were ordinary folk, the salt of the earth; loving, caring people. After getting married they moved to Newbury for my father's work. I was born in May 1940 (an only child), at the beginning of the second world war. My dad joined the Air Force and was sent to spend three years in India. When he returned at war's end, I didn't realise who he was. But I can now imagine the joy of my parents being safely reunited after those years apart, during the deep uncertainties of war.

Religion?

As I grew up I wasn't aware of religion or belief in God playing any part of their lives. As far as I know, religious beliefs just weren't a factor for them. Thus, not for me either. I had a lovely upbringing. Amongst other things, my dad had a great sense of humour, and that rubbed off on me.

The first time I really thought about religion was due to my first girlfriend being a Christian. We started going out together when I was sixteen. I joined her in going to the Methodist church, and was open to her beliefs, as this didn't seem to affect our relationship. But after a couple of years together she went to a teachers' training college, studying to be a teacher of Religious Education. I didn't mind her having, what I had come to perceive as, these funny ideas. But the thought of her spending the coming decades 'indoctrinating' children, made me very uneasy. I said that if she was to pursue this path we had better break up. She did continue, and we parted our ways. My last words to her were, "You'd better go and marry the church minister." She did, in fact, marry a Methodist minister.

We both felt a lot for each other. So, our parting went deep with me. This leads to my first observation about religious altercations. This break up had brought a knife into my heart. In my case, the Christian religion ceased to primarily be a head issue. My subsequent negativity was evident in doctrinal discussion. But the deeper issue and motivating factor was the hurt caused to/by a precious broken relationship. I had become a militant atheist.

I too went to university in London which was a great experience on several fronts. But amongst other things I relished getting into

frictional discussion with Christians. To illustrate my mentality at this time: In my final year, I became student body president of what is now *The City University*, London. It was traditional for the president to say ‘grace’ at the annual dinner. I refused to do this (even though my surname is Grace!).

A life-changing experience

But something else happened at this time which made a pivotal impact on my direction in life. I’ll outline this here in some detail, but will refer back to it occasionally later.

Having a social conscience, amongst other things, I demonstrated outside the South African embassy with my banner against apartheid, and spoke at Hyde Park Corner for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Incidentally, my field of study was Nuclear Power). There were also things in the Student Union I felt needed to change. In a union meeting, a motion I wanted passed was discussed. The voting was close, but went against the ‘important’ change that I felt was needed. So, being chair of the meeting, I was able to surreptitiously alter the voting figures. The motion was passed. Yet, in true student style, I was critical of politicians for being dishonest and corrupt.

Someone I met, who knew nothing of this vote fiddling, was a volunteer with Moral Re-Armament (MRA), which I had never heard of previously. He said to me that if I was really serious about bringing change to the issues that concerned me in the world, I should have a good look at my own life actions and see if I was walking the talk. I didn’t have to think too deeply to be aware of the mismatch.

At the next Union Meeting I told the students what I’d done with the voting, apologised, and reversed the decision. My knees were shaking and there was plenty of booing and hissing but I wasn’t thrown out, as I had been prepared to be. For me that act of honesty was a costly step, and was like driving in a stake for future conduct. It was about being true to what deep in my heart I felt to be right. As a militant atheist, this sense of integrity emerged not from a religious belief, but from a vision for a better world. Another consequence was that I felt an inner liberation.

Full time volunteering with MRA. (Now: IofC <<https://uk.iofc.org>>.)

My life since then has been a rich adventure, but it is clear that I wouldn't have set out on this path in the first place, without taking that concrete step of being honest about the vote fiddling.

Upon leaving university, and spending a year working as an official of the National Union of Students in Britain, I went to the USA to be part of a conference for young adults at the MRA centre in Michigan. This led to a decision to continue working with MRA on a voluntary basis, firstly for a year in the USA, but which continued for the next fourteen years in various parts of the world. Some people referred to this as being on the basis of 'faith and prayer'. But for me, an atheist, there wasn't prayer involved. And the faith part wasn't related to God. It was just an overriding passion to play my part in 'Remaking the World', a vision which I had gleaned from MRA.

In the USA, and then in the UK, I was part of the MRA network and mostly lived in communities of that organisation. So, the need for a roof over my head and food was covered in that way. Some friends supported me in a small way for other financial needs. But, for instance, in London, where for a couple of years my focal work was with students and universities, sometimes I had no money for transport. So, I just walked to colleges. It didn't feel like a sacrifice to live in this way, in the context of commitment to the larger vision.

For me, the thought of 'Remaking the World' was a utopian vision. I enjoyed solving mathematical problems, for instance. And, with the enthusiasm of youth, I took on this bigger vision in that problem-solving spirit. However, after a few years, I realised that, whilst some things did get better in the world, new problems kept arising. So, a 'Remade World', in the utopian sense that I had taken it, wasn't going to happen. I asked myself, what was the point of living this way if the goal would never be reached. I might as well 'Eat drink and be merry', and live for my own enjoyment. Yet, I was conscious of an inner struggle. Deep down I recognised a conviction to live for a greater purpose.

Eventually, I decided to continue on that path, but the fundamental motivation had changed. It was to follow the deeper leading in my heart wherever that might lead. I began to feel more open to the sense

that that might be linked to what people talked about when referring to ‘God’s leading’.

In 1969 I was invited to be part of an international team in India and Sri Lanka engaged with building strong, clean and united countries. The next two years were another real adventure – very worthwhile, but also involved wrestling with various personal inner struggles. Eventually I came to terms with a nagging feeling that I might stay in India, out of my comfort zone, for a long haul. But, having accepted this in my spirit, there came an invitation to Australia to continue working with an MRA venture there. There is much that could be written about this, but I’ll focus on my spiritual journey.

Looking at Christianity

In Australia, unrelated to MRA, I met a young man, a Christian, who invited me to a Christian weekend camp. By this time, I was open enough to accept that. They were nice people, which made it easier for me to consider the idea of becoming a Christian. I was told that the essence of that was to accept certain beliefs about Jesus. One was that we are all sinners, and that, “Even though God is love, He is also totally holy and just. According to that holiness and justice, our guilt demands a response. And that response is eternal punishment. God is bound by his very nature to punish sin. So, how can God’s perfect justice and perfect love meet? The answer is that on the cross Jesus took our punishment in our place. He was bearing what we should have borne.”

