

Friends And Global Change

“Gathering in Clear Light and Fresh Hope”

By

Julian Stargardt, Hong Kong Monthly Meeting

Friends' Peace Testimony, 1660

“Our principle is, and our practices have always been, to seek peace, and ensue it, and to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God, seeking the good and welfare, and doing that which tends to the peace of all.... That spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil, and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ which leads us into all Truth will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.... But we do earnestly desire and wait, that by the word of God's power and its effectual operation in the hearts of men the kingdoms of this world may become kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, that he might rule and reign in men by his spirit and truth, that thereby all people, out of all different judgements and professions [beliefs] might be brought into love and unity with God and with one another, and that they might all come to witness the prophet's words who said, 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.' ” (Isiah 2:4; Micah 4:3)

Declaration by the Religious Society of Friends to Charles II, 1660

“There is enough in the world for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed” Ghandi

“We need a Friends global voice to speak to matters of Global Change.

A global voice representing all Friends, run for Friends by Friends on Friends principals of worshipful discernment and subject to the will of Friends worldwide.

We need a Friends Council for Global Change under the auspices of FWCC with Representatives from all Meetings.” Hong Kong Monthly Meeting Minute 1 Nov., 2008

Dear Friends

Just as we seek unity in the Lord, so there is a unity and inter-connectedness in the challenge of change we face, unity of natural change and man-made change. “Global Change” is a term used to express the unity, integration and inter-connection of all change. Seemingly different or unrelated changes are in fact different aspects or facets of a single greater change. All changes are inter-connected. The challenge before us is how do we – creation on this earth - survive the change we face ? How do we survive and flourish ? These are challenges to our survival which face us now and face the survival of our children. What is the role of Friends in this ?

We do not own this planet. It is not ours to consume. Yet in our efforts to improve the material quality of life for all humans we have brought about fundamental changes to both human society and to the natural environment which put our survival at risk. We consume the earth like candy, like some consumer disposable we use it and dispose of it. We act as if we are a species of planet eaters. By contrast we should act as guardians of the earth because it is our responsibility and our duty to hand over our home planet to the next generation in a better condition than we inherited it. The changes we have brought to creation by our consumption bring life on earth to the brink of extinction. It is this challenge of how do we manage the challenge of our survival that we must now face. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) states in its latest “Living Planet Report” that the world is in a global ecological credit crunch and estimates that by the 2030s we will need the resources of two planets to maintain our consumption patterns. We do not have two planets' resources. We

must adjust to change here and now with the diminishing resources available to us. If we do not face this challenge as a united global community we may squander the opportunity to survive and we may not survive at all.

Some people dispute that human activity causes global change. Let me lay these doubts to rest with five examples: 1) Ozone holes caused by manmade CFCs; 2) Depletion of fish stocks by overfishing; 3) Fuels burnt for energy causing global warming by carbon emissions and acid rain by sulphur emissions; 4) Deforestation diminishes oxygen and water input to the atmosphere; causes ethnocide of indigenous peoples; species extinction and desertification; 5) Desertification by over grazing, deforestation and conversion of marginal land to arable farms. For details see the end note (1).

Friends have a unique message to share with the rest of the world. Our message could help all life survive and flourish. Our unique message is the application and sharing of Friends' faith, our Testimonies, especially of peace, simplicity and equality and our process of worship based methods of church business. Our worship based process in which we seek and find unity together in divinely revealed truth through worship together with equal respect for each individual voice. Our faith, our Testimonies and our church business method is the message we must share with the world if the world is to find salvation and continued life in the changes which we face today, tomorrow and in the future.

We hear daily of climate change, global warming, changes to the environment, of pollution; diminishing resources; challenges to our economy and of social upheaval. When I hear of concerns for 'Climate Change' or about 'the Environment', I ask myself in wonder "Why do people talk about these things in isolation?" I ask because climate change, global warming, environmental change, economic change, social change, war, peace and justice are each individual parts of global change. Each part can only truly be understood when viewed in the context of the whole. Whatever version of creation you believe in, change is the one constant which is always with us. Change is natural, normal and part of life. What is not normal, natural and what may end all life on earth is the accelerated change we humans have brought to our home on earth.

