

FORTY-THREE

OXFORD FRIENDS' MEETING
43 ST. GILES OXFORD OX1 3LW

NEWSLETTER

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Thinking about Climate Change — Acting on Climate Change?

23 January 2010:

A date to help us to get real!

“The crisis of global climate change represents a supreme test of humanity’s collective wisdom and courage. Our immoderate use of the Earth’s resources violates the entire biosphere, threatening the lives of millions of people and the habitats of thousands of species. Many of the poorest people are already suffering a changed climate: they are asking us all to act.”

These are the opening words of a message from Britain Yearly Meeting’s ‘Meeting for Sufferings’ in June 2009, addressed to the forthcoming Copenhagen summit on climate change. They make clear that the Society of Friends is waking up to this impending crisis, as the greatest moral and spiritual challenge we have ever faced.

It is a message to all Quakers.

The news is not good. In January 2007, the UN’s Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forecast a possible rise in global temperature during the course of this century of between 2^o and 6^o C. The range of uncertainty in their forecast was dependent on the amount of CO₂ (etc) we continue to emit. But current figures – of

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From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

We are building towards the climax of crisis. The spiritual crisis is folding into the ecological crisis and the ecological crisis is folding into the economic crisis. As Christians, it seems to me, we are now required to critically assess the capital driven market economy and identify it as a false religion, a fabulously productive but ultimately destructive system bringing closure on God’s goodness in creation and bringing a creeping atheism to the soul. To look this system straight in the eye and call it to account is a critical test of Biblical faith.

Challenging market economics with a Biblical sense of the goodness of God in creation is to join a spiritual struggle. Faith in God, solidarity with the suffering poor and all other forms of life demands that we take a stand and say, ‘This destruction must stop.’ We must be perfectly clear about the implications of undertaking this responsibility. It is more than just setting up household recycling bins, growing organic vegetables or riding a bike to work. It is more than a talking job. It is a renovation which will change everything: the way we do business, the way we eat, the way we travel, the houses we build, the products and services we can expect and the prices we pay for them, the way we feel about trees and the way we worship God.

QF&P 25.14 Keith Helmuth, 1990

Deadline for contributions to the December 2009 issue: noon, Friday 20 November

Contributions, of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated, preferably by email: newsletter@oxfordquakers.com. Paper copy can be left in the Forty-Three pigeonhole at Oxford Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373.

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rapidly increasing global emissions – now put us on track for the *top end* of this predicted range. A 6⁰ global temperature rise is the ultimate catastrophe. According to the climate scientists, even a 3⁰ increase may be enough to trigger runaway climate change, turning huge swathes of the continents, North and South, to desert, and massively raising sea levels. (See Mark Lynas, *Six Degrees: Our future on a hotter planet*. Fourth Estate, 2007.)

Yet the waterfall still seems so remote as we drift down river: still a distant murmur in our lives, not yet a roar.

To help us all, within the Oxford (and Area) Meeting, in facing up to this gathering crisis, and in understanding how we are led to respond, both individually and as a community, Oxford Meeting has invited the ***Living Witness Project*** to run an **all-day workshop in the Meeting House:**

23 January 2010, approx. 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Provisional title: ‘After Copenhagen:

The challenge for Quakers now’.

PLEASE PUT THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARY TODAY!

The Living Witness Project (LWP) grew initially out of the Oxford Meeting Group on Sustainable Living (GOSLings). LWP is now working with Meetings all over the country, helping Friends to develop a shared witness to sustainable living, connecting our spiritual life with work for a sustainable world. It is the principal Quaker organisation in the UK focusing on climate change, together with the ‘Good Lives’ programme at Woodbrooke.

Alan Allport



James MacMillan: Religion and Music in the Twentieth Century

In a radio talk in October 2008, James MacMillan expressed the view that religion and a spiritual perspective on life has always been an important inspirational and motivational force in classical music, and that this has remained true for much twentieth century classical music also.

However, in his view, this spiritual dimension has been almost totally ignored by academic and media comment in the twentieth century, because it does not fit comfortably with the dominant secular world view. Instead, people have been encouraged to view contemporary and past classical works, purely as aesthetic objects, ignoring the religious culture which nurtured them. A consequence is that the capacity of classical music to deepen spiritual awareness in its audiences, has equally been ignored.

MacMillan quoted an example from his own experience, when a major publisher who was producing a series looking at twentieth century classical music from different perspectives refused out-of-hand to support a project to produce a book within the series looking at the role of religion in twentieth century music, with the comment “What has religion got to do with music in the twentieth century?”

In MacMillan’s view, such a view of modern classical music, profoundly distorts the truth and devalues the cultural and spiritual importance of the whole field of classical music. He argued that not only Mahler but many of the strongest and most innovative composers in the twentieth century were religious: for example Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Messiaen, Gorecki, Aarvo Part, Schnittke, John Taverner, and John Cage. MacMillan quoted an example from Cage’s work called *Silent Prayer*.

MacMillan felt there was a strong case for arguing that one cannot give a full analysis of a composer’s music, without looking at the religious ideas which have shaped it. He compared the modern practice of abstracting music from its context within a spiritual framework of cultural beliefs, practices and values to that of grave-robbers raiding tombs like the Pyramids, simply for their beautiful objects, without any concern for understanding, respecting or preserving the beliefs and values of the cultures which created such marvellous works. (With music, the case is even worse, for here we are dealing with a tradition that is still living.)

MacMillan felt that it was something of a self-serving caricature to call our modern secular culture ‘liberal’. A true liberality would imply an openness to many perspectives. Whereas modern ‘liberalism’ speaks from a confident set of background assumptions in which the religious artist is destined to be marginalised and derided.