Stories such as the following were told in illustration. “Suppose someone appears before a court for some crime and is found guilty. The law requires the judge to impose a sentence, and he fines the man £500. The trouble is, the man can’t pay; he is penniless. However, the judge is merciful as well as just. He walks over to the dock, takes out his cheque book and pays the culprit’s fine. In this way justice and mercy are both satisfied.” Thus, God sent His son Jesus to die in the place of all who accepted Him as their Savior.

Without thinking about this and other beliefs too deeply I took the explanation on board as part of the Christian package. But, my normal life was focused on more practical issues. For instance, it being during

the time of the Viet Nam war, I had several young friends who were conscientious objectors, so I was supporting them when they appeared in court. There were several other issues related to building a better world that inspired and motivated me. Conviction around this was deep, but thoughts on Christian doctrine weren't foremost in my mind.

Engaged and married.

During the couple of years which followed, one conviction that grew was the thought that Maria Driessen, a young Dutch lady who was one of the MRA team in Australia at that time, was meant to be my life partner. How that developed is an interesting journey, which I won't go into here. But Maria didn't know what had been growing in my heart, and when I proposed (by letter, because she was in Melbourne and I was in Papua New Guinea at the time) she describes how her love for me quickly blossomed, and the following morning she phoned her acceptance. We both felt this to be a real gift of God, and haven't looked back since then. To date, we've had forty-seven wonderful years together.

After getting married in Holland our inner searching for what next led to responding to an invitation to go to South Africa, during apartheid times, to join friends of all races who were engaged with bringing constructive change there. This became the focus of our continued 'calling'. It was an adventurous and challenging four years.

Taking stock

Whilst in South Africa, in 1975, I wrote a reflection about my spiritual journey to that point. Although, looking at this now, I have considerable unease at



Adventurous and challenging times. In the first 2 years, we changed where we stayed 55 times.

some of what I wrote, I'll share this as a basis for reflection on what led me to think that way. It can also act as a cornerstone to seeing how my spiritual journey has developed since then.

The reflection was titled '*The Cross, a Path to Faith*'.

I wrote:

Like many students, I was confused and frustrated with the world. I took part in demonstrations because I could see no other way of making my effort to change what I felt was wrong. Religion seemed an irrelevant retreat for those who were too weak to face realities of life. I was a militant atheist.

(I then wrote the story of vote fiddling at university, and continued)

It was not easy to find courage to make that apology but it was a choice between my pride and what in my heart I knew to be right. Though I didn't realise it at the time, as an atheist I had chosen the Cross on one issue. There is no doubt in my mind that God speaks clearly to atheists just as He does to those who believe in Him. There were many other things to be put right, all of which needed a costly choice to cross out pride.

Some Christian friends said I couldn't live by absolute moral standards (honesty, purity, unselfishness and love: as focussed by MRA) under my own strength, by trying to pull myself up by my boot laces. They were right. But equally I observed, they weren't living by those standards supposedly with Christ's strength, which was what they had claimed was the answer I needed. I gave as much of myself as I felt able, to the battle for a new world but became more and more aware of my own limitations and my inability to cope with my own nature. The enemy wasn't out there at all, it was within me. I got bogged down, a grim and gloomy wrestle with temptation.

I felt the need of God but in my heart and mind still doubted His existence. My scientific training wouldn't allow me to accept anything solely on the basis of feeling a need. I had to be true to myself and follow the deepest thing in my heart.

The conviction grew that I was meant to give all my time with Moral Re-Armament. That would mean no regular security, when with my education, I could get a good job. My parents had given me their all and I understood what it meant to them to see me with a secure job and making a success out of the traditional way of life. I hated to hurt them because I had really begun to love them. My friends would think me crazy too. After weeks of inner tumult, I again made a choice. An agnostic chose the Cross.

Having given up material security, I became aware of the desire to put my security in other things, like activities and relationships with people. So, as long as I kept busy it would keep my mind off deeper things that were uncomfortable to think about and face. The devil often uses over busyness with good works as part of his strategy. The security of a relationship with a nice girl and marriage also held considerable attraction. These things of course are not bad in themselves but I realised the self-centred motive in my desire for satisfaction in earthly things. It was not a question of whether I believed in God, it was a question of whether I would be true to the deepest thing in my heart and make the choices I knew I should make.

The intellectual arguments for or against the existence of God are equally balanced, but when I made that decision of the will, to let go of self, in my heart I knew He was there. I wanted to be content with just doing God's will, even if that meant never having any of the things I had so much looked forward to. I realised there must be no demands because, as the saying goes, "Compromise is that 1% which doesn't do anybody any harm, all it does is to render you ineffective." If He did give me material things, activities, marriage or a host of other things, I wanted them to be used for His glory and to bring His Kingdom on earth.

Although I felt Christ was a great moral teacher, I somehow still couldn't accept that He was divine. I wrestled with this over some years and thought it was something I could never be clear on. Then one day I found with much joy, a surety in my heart that Christ was who He said He was. I can't explain what happened other than simply what Jesus says in St. John's Gospel ch.6 v.65: "No one can come to me unless my Father puts it into his heart to come." I can only think that God hadn't put it into my heart until that time. I went on my knees and committed my life to Jesus. Though I experienced the joy of a personal relationship with him, the devil was still around with his temptations and there was still the same battle to be fought. But now everything took on a new perspective and I knew where to turn for help.

It is one thing to experience the joy of that relationship but quite another to understand what it means to be committed to do God's will. One of my earlier reasons for rejecting Christianity was that many

Christians I met were just interested in personal salvation. Others seemed to think that all that is required of us is to live “a good Christian life.” But a sincere communist will give everything he has to change what he feels is wrong in the world. If our commitment to Jesus doesn’t give us an even greater passion than that to help people grow to their fullest stature, we need to ask ourselves, “Why?” And if it doesn’t give us a real passion to see education, industry, government, our countries and other such things under His control, we have a very limited idea of God’s interest in the world He made. Our calling is not to just try to influence people, but to be used to bring about radical change to people and nations and to seek a plan how that is to be achieved.

I often find it difficult to open my heart to all these things and sometimes wish for a more comfortable path to tread. But the crux of life is, I feel, well expressed, in John Wesley’s words: “Jesus came, not to make life easy, but to make men great.”