All change is part of a larger interconnected global matrix. It's like a great big jigsaw, lose one piece and the whole thing is broken. No one person, community or nation can solve these issues alone. Managing change, resolving the challenges of change is seen as challenging the sovereignty of nation states. Governments and people are wary of challenges to national sovereignty. To overcome these challenges and prejudices we must learn to work together peacefully, lovingly and equally as a global community to find fair, compassionate, just, loving solutions for all; equally for the Bushman in the Kalahari and the billionaire in New York or Mumbai. To achieve loving appropriate solutions to the challenges facing us, means we as a global community need to overcome cultural, spiritual, ideological and national boundaries. Learning to work together harmoniously as a global community is no easy task. But it is a task we must start now before it is too late. For many species and places it is already too late, they are extinct. Let their passing serve as an alarm bell for us. Let their passing spur us in to action.

This planet and humanity have survived big challenges from change before. We humans survived ice ages and global warming before we developed technology. So why is there so much fear of change now? We humans are innately conservative as a species. We like stability. We like predictability. We fear the unknown. Above all we now live in a

technological society which cannot survive collapse. We rely on technology to extract minerals for our consumer products, we rely on technology for every aspect of our daily lives. In a time of collapse our technology may become unsustainable. While we survived ice ages and global warming in ages before we developed technology, modern technology makes us strong but our reliance on technology is also our weakness. To adjust to and survive changes which are happening now we must find methods of managing the impact of change on society and on all of creation, we need methods of adapting to change which ensure we survive and flourish. Change, the challenge of the unknown, is often in itself frightening. The changes which challenge us globally in society, the environment, economy and climate are changes which occur at ever increasing speed and which threaten to destroy our civilization and they could destroy life on earth as we know it.

These issues affect the survival of human life on earth and the diversity of life on earth; the challenge to survive causes a global upheaval which will become more difficult to manage and survive before it improves, this upheaval is arguably the largest upheaval since the extinction of the dinosaurs; it affects everyone, all creation on earth, including all Friends

What connection do these issues have with Friends and what can Friends contribute to this global discussion ?

If we Friends do not share our message then we let ourselves down, we let God down and as life on this planet competes for diminishing resources we may degenerate before long into a struggle for survival, a struggle of murder, war and possibly the destruction of all or almost all life on this planet. I am not a scare monger. My views are shared by scientists including authors of the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other specialists studying global change.

The challenge of global change is not limited to climate or environmental change. Change is the only constant in life. Change is universal. Change affects society, economy, resources, the air we breathe, the water we drink. Change affects everything. All change is inter-connected. Change happening now threatens our existence and the lives of those who come after us. Change cannot be stopped. But we can adjust to change. We do not own this planet. We are custodians of the planet for future generations: Future generations of humans, future generations of all creation. How we manage adjustment to change determines whether life survives and if life survives what we do now determines what sort of life we will have in the future and the sort of life those who follow us shall have. It is our responsibility as Friends to ensure we act wisely and in the Holy Spirit to ensure the choices we make now bring about the best adjustment to change.

I now look briefly at the interconnection between different aspects of change, such as: Economic, environmental and climate change, as well as scientific, social and government responses to change and describe the special contribution Friends can make to the process of management of change both at a local and at a global level.

The recent economic turmoil of late 2008 was triggered partly by easy credit and partly by competition for scarce commodities like iron, copper, coal, oil, gold. Competition between India, China and Japan among other countries for commodities helped push prices to record highs. High commodity prices led to renewed exploration for resources and exploitation of previously unprofitable sources of resources. High commodity prices affected consumer prices on the high streets of the developed world and reintroduced the spectre of inflation, a

ghost the world thought it had laid to rest in the 1970s and 1980s. High consumer prices led to less consumption. Less consumption means less manufacturing. Less manufacturing means less employment. And to illustrate the circle, less employment causes reduced consumption and can result in economic crash. Ironically a crash may be a partial respite for the environment. We consume far too much. If there is a crash we consume less. But with an economic crash most countries find a convenient excuse to say “Damn the environment, we have people to feed !” What they don’t understand is that when we ignore the environment, we condemn ourselves to future starvation.

We live in an interdependent and interconnected world. A world that is globalised whether we like it or not. Our world always has been interdependent and interconnected. It is just that we as a global community are only now slowly and reluctantly awakening to the fact of our interconnection and interdependence. “No man is an island entire of himself”⁽²⁾ we all depend on each other for our survival.