2 MacMillan contrasted this with a recent Papal

address which spoke to all of our need to seek and find new epiphanies of beauty.

MacMillan felt that true art can be the bridge to such new discoveries, and that such art has close affinities to the world of faith. Art remains a bridge to religious experience even when the worlds of formal religion and culture are moving far apart. In this way, the experience of art also becomes an experience of our personal redemption from our own failings, meannesses and trivialities.

MacMillan acknowledged that many artists today would not agree with such a view; and also acknowledged that in much modern art, it is indeed difficult to discern any connection with the numinous.

MacMillan went on to express concern at the marginalising of classical music in modern entertainment culture. Without sharing his politics, he felt that the Marxist philosopher Adorno had interesting things to say about how modern popular culture has acquired its dominance; partly through the gradual disenchantment with religious ideas and the consequent disintegration of a consensus world view based on religious beliefs; and partly through the rise of a capitalist industry which links culture essentially with profit and which seeks to promote profit maximisation rather than cultural quality aimed at human flourishing. The result, MacMillan felt, was a popular culture promoted by advertising and swamped by a “lowest common denominator” mentality which discouraged serious cultural aspiration.

MacMillan saw in pop culture, an ubiquitous conformity imposed by an industry dedicated to mass consumption by uncritical consumers pursuing the fashion of the moment, rather than making their own individualist discoveries from a wider and more complex tradition. Such a culture did not encourage the kind of concentration and deep “active listening” that serious music requires. The result was that many people brought up with undemanding popular music, were baffled and alienated when encountering “art music”.

MacMillan quoted from “Music and Mind” by Anthony Storr, which he said made bold claims about what great music can bring to our experience. He felt that the abstract content of music can give our feelings and emotions order, and through this can provide a transforming influence and have a role in healing our damaged society. MacMillan drew a comparison between the

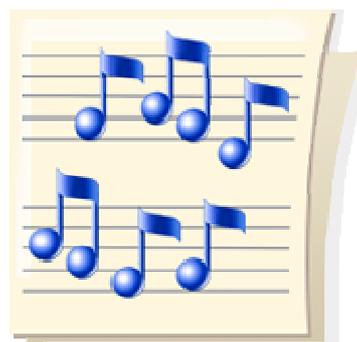
openness needed to absorb classical music, with that needed for meditation and contemplation, and even prayer. Such music had the capacity to give us glimpses of something beyond the horizons of materiality. He quoted the conductor Herbert von Karajan, to the effect that great music comes from eternity.

Neither “intellectual” nor “spiritual” captures great music’s activity, which touches something deep in our souls, and releases a spiritual force.

We need such channels to penetrate modern banality so as to contact the sacred in which our true freedom resides. Without such channels, our lives will become meaningless.

Great music reminds us, in an increasingly dehumanised world, what it means to be human.

Chris Gaal



College Outreach Opportunity

Are you looking for a little project to run, and do you want to reach out from Oxford Meeting to young people? Oxford & Cherwell Valley College, located on Oxpens Road, is expanding its initiatives in faith support, and Quakers have been invited to play a role. Examples include:

- The college hopes to run small on-campus sessions on ‘What do __ believe?’, and Quakers could lead one of these.
- Each month, the college will set up a display on a different faith. We could construct a Quaker display.
- A network of various clergy and other religious leaders, centred on the college, currently lacks a Quaker representative.

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Additionally, on Thursday 5 November, from 11 a.m., the college will hold a Faith Support Volunteers' Seminar followed by lunch at 12:30, and potential volunteers are invited. According to Tina Hirons, the college's Faith Support Co-ordinator, "For potential volunteers, the event will provide the opportunity to find out what is involved in being a Faith Support volunteer in a Further Education College and to help you to consider if this is a role that you would like to take up. For us all, I hope it will provide a stimulating and encouraging time as we consider how to develop the faith support work in College." The event includes a talk by Jafar Miraz from Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education (www.fbfe.org.uk). For a full programme, parking information, or to RSVP, please email mark.ebden@eng.ox.ac.uk, or telephone 01865-283391.

If you miss the 5 November event, your help would still be appreciated in any of the three examples listed above.

Mark Ebden



Quakers in Focus

This is a series of informal meetings held on Thursdays in Mareta Stark's home, for newcomers to Oxford Meeting, Attenders who are wondering about seeking membership, and seasoned Friends who may feel in need of an MOT!

19 November - **Meeting for Worship**

Richard Thompson and Madeleine Forey

What is happening in a Meeting for Worship based on silence? What to expect and how to explore the experience. What is ministry?

26 November - **Going against the Tide:**

Quakerism Past and Present

Iain McLean and Sandra Figgess

We learn of the suffering of early Quakers in the turbulent seventeenth century, belief in a direct relationship with God, witness to peace and speaking truth to power. How do today's Quakers measure up? Do we still speak truth to power and live out our convictions? Are we still relevant?

3 December - **Quaker Faith and Practice**

Lis Burch (tbc) and Jenny Buffery

How does the Society of Friends function? What is BYM? What is Quaker Business Method? How do Quakers make decisions without voting or seeking consensus?

14 January - **Quaker Testimonies: Sustainability and Simplicity**

Alan Allport and Fiona Mullins

Quaker testimonies underlie our beliefs and actions. We hear from individual Friends about how the testimonies have influenced their lives.

21 January - **Quaker Testimonies: Peace and Equality**

Glen Williams and Janet Toyne

Quaker testimonies underlie our beliefs and actions. We hear from individual Friends about how the testimonies have influenced their lives.

28 January - **Membership**

We hear from four Friends about their spiritual journeys, what led them to apply for membership of the Society of Friends and how they valued the experience.

Oxford Meeting Elders