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Although I’m apprehensive at some of the beliefs expressed, and language I used, there are aspects of this that I still resonate with. I will not elaborate on this because, for me, it is more important that the reader asks her/his own questions about such beliefs. Also, different people will clearly be uneasy with different strands of the above. One thing I would like to focus on though is what led to my writing: *Then one day I found with much joy, a surety in my heart* .”

Looking back on it I realise that this sort of thing could be said by a wide variety of people from the context of the groups they were closely involved with. For instance, a Muslim might become similarly convinced that the Qur’an was verbally revealed from God to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Or, someone might reach a point where, in his/her heart, they feel they are meant to join the liberation struggle for their country. This could be a deep inner conviction, but might well be unrelated to a religious belief. I suspect that what I underwent was a universal human experience of social conditioning, but within the context of the fellowship I happened to have been involved with, and influenced by.

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Deeper questioning

In the latter 1970's, I began to question even more seriously some of the beliefs I had been told were pivotal to being a Christian. For instance, related to the substitution belief of Jesus dying in our place, outlined above: I began to feel this to be a fundamentally flawed analysis. We are not talking about a small misdemeanour that would give rise to a penalty which somebody else could pay off for us. We are talking about **the wages of sin is death**. No judge would accept as justice somebody else being executed instead of the culprit. That might be compassion, but it certainly wouldn't be justice. And justice is what this explanation around the significance of Jesus' death is trying to address.

The substitution explanation was also linked to another piece of doctrine which went right against my experience of life, in working with such a diverse group of friends in the MRA fellowship. I had also been told by Christians, quoting biblical passages, that if I gave my life to Jesus then I would be saved and go to heaven. Otherwise, upon death, if I didn't give my life to Jesus I would go to a much hotter and exceedingly more unpleasant place. This belief, I'll address more fully later.

But, in order to try to accommodate such doctrines (which I had been assured were pivotal to Christianity) with good sense, at that time I homed in on the following theory: If a person is driven in a car over the Severn bridge from England to Wales, he/she arrives at the destination whether conscious of that or asleep on the back seat. He/she is in the hands of the driver. Similarly, the sacrifice of Jesus is the bridge towards our destination, and God is the decider of who will cross that, whether they are conscious of it or not. Thus, you don't have to believe things about Jesus, in order to be saved by Him.

I came to this theory myself, but realise that the basic concept is certainly not original. With such thoughts however, I was still trying to relate to doctrines which I found to be unbelievable, whilst trying to live the life that I perceived Jesus embodying.

I also began to reflect back on my time in India, where I became very inspired by Gandhi's struggle for Indian independence from Britain, and the totality of his life which was a foundation for that. I carried

with me a little book by Gandhi (which I still have), *'The message of Jesus Christ'*. He was greatly inspired by Jesus' life and message, but never took on board a lot of the doctrines many orthodox Christians regarded as the basis of their faith. He remained a devout Hindu.

It was clear to me that someone can live a life led by God without being Christian. Also, I felt inspired by his faith even though he was not a Christian. Incidentally, a couple of decades later I visited Martin Luther King's home in the USA, in Montgomery, Alabama. On the wall above the desk in his office was a large picture of Gandhi. I was struck though by Gandhi, a Hindu, being inspired by Jesus; and King, a Christian, being inspired by Gandhi. The lives of both also had, of course, many other influences.

However, although I resonated with Gandhi's perception of Jesus, I didn't realise at that time that a significant number of Christians, and indeed many Christian scholars, also had an understanding of Jesus' life and message, more in tune with this.

Reality of life

All this time, I continued trying to be true to the leading deep in my heart. Supporting friends to bring change in South Africa was with a sense of a long-term vocation. But in 1979 I fell foul of the security police there, and suddenly my vocation was taken from me. I found myself back in Europe with my wife and two children under the age of two. My commitment to the bigger vision had taken a battering, but was still there. I had no money and my spirit was too wounded to carry on with full-time work with MRA. So, at the age of 40, after being fortunate to get a post graduate grant for one year's university training as a teacher, I finished up teaching mathematics at my old school in Newbury, which had become a Comprehensive school.

I wouldn't say that I felt God guiding me to do that. It was just doing the best I could for my family, under the circumstances. The chaplain of the school became a good friend, and we joined him for Sunday worship at the local Baptist church. We felt comfortable there with a diversity of acceptance of Christian belief. After some years, Maria and I were baptised together (total immersion).

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‘End Times’ and China

The fourteen years of formal teaching was a precious experience, which I largely enjoyed. There were many aspects to this. But, focussing on the spiritual journey, I’ll just relate one experience which made its mark on me.

In an A-level mechanics class I was teaching, was a student who was a Jehovah’s Witness. After a few weeks, this pleasant young man decided to leave school and his studies because his religion had taught him that we were living in the ‘End Times’ and his life would be better used to go house to house to warn people about their impending doom - unless they adhered to the beliefs that he had. That was over 35 years ago, and I don’t know what he might believe now.

A few years later I was one of a small group of UK teachers visiting China (before the big changes happened), invited to compare what motivated young people in China with the motivations of young people in the UK. One evening we had dinner with several local communist party officials. They raised the subject of religion being ‘The Opiate of The People’. I didn’t mention my student, but I could understand their concern about the disengaging effect of some religious beliefs. However, they were interested in the fact that, on the contrary, my Christian beliefs played a part in motivating me towards bringing change to what is wrong in society.

Birth of the schools venture

In the mid 1990s I began to wonder whether I should stop formal teaching, to establish a programme going into UK Sixth Forms with international teams of young people to stimulate thought on purpose in life and motivation. This would once again mean launching out without a clear means of income. For a year, Maria and I wrestled with this thought. Although I had conviction for this, eventually I came to terms with accepting, what I sensed was God’s leading, that I should continue in my teaching role.

Then, one day a few weeks later in a staff meeting, the head master of our school said that nationally, schools like ours were going through restructuring, and teachers over the age of fifty were given the option of early retirement. I suddenly woke up! “That could apply to me”, I

thought. The long and the short of what followed was that I was able to take early retirement, and launch the MRA Schools Service.