Depletion of oil in the Middle East and the availability of uranium from Australia affect India and India’s economy. Indian products and Indian services impact the world. Think of Indian clothes, call centres, steel, computer software and computer chips. Pollution from India’s factories affects Singapore. Indian companies influence business in Europe and the US while businesses from around the world influence India.

I choose “India” because we are in India. We can replace “India” with “Australia”; “New Zealand”; “Japan”; “China”; “Brazil”; “Europe”; “America”, or any other country in the world. No country can or does live in isolation from any other country. No person can live in isolation from humanity. Humans cannot and do not live in isolation from the rest of creation. Without the rest of creation we cannot survive because we are part of creation.

We are all interconnected. We are all interdependent. All nations, all businesses, all people, we are all interdependent, we rely on the survival of one for the survival of all. If we needed a lesson in the reality of interdependence, then the current global financial crisis is providing it for us (Indra’s Web springs to mind⁽³⁾). The sooner we all realize, accept and act in accordance with our global interdependence, the better for us all.

If we do not recognize, accept, learn to live and act in unity we shall all perish. Not just all of humanity but much if not all of life on this planet will perish, possibly within the life time of many of us in this room. When I say “unity” I do not mean ‘uniformity’, I mean what we Friends call “unity” with respect for our differences as part of what we need to do to survive.

In distant antiquity, so the good book tells us, we ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We know our sins. We have ample signs before us to show us what is wrong. Like Noah before the flood we can warn, we can prepare, we can survive and we can flourish. Let us pray that unlike Noah we will be heard. If we Friends remain silent we shall sin by omission. We shall be like a neighbor who sees his friend’s house on fire but does nothing to save it. We must speak out. We may not save the world but at least we shall know we tried.

If we, this current generation of humanity, do not find unity and find it soon we shall perish. We shall perish in a flood of pollution, an exhaustion of natural resources and an apocalypse of competitive wars for continually diminishing resources.

This may be a grim message to some of you but this is the message which is daily rising from the voices of scientists around the world. It is this message which some - especially governments - seek to ignore or deny to a greater or lesser extent.

Every day we hear the growing global debate about climate and environmental change. The debate is not in fact about climate change or environmental change. Why not? Because whether we like it or not changes to the environment are here to stay. There is little we can do to stop them. They are here. Water shortages already affect much of the world including India and China, Australia, much of Africa, Arabia, parts of Europe and the Americas. Creation of new deserts by over-cultivation, diversion of rivers and exhaustion of artesian basins deprives parts of the world of much needed farm and grazing land. Once a desert is formed it is rare indeed for the process to be reversed. In China alone official statistics say about 3,000sqKm of new desert form every year*. In India 1/3rd of all land is at risk of becoming desert, according to the Central Arid Zone Research Institute in Jodhpur*. Yet around the world governments, businesses, churches, individuals are often eager to ignore, minimize or deny the existence and consequences of man made environmental change or to even claim it is a good thing.

Why should businesses and national governments want to claim that global change is not happening or that it is not a serious problem? Because fixing it is seen as a threat to profits and as a threat to sovereignty. Change transcends national borders and cannot be responded to effectively in isolation at a national level. Global Change is beyond the capacity of any one national government to control, manage or cure. Governments are stuck in a mindset dominated by concerns for national sovereignty. This mindset limits their ability to see and act on solutions beyond their own national boundaries. Global Change does not respect national boundaries, as Kiribati and the Maldives know as their national territory is drowned by rising sea levels caused by pollution from other countries. Global Change requires global solutions because it ignores sovereignty and national boundaries; it makes national boundaries redundant and obsolete. Global change can only be managed by international cooperation. No one nation can fix the problem. China and India's pollution affects the rest of the world. But are China and India's pollution problems for China and India to redress alone? I say "No" because the cause of China and India's pollution is the export of manufacturing from the so called developed world to developing countries especially India and China; so the solution is partly the developed world's responsibility. Manufacturing exported to and now concentrated in China and India and elsewhere (and now being exported by India and China too) is manufacturing for export to the countries from which the manufacturing was originally exported as well as for new local consumer markets. When developed countries export their manufacturing to developing countries they also export the problems associated with manufacturing, problems like access to resources and pollution.