Reflecting on this later, I thought that in my spirit I needed to have accepted carrying on teaching before God would give this opportunity. But then I thought, “Did God ‘arrange’ for Grant Maintained schools like mine around the UK to have this restructuring, in order to enable me to have early retirement?” This was very far-fetched but, somehow, I sensed that a wider process was at work, way beyond my human understanding. Anyway, I launched out, and this led to sixteen years of such a worthwhile initiative where our teams facilitated over 800 sessions in Sixth Forms all around England.



Photos
from
schools



In 2003, in ninety-five schools, we had a very fruitful time exploring the difference between:

“Because I feel like it.” and “To thine own self be true.”

To set the scene I said that at one point, when visiting my mother in a complex for elderly people, I saw two boys dropping litter outside. I told how, after saying to those boys that that was not very nice for those old people, their response was abusive. So, I then said to the boys, “Why do you do a thing like that?” One, aged about thirteen, replied, *“Because I feel like it.”*

I then talked about a teacher who had hosted us in a school. When I returned the following year, I found he had died. A plaque in the staff room in memory of him said, *“To thine own self be true.”*

The sessions with the students in these schools, then unpicked what they felt was the difference between these two seemingly similar statements. It was very fruitful. **Thus, the title of this booklet.**

Transition to Quakers

While this was happening, Maria and I continued to have support from the minister and other friends in the Baptist church. This also led to a considerable further exposure to more orthodox Christian mores.

Then, about twelve years ago a new minister of the church, a personable younger man, put his stamp on the church saying that Newbury Baptist church was a conservative evangelical church. Also, that to be considered a Christian, you have to believe “this, this and this” doctrine. We didn’t believe, “this, this and this” or resonate with the more exclusive approach. After some down to earth discussion with the minister we decided to change our spiritual home. It was not an easy decision after thirty years at that church. We have kept all our friends there, and appreciate the present minister, but are now part of the local Quakers, a fellowship we knew little about. We found in them an inclusive spiritual approach which we could resonate with.

It was accepted that people of differing doctrinal understandings as well as non-Christian beliefs could seek together with **common heart**. This atmosphere resonated with my understanding as a Christian, even though I realised that other Quakers would **believe** differently to me.

I had been used to the Quaker concept of silence, as it was common practice from IofC (MRA had a name change to *Initiatives of Change* in 2001) to spend a time of quiet each morning after waking up, to centre on a deeper inner leading. Many think of this as a means of seeking God's will, but I had started this practice fifty years earlier as an atheist. It appealed to me that in a Quaker Meeting people could approach this time of silence in whatever way resonated with them. I also liked the practice of people being welcome to stand and speak (minister) if, and only if, they felt moved by the spirit to do so.

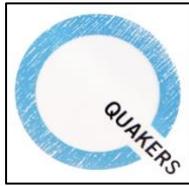
The other focus I responded to was the social action that Quakers are involved with which arises from this deeper inner leading. This combination fitted well with what motivates me from *Initiatives of Change*. So, encountering Quakers was, in a sense, like coming home.

A bit of background: IofC used to be called *Moral Re-Armament*. It got its name in 1938 when countries were arming militarily, before the second world war. The founder of MRA said "What we badly need is

moral and spiritual re-armament." And so, the name was born - very appropriate for its time.

Around the turn of the century many of us felt that a name change was needed, to be more in tune with the present times. One name suggested was *Initiatives for Change*. Some of us, me included, felt that this was the wrong emphasis. Although there was change needed in society, the root of the issue was human attitudes and motives and so we suggested *Initiatives from Change*; change rooted in transformation in people.

Then it was felt by all of us that what is crucial is to have the link between the two – personal and societal. And so, *Initiatives of Change* was adopted as the new name. For me this resonated well with the Quaker ethos too.



Initiatives of Change
International

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Further pondering, and the universe

The new spiritual home gave us the space to ponder further. We also became involved with the *Progressive Christianity Network* (PCN). It was inspiring to find that many other Christians were on a similar journey to ours. It also became clear that the orthodox belief package which we had earlier been presented with was by no means a universal understanding of Christians and theologians.

Within this more open atmosphere some of my other questions, such as about the nature of the universe, could be explored. The Australian Christians, mentioned earlier, had an interpretation of the Bible, which took the Genesis Creation Stories literally. I never could relate to this but now was an opportunity to think it through in more depth.

As part of this exploration, I wrote an article for the national PCN magazine, titled: *A perspective on The Eternal*. This was as follows:

Some people, who interpret certain biblical stories literally, believe that creation happened about six thousand years ago. Personally, I go with evidence pointing to a 'Big Bang', which dates the universe at about 13.7 billion years, with the emergence of human beings some hundreds of thousands of years ago.

What I write above doesn't negate belief in God. Far from it, but it certainly gives perspective to my perception of the Divine, and hints at humanity's very limited ability to comprehend what we are talking about when we use the word 'God'.



To us the earth is enormous, complex and rich in diversity, but we have also come to know that it is but a minute dot in the vast space of our Solar System. Our Solar System is itself an equally minute dot in a hugely vaster Milky Way galaxy with 200 to 400 billion stars. This is mind-boggling, but it goes further than that – much further. The most current estimates lead us to believe that there are 100 to 200 billion galaxies in the Universe. So, how many stars are there? Even if these figures are wildly inaccurate there are still one heck of a lot. No wonder J. B. S. Haldane, the Scottish mathematical biologist wrote: “Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we **can** suppose.”

In a Quaker Quest booklet on 'Faith' a contributor wrote: “Thinking of my cat eating his tinned tuna, I wonder whether we know as little of what is out there in the world of the spirit as he did of the process, from the Big Bang onwards, that put the food on his plate.” Indeed, just as a cat's brain is incapable of comprehending the immensity, diversity and complexity of the universe, I suspect that the human brain, in its present state of development, has also only scratched the surface in taking a lot of this on board, especially the dimensions beyond which we presently relate to. From where comes life, love, loyalty and the ability to begin to ask some of the big questions?



Without even our limited perspective on the universe it is not surprising that some of our biblical ancestors perceived a Creator as out there, separate from and beyond the earth, just above the clouds, who created everything. We thought we understood! Naturally, we thought we were the centre of all that is created - created for us.

In the light of what I allude to above, what is going on is far bigger and more complex than our forefathers could have dreamed about. Are the ten sextillions or so stars really created for our benefit, or are we just a component of something much, much bigger? A past of 13.7 billion years is hard to contemplate, but the universe is thought to be going to continue for **trillions** of years. When our Solar System, and earthly life with it, explodes to extinction - the universe will still be in its infancy!

My faith is in that creative ‘something’ which incorporates, is within, and is vaster than the universe as we know it. We human beings strive to understand our relationship to this ‘something’, and it is this mystery that I perceive as God. There are numerous windows through which we may glimpse this mystery, most of which we haven’t yet discovered. For me, as a Christian, I see Jesus as one of them – a decisive one – in terms of how humans should best relate to our perception of that greater ‘something’, and to each other. On the other hand, I sense that it would be wrong, and very inadequate, for me to start perceiving or worshipping any of these windows, including Jesus, as anything more than entry points.

Some people say that a well-established religious belief is necessary to be productively, morally and spiritually motivated. For me the acceptance that there is much about reality that we can’t know, overrides the temptation to take on board beliefs that are, to me, untenable. I feel increasingly at ease with the sense that I emerged from ‘mystery’ into this world, should make my best contribution to my fellow humans and to the greater good, and should then merge back into the Divine. I do not expect to exist then as an individual but somehow as part of The Eternal. My peace of mind and heart comes from acceptance of this mystery.

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Being able to look objectively at issues like this raises questions about how we see the nature of the Bible. Are we to take passages such as the Genesis Creation stories in some literal sense? Or, do they have another purpose which allows for wider exploration? This has been an ongoing issue through the centuries. For instance, “*The earth is set firmly in place and cannot be moved.*” (Psalm 93 v1) is a passage that was used to vilify Galileo. But as Bishop Desmond Tutu wrote: “*When you want to bake a cake you don't go to a geometry text book for instructions. The Bible did not intend to tell the ‘how?’, but much more the ‘why?’ and ‘by whom?’ of creation.*” It is a pity that the Dutch Reformed church in South Africa didn’t take note of this when taking biblical passages as a foundation for their apartheid policy.

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***There are no black and white answers
to multi-coloured questions.***

Anon

The nature of the Bible

So, what is the nature of the Bible? In “*The Heart of Christianity*”, Marcus Borg, just one theologian (discovered more recently) who offers a broader view of Christianity than the one I rejected, writes:

The Bible is the product of two historical communities, ancient Israel and the early Christian movement. As such it is a human product, not a divine product. This claim in no way denies the reality of God. Rather, it sees the Bible as the response of these two ancient communities to God. As their response to God, the Bible tells us how they saw things. Above all, it tells us how they saw God’s involvement with their lives, their stories, their laws and ethical teachings, their prayers and praises, their wisdom about how to live, and their hopes and dreams. It is not God’s witness to God (not a divine product), but their witness to God. **The Bible tells us how our spiritual ancestors saw things – not how God sees things.**

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I now find this perception of the Bible more authentic than as if it were, in some sense, dictated by God.

I mentioned earlier that I would consider more deeply the belief of some Christian friends that if people don’t make a conscious commitment to Jesus they will go to hell when they die. As an illustration of where such a belief can lead, I’ll share an experience from a church event which I attended fairly recently. The speaker described the work of his organization to evangelise and convert Jews to Christianity. He was enthusiastic. I felt uneasy.

Amongst other things, he talked a lot about their conversion successes in Amsterdam. As it happens my wife Maria is Dutch. A few days earlier we had been to see a play about Anne Frank, the Dutch, Jewish girl who with her whole family hid for two years during the war before being discovered and sent to Nazi concentration camps where they suffered terribly, and died.

So, at question time, in an attempt to delve into the speaker’s deeper beliefs, I mentioned this play, and then recounted being at a church a few years ago where the preacher had said that, like many other Jews who were sent to holocaust camps, Anne Frank had encountered hell on earth. He then went on to say that that was nothing compared to the

eternal hell she is going through after death, because she was not a Christian. I asked the speaker whether he agreed with the view of that preacher. He replied that as people faced death some do turn to Christ and would be saved. I pressed him a bit further, supposing that Anne Frank had not been one of these. He then said he did indeed believe that all non-Christians go to eternal hell, which would include people like Anne Frank. "That is what The Bible says." I didn't feel it was necessary for me to say any more. Those listening doubtless made their own judgements about this. But, some clearly agreed with him. Personally, if my biblical interpretation led me to believe that Anne Frank, and millions of other Jews who died in the holocaust had gone to eternal hell, I would feel compelled to rethink my understanding.

One more illustration that has convinced me of the fallacy of this sort of belief. As a teacher of mathematics, I know how easy it is to alienate children against mathematics just by the way it is presented. Another subject which can also easily 'turn people off', even conveyed by well-intentioned teachers, is Religious Education (RE). This raises an important question. If a child is turned away from Christianity by RE lessons, sometimes for life, is it Jesus who is actually being rejected? The same is true of the way many adults are repelled by the views or personalities of Christians they encounter. Are all these subsequent 'non-believers' destined for eternal hell?

Though not a Catholic, I resonate with Pope Francis who maintains that if the choice comes between doctrine and compassion, we should choose compassion. To me, this is just the sort of thing Jesus might have said. The troubling thing is that many people continue to be alienated from the 'Way' that Jesus exemplifies for us, by being presented with unbelievable doctrines as key to the Christian journey.

I sense that in all of us lurks an inner impulse for compassion and integrity, alongside a desire to make a difference. In myself, I would like this to be enhanced by a motivation to be fully at one with the extraordinary act of love and self-denial that Jesus' death really was. But, I realise that I too hesitate to be wholeheartedly identified as a Christian, because of association with doctrinal beliefs, such as those outlined above. I am reluctant for my valued relationships, also the passion to follow deeper convictions, to be detracted from in this way.

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Much more could be written exploring the validity of doctrines, and their positive and negative effects. But, my primary purpose now is to move on to how Christians can play their part in fostering a better world, in partnership with many others from different life foundations.

Evolving from Christian roots

Both IofC and Quakers have Christian roots. But, both have evolved to become truly inclusive bodies. The founder of IofC, Frank Buchman, a Christian minister, had an experience in 1908 which transformed his life. This set him on a journey that, like George Fox (seventeenth century Quaker founder), has made a big impact on the wider world.