Pollution once in the sky, water, earth is not easily taken out. Environmental and climate change cannot be simply stopped. Whether we like it or not we must learn to live with it. We must learn to manage it and adjust to it. A lot of sound and fury is expended on carbon emissions which can be managed but what has happened to discussion of CFCs which cause the Ozone Holes? Silence; the same silence which greets new deserts or rising sea levels. Silence because these issues are difficult to handle. The solutions to change can only be found by local and international cooperation between individuals, communities, universities, research institutions, churches, faiths, political parties, NGOs, businesses and governments.

Debate about how we can all cooperate locally and internationally to manage change is growing every day. This debate is the most important debate of our lives because our lives depend on the outcome of this debate.

What can Friends contribute to the debate about global change ?

There is a mood and impetus among Friends to form a global Friends NGO to be active in this debate. Is this the right way forward for Friends ? If it is what form should Friends action take ? What we decide here and now at this Gathering will have an impact on the development of this new Friends organization, on its direction and on its message.

Are we specialists on climate change ? Are we experts on global pollution ? What do we know about rising sea levels, carbon or CFC emissions ?

Some of us may know quite a lot. Many may know a bit. But many may know little or next to nothing. However all of us care about our neighbours and all of us are experts at being Friends. Our contribution to this discussion should be based on our area of expertise, our special expertise as Friends

What distinguishes Friends ? Our special attributes are our faith, our spirituality, our Testimonies and our worship based methods of seeking and discerning the truth, for example our:

- Message of love
- Peace Testimony; of living in that Spirit which takes away the cause of all war and outward strife
- Message of equality
- Testimony of simplicity; I think of Gandhi's words: There's enough in the world for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed
- Method of seeking and discerning divinely revealed Truth;
- Method of seeking together through discernment by worship unity in the truth while giving equal weight to every voice and respecting the minority who may be right
- Proceeding with initiatives only when we have found unity in divinely revealed Truth through worship together

We need to share our spiritual methods of seeking and finding unity in the truth and we need to share our Testimonies with others because sharing our spiritual methods and Testimonies may be the key to the survival of us all. How can we do this ?

To ensure our message is heard and acted on we need to deliver it through our Meetings, our Yearly and Section Meetings and through FWCC. No doubt Quaker affiliated NGOs can help and support our message. But to carry the weight and authority of the Religious Society of Friends our message must come from us as a spiritual body.

What action should we Friends take ? How do we ensure our voice is heard clear and true ?

Recommendations:

- Friends need to mobilize at a grass roots level all the way upto Yearly Meeting and FWCC level. We face a challenge to our faith and ethics which is more profound and fundamental than anything we have ever faced before. We need to speak up as a gathered people of God. We need to share with the world our testimonies, our spirit and our faith

- We need to coordinate regionally and internationally, between Meetings, Yearly Meetings and between regions. Each Meeting at every level should organize a committee run on Friends' spiritual principals to speak out, act and liaise with other Friends
- Friends need to speak with our own voice and our message needs to be discerned through our tried and tested methods
- We need our voice to be coordinated internationally through Friends methods and channels

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- Funding will be an issue and will need to be secured
- Contact with the world's leading research institutes to ensure that information and facts we quote and use are up to date and reliable.
- Cooperation and coordination with other Churches, other Faiths, NGOs, Businesses, Universities, the UN and Governments to seek a common message

What can we do as a Global Community ?

- Pool resources
- If we pooled the resources each country currently spends on defense we would have more than sufficient to overcome the problems we face with global change
- If we need defense at all, then what we need is a global law enforcement agency and perhaps in this space age a space defense agency. But never forget ‘Quis custodet custodes ?’ (Who guards the guardians ?)
- The time is long past for a divided world, we need to unite as a global community.
- We need a federation in which the peculiarities of each community are respected and protected but in which no community walks in fear of any other. We need a federation which thinks of itself as a global community.