Buchman and Fox were clearly motivated by Christian beliefs. But many who have more recently given their lives to work with the organisations they inspired are from other religions or, as in my case initially, were antagonistic towards any religion. The more recent presidents of IofC International have been Hindus and Muslims. Within UK Quakers there are Universalist and non-theist groups, who are fully engaged with the Quaker lifestyle and wider commitment.

In each of these bodies there is a searching discussion on how they should be positioned and viewed spiritually in the present day. But in both cases, personal transformation and the impact on wider society are central to their *raison d'être*. The ongoing exploration is one of the things which attracts me to both these bodies.

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Vital Link between 'Believers' and Non-believers'

The banner headline of IofC is about trust building. My conviction grew that we, and groups like us which have almost unconsciously pioneered the frontier in 'inter-faith' work, might fruitfully explore the spiritual bridge in the frontier between 'believers' and 'non-believers'?

So, in recent years, in different settings, I've initiated a number of workshops on the theme of *The Vital Link between 'Believers' and 'Non-believers'*. These have been very worthwhile. A prevalent line of thought which emerged was that compassion is a basic human instinct, and that this comes from an innate spirit in our human hearts - wherever we may believe that spirit originates.

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Shared Humanity

So, sitting here in Covid lockdown, pondering what motivates us, I've re-read several articles I've written, which focus on our Shared Humanity being the common factor which overrides all our beliefs. Excerpts from a couple of these now follow. I ask questions of myself. But the reader will doubtless ask his/her own questions.

The first article was written in 2017.

Beyond Group Allegiances

There are dangers when people gravitate towards a group identity. Imad Karam, my Palestinian friend, says that a primary problem in his part of the world is that Palestinians and Israelis are both trapped in their own narratives. I'm sure that this entrapment is true for so many situations, whether with international conflicts, religious affiliations, husband/wife clashes, or even football team allegiances which turn to crowd violence.

In terms of belief groups, a Christian may be assured in his or her belief, drawing on centuries of history, wisdom and evidence of the 'truth foundation' of the narrative. But a Muslim will have an equally impressive foundation to draw from, as may a Buddhist, or someone motivated by a non-religious world view like Richard Dawkins.

We observe others who are dedicated to a wide variety of narrow paths, and may think of some, 'How can they become so blinkered?' But logic would suggest that we too are part of a universal human phenomenon which leads to people becoming trapped in their 'truths' and 'certainties'.

I ask myself why in my 20s I chose not to drink alcohol, or why I became a Christian having been an atheist, or the many other steps which have led me to where I am now. There is a logical reasoning behind the decisions taken. A fundamental factor in my case was that in my mid-twenties I encountered MRA, a fellowship of people, whose philosophy and welcoming atmosphere I really resonated with. So, I gradually took on board the conformist norms and beliefs of that group. Fortunately, since then *lofC* has become more open and searching, as have I.

A helpful prompter towards this questioning, for me, was pondering the anecdote of the 'boiling frog'. If a frog hops into a bowl of boiling water it immediately jumps out. But if the frog is placed in a bowl of cold water that is slowly brought to the boil, it just stays there with the inevitable

consequence! Some beliefs, which we gradually grow to accept, we wouldn't dream of associating with under more objective circumstances. We would immediately, as it were, leap out.

Many people though are primarily moulded by the beliefs and culture that they grow up with as children. Research shows that we are all deeply subject to the resulting unconscious bias.

Despite this, there are very well-balanced, intelligent Christians, Muslims and others who have well thought through religious convictions. A primary hallmark of the new inclusive narrative, though, would be for such people, while maintaining their faith, to recognise that we are all largely moulded by groups we have identified with, from birth or encounter later in life.

It would accept that, like the frog, had we been nurtured in a different culture we would probably - equally sincerely and intelligently - have identified with the beliefs and norms of that culture, whether religious, political or national. If we would all first and foremost acknowledge this phenomenon within ourselves we would more likely be able to walk in the shoes of, and to stop demonising, 'the other'.

At a time when many are retreating into identity groups, and in many cases ceasing to talk to the 'other', how do we build trust with those on other sides of the fault lines, and make this a priority in our daily commitment? This is the challenge facing all of us who have conviction that our common humanity overrides all other group allegiances.

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Interconnectedness. The Buddha and Jesus.

I sometimes really value perspectives of friends from cultures very different to my own. A Buddhist friend shared the following:

*The caring Buddha was once asked,
“When you die, do you want to go to heaven or hell?”
After a pause, he replied: “I think I prefer hell.
There are still people there who need me.”*

Looking further at how interconnectedness might manifest itself between 'believers' and 'non-believers' in God, in February 2020 the Quaker UK national magazine *the Friend* published an article by me as the *Thought for the Week*.

It said:

*Is there an affinity between
the non-self of Christ on the cross
and the non-self of the Buddha?'*

On the face of it orthodox Christianity and Buddhism are irreconcilably different. But, in each case, does the human spirit go through the same transforming process? Is there an affinity between the non-self of Christ on the cross and the non-self of the Buddha as he reached for enlightenment? The Newbury Progressive Christianity Network group recently discussed this, at our Quaker Meeting House. We were joined by a local Buddhist.



A Christian (or a Muslim) may feel that a relationship with God is fundamental to inner transformation. But maybe it is the belief in a loving, creator God that is helpful to that process, rather than whether such a divine being actually exists. Equally, although Buddhists may not believe in a Creator God, maybe the transformation they go through is given by the God they do not believe in.

The primary aim of the Buddha was to help people to overcome their inner struggles. He had a well-conceived understanding and developed various techniques to this purpose, somewhat similar to a modern-day psychologist. But the concept of God played no part in his approach – he was people centred. Jesus, on the other hand, was primarily inspired by his devotion to God. This was in line with the Jewish worldview he grew up with. His actions and destiny were linked to God's will.

But, when one looks at Jesus' life, it is apparent that for him too spiritual transformation and growth in people was fundamental. His challenge to the woman at the well was about her facing deeply the mistakes in her life and changing. The same was true for the accusers of the woman caught in adultery, as well as for the woman herself. His way of dealing with these people was not necessarily derived from their religious beliefs. He challenged them to look at their selfish desires and to live differently; he also treated people with compassion, rather than judgement. In this sense, Jesus and the Buddha had the common aim of helping people to grow spiritually. Each did this within the culture and understanding of life they had been born into.

With this in mind it is worth asking again whether, despite the obvious differences in their theological understandings, the inner motivating experiences of Jesus and the Buddha were really at variance. Maybe, like all

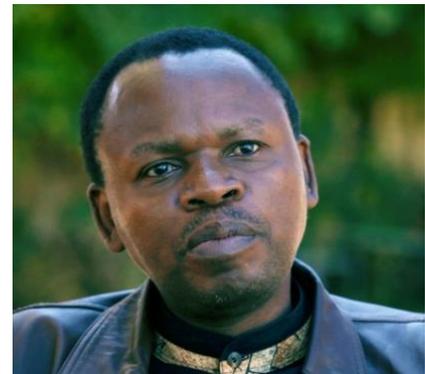
of us, both were seeking to access a reality or a divinity that is far beyond human beings' ability to comprehend.

Our discussions led us to recognise that there are two levels, and not just one, with which humanity reaches out to the Ultimate Reality. One is with the mind; the other is with the heart and spirit. The first seems to predominate in traditional theology. But, when seeking an inspired way forward, we surely need to focus more on the second. Fostering compassion is a major component of our lives, and common to all of us.

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Another perspective: *Touched something deep inside.*

I first met Letlapa Mphahlele and Ginn Fourie in 2003, and was deeply touched by their story. Letlapa was a liberation army commander during the time of apartheid in South Africa. He had a passionate anger about the way his people were being oppressed. At one point in the struggle, in retaliation for the killing of black civilians,



he ordered massacres on white civilians. One of the victims was Lyndi Fourie, a 23-year-old Cape Town university student. Following a profound journey, Lyndi's mother Ginn forgave Letlapa. When this happened, Letlapa said, "It touched something deep inside and restored my humanity." Letlapa is an atheist. His interpretation of what happened in his heart is nothing to do with religious beliefs or an orthodox perception of God. Yet he recognises the transforming process that was triggered by being forgiven, as a spiritual experience. To see a film about this, Google: *Beyond Forgiving*.

I invited him to the UK, to be part of the schools' programme and, in six weeks, took him to thirty-six senior high schools to share his story. His experience made a big impact on all who heard it.

Letlapa recently wrote an article titled, '*A journey towards freedom*' in the UK Christian magazine, *Progressive Voices*, about his spiritual journey. It finishes:

Beyond prejudices we inherited from our forebears, across the fences and walls we erect around ourselves, across doctrines and dogmas we uphold, perhaps it helps to acknowledge that there's a thread that runs through all

the ideologies and all the schools of thought: common humanity. And if we recognise humanity in others, no matter how different from us they look and dress and talk and worship, we'll be nourishing and watering the roots of our own humanity. Is this a vision that can unite atheists like myself with a variety of religious believers where we come together for a greater 'Yes!' - the reality of a shared humanity.

The story of Letlapa and Ginn is one of over 150 such experiences recounted by the *The Forgiveness Project* on their website. I asked the founder of this Project, Marina Cantacuzino, how many of the people included in these stories were motivated by a religious faith. She looked into this and concluded that it was about fifty per cent, though the vast majority claimed to follow a spiritual path. This is yet another example of something innate to our human nature being what motivates us, rather than it being dependent on religious faith.

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A spiritual struggle for peace

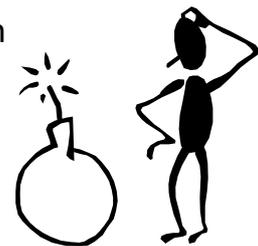
Letlapa was a liberation army commander. But he now seeks other routes to confronting that which is wrong. That is a spiritual journey.

In 2012, I wrote an article in *the Friend* exploring a more Quakerly approach to bringing change through non-violence. This was titled:

Waging Total Peace

The Quaker Peace Testimony was a focus for discussion at a recent 'Becoming Friends' evening at our local Newbury Quaker Meeting. It brought back university memories from fifty years ago. My degree specialised in Nuclear Power, but seeing how it was going to be used led me to oppose nuclear weapons and to speak at Hyde Park Corner in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Weapons, whether nuclear or otherwise pose a dilemma. How can it be right to be even prepared to kill others? Yet how can it be right to expose our country, and other friendly countries, to the risk of being subjugated by oppressive ideologies? My wife is Dutch and was born during the war. Her country was overrun by the Nazi regime of Hitler, and her family was given twenty-four hours to leave their home



because the occupying soldiers needed it. That sort of experience leaves its

mark and a motivation to try to control your own future destiny, if necessary by force.

Although in principle I support the unilateral cause I believe it is not right or wrong in itself but depends on the reasons a person has for adopting that stance. The debate about unilateralism seems to me to be muddled by a problem – the difficulty of distinguishing between true non-violence and appeasement.

Mohandas Gandhi, a devoted exponent of nonviolence, believed personal motivation was paramount. He wrote, “Non-violence is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but a positive state of love. It is not a cover for cowardice but it is the supreme virtue of the brave. Exercise of non-violence requires far more bravery than that of swordsmanship. But swordsmanship is any day superior to passive and helpless submission.” I believe that the highest moral stance towards disarmament is to do it unilaterally, but it needs to be taken with the realistic acceptance of the implications. It is often claimed that Jesus’ life and message is one of non-violence. We are also told, often by the same people, that disarmament will lead to peaceful co-existence. Yet a consequence of Jesus’ life was death on the cross, and since then many of his most devoted followers have been thrown to the lions. Unilateralism may be right, it may be in line with Jesus’ teaching, but we are deceiving ourselves if we think it is the likely way to true peace.

Jesus told Peter to put his sword away and was prepared to face the consequences. If we are prepared to face the consequences we can go down the path advocated by the Peace Testimony. It would however be wrong to do so from a misplaced trust in human nature. At root, it is not the fact that we have or do not have armaments that leads to war – it is the way we live all aspects of our lives.

In my radical student days, I was struck by someone saying, “You demonstrate for peace but live in a way which makes war inevitable.”



We must take a unilateral stand for goodness, living every facet of our lives in such a way that the Divine spirit can work through us to bring a new heart to human affairs - whether or not others go along with them. We should do it not just because we hope it will benefit us but because we know that is how we are meant to live.

A life centred on being true to God, or our deeper inner leading, will often be instrumental in creating peace, but it sometimes leads you into conflict. A stand for peace should not be taken in isolation, but primarily in conjunction with a commitment to a fundamental moral reassessment of all aspects of our lives. It also challenges us to become involved with social and peace-making initiatives before conflict arises.

“Are you a peace lover, or a peace maker?” Nico Smith. (South Africa)

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Transformation

Theologian Marcus Borg (quoted earlier) observed, “Though we can’t make transformation happen, we can midwife the process.”

Transformation may be of real value to the individual person. But, it may also have a wide-reaching impact in the world at large. Nelson Mandela had every reason to hate. Yet the path he chose to take had a tremendous impact not only on fostering the transformation of his own life, but also on that of his nation, South Africa. We lesser mortals can also make a contribution to society and to those around us, as well as to a redirection of motivation in our own lives.

Experiences may sometimes, of course, have an opposite effect. The oppression of loved ones, or even an annoying neighbour, often causes a spirit of anger, and maybe hatred and revenge. A heart of love can easily transform into a heart of stone.

Pain that is not transformed is transferred. — Fr. Richard Rohr

So, whatever our beliefs, we have a choice. One option leads to an embittered existence for the individual, and can have grim consequences for others and the wider community. The other path triggers new life and purpose to the person involved. And, as in the pandemic, people of widely differing cultures and beliefs may come together with a common heart and purpose.

For myself, I realise that a personal change of direction in life wouldn’t have been born if I hadn’t taken the initial costly step of being honest about the voting. It has needed that moral backbone.

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Emerging from the lockdown.

In ‘**Setting the scene**’, I wrote that the purpose of this booklet is to explore, “whether there is an encompassing world-view which transcends ‘beliefs’, which we can all more fruitfully engage with?” Clearly, a small booklet cannot hope to give a complete picture of such a world-view.

But, I hope that, in a small way, the varied experiences shared above can contribute towards fostering a community centred on compassion and integrity. Hopefully, this may resonate with the sentiment of Russian philosopher Grigory Pomerants who wrote:

“We do not ask of what belief you are, but of what spirit.”

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A summarising metaphor

To summarise, here follows a piece I wrote about ten years ago, when making the transition from a mainstream church to the Quakers. This summary feels like a metaphor for our life’s journey:

The emergence of pondering



As Homo Sapiens emerged from caves in different parts of the world and began developing with different cultures and varied creeds he/she began to wonder where it all began. He/she became aware of the dimension beyond the simply material - of creativity and love and of a wide variety of emotional nuances.

“There is more to all this than meets the eye” they thought, each HS group from the point of view of their own world-perspective. Concepts of *the Divine* began to take shape as hearts reached out for an understanding. Across and around the earth (depending on whether you thought the earth was flat or round) understandings of this *Divine* varied greatly. But it was the same truth, the same *Divine*, that was being sought.





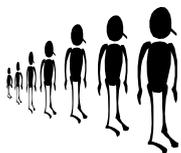
Nevertheless, the people began to argue, and even got into devastating wars, about whose ponderings were correct, and about whose holy scriptures were revelations directly from *the Divine*. Some even concluded that unless others accepted the same beliefs as them, those others were heading for eternal damnation. Though it has to be said that there were still a number who, deep down, sensed that *the Divine* was more about what was in their hearts. *He/She/It* was bigger - much, much bigger than any of their understandings.

One day a person, of no particular gender, had an idea and told it as a parable:

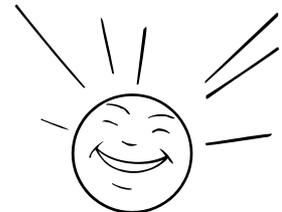
“Let us suppose that a blind man and a deaf man are together in a room when a thunderstorm breaks out close at hand. The blind man experiences and reports a loud noise; the deaf man experiences and reports a bright light; and each is convinced of the reality of his experience and the truth of his report.



“But the two reports are different, and, on the face of it, that of which the blind man is convinced is different from that of which the deaf man is convinced. The ‘truth’ of one appears quite unconnected with, and irrelevant to, the ‘truth’ of the other. But if each should discover his own truth, exploring the implications, the causes and the origins of that of which he is convinced, the two might soon recognise that what they had experienced in different ways and reported in different ways was, in fact, the same thing - the proximity of a thunderstorm. The ‘truth’ of each would then become relevant to, and even a confirmation of, the ‘truth’ of the other.” (see *Love’s Endeavour, Love’s Expense* by W. H. Vanstone)



The implications of this vibed for some who had ears to hear. Together, and with growing numbers of others from very different beliefs and ponderings, they went forth into all the world with expanding hearts and minds. As they lived and proclaimed their new sense of connectedness with each other Homo Sapiens grew more and more in tune with *the Divine*.



And the heart of *the Divine* did leap with joy!

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Would I be me?

Finally: At age seven, our daughter Wendy said to Maria, “Mummy, if you had married someone other than daddy, would I be me?”

My life journey has led to deep friendships with people from a wide variety of cultures and beliefs. What makes us the persons we are is clearly dependent on the genes/DNA from our parents. We have no control over this. Also, we have limited sway over how we are brought up. But gradually, for most people, there is a transition from total dependence, towards interdependence. Thinking for ourselves can lead to questioning how our beliefs and life norms have arisen.

It has not always been easy for me to review the beliefs that have become part of who I am. But I’ve tried to question my own answers in the light of observing how beliefs and attitudes evolve in all people.



Our daughters, Wendy and Karen

Maria and I have done our best to encourage Wendy and Karen to follow their own (very different) stars – ‘To their own selves be true.’ It gives us great joy to see the paths they are treading. We trust that our grandchildren, Keren, Isaac and Abi will also follow their own inner stars.

This booklet passes on to them and to future generations, some of the experiences and mistakes that have been my lot, as I’ve tried to be true to my own inner leading.



Jon, Wendy, Keren, Isaac, Abi

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It is clear that, achieving an all-embracing spirit of shared humanity, both in ourselves and in the wider world, is likely to be at best a long road to walk. But I believe that fostering such a spirit is an essential foundation towards realising the compassionate world we all long for.

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(For a 47-minute photo/video of the author’s life, see https://youtu.be/myg8yUZf_RY)