Conclusions

- Taking action now is an insurance policy against disaster
- We need to act in faith, hope and compassion not from fear and despair
- We need to transform the way society and the economy determines value
- We need to find ways to protect all people and creation in accordance with our faith and Testimonies

End Notes

1. Para 3

1) Ozone holes are caused by the release of man made cooling agents, the chemical CFC; CFCs are manmade, so by extension then the Ozone holes are manmade. Ozone is a poisonous form of oxygen which in the upper atmosphere shields the planet from solar and cosmic radiation which is similar to nuclear radiation. Exposure to solar radiation as a result of the ozone holes leads to a rapid rise in

cancers. 2) Depletion of fish stocks. Depletion of fish stocks is caused by human over-fishing which puts fish at risk as a food resource and makes the marine environment out of balance. 3) Fossil Fuels (e.g. oil and coal) are extracted and burnt to release their energy producing as by products pollutants such as carbon and sulphur which cause global warming and acid rain; as we consume oil and coal and transform them into atmospheric carbon and sulphur we deplete resources on which we rely for survival. 4) Deforestation. Plants breathe in carbon and breathe out oxygen and water vapour. The biggest producers of oxygen are marine plants and tropical hardwood forests. Earth relies on its terrestrial and marine forests for the production of oxygen and rain and to absorb carbon. Deforestation is a form of throttling or suffocation of the planet. Deforestation occurs wherever major forests are left, now mainly limited to rainforests in developing countries, principally Latin America; Indonesia; Malaysia; Central and West Africa; there is also extensive deforestation in Australia, Canada, China, Russia and the USA. The main reason for deforestation is to make wood pulp for paper and furniture. A secondary reason is clearing land for farms. Most forest land makes poor farm land due to the loss of or near absence of topsoil, thus former forest is at risk of turning into desert. 5) Desertification. Man made desertification occurs when we clear marginal land for farming which for whatever reason is unable to sustain intensive farming. Thus when grass lands or savanna which can sustain grazing is subjected to intensive grazing or is cleared for arable agriculture like wheat or rice it quickly turns into desert as the topsoil is blown away by winds; this has happened in Australia, the Sahara, the USA, China and India to name but a few places. The effects of these and other human activities are not new but they have escalated geometrically in the past 100 years.

2. John Donne, "No Man Is an Island" Meditation XVII, 1624

3. Indra's Net:

"Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars in the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected *all* the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring." F H Cook "*Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra*" Pennsylvania State University, 1977 (With thanks to Stan Lee of BYM for suggesting the use of the Indira's Net analogy)

Hong Kong Monthly Meeting Minute 2008:

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AWPS Minute, 2005:

"The excuse of national security issues has been used to introduce legislation to reduce or remove legal rights.

In many countries, national legislation in the name of the "War on Terror" has radically reduced legal rights and protections.

We call on Meetings in the Section to speak out against any reduction of legal, civil and human rights whenever and wherever these may occur.'

Friends have Testimonies on Peace, Integrity, Social Justice, Truth and Seeing that of God in All.

The world is faced with more serious threats than the threat of terrorism. These require our urgent action. There are, to name just two threats:

- Poverty
- and
- Impending global ecological catastrophe.

Our freedoms, liberties and rights are essential to prepare for and manage such matters that are vital to our survival.

We need to speak out from the basis of our Testimonies. We must preserve our rights.”

An example of the above:

“The Act [the British national security anti-terrorism act passed after 9/11] has provisions which may be for anti-terrorism but they also go much wider than that...”

3 November, 2008: Alastair Darling, British Chancellor of the Exchequer, explaining to Parliament’s Select Committee on the economy the UK government’s legal basis for freezing Iceland’s UK assets.
Source: Recorded live discussion broadcast on Bloomberg TV, Hong Kong, 1.50pm, 4 November 2008

FWCC Triennial Minute, 2007:

“We believe that it is vital to address the threat to life on Earth posed by environmental destruction.

We believe that we have a duty of responsible stewardship for all of God’s creation, although we recognize that we do not always achieve it fully. When we damage the natural world and its creatures, we damage God’s creation. Reverence for human life cannot be separated from maintaining the integrity and health of the ecology of our planet.

Competition for land, water and other precious resources is leading to wars and ecological disasters. Overuse and misuse of resources is not sustainable.

We call upon all the peoples and governments of the world to recognise the equal worth of all people, the integral worth of the natural world and to work together for the common good of all the earth community.

With God’s help, we resolve to examine our lives in light of the needs of the whole Earth and cooperate in taking steps towards sustainable living for all.”

This paper was written under a sense of discernment and I circulated drafts of it to Friends in Hong Kong and around the world. I thank Friends for the kind and helpful feedback I received and for prayers, thoughts and practical advice which enabled me to improve the content, presentation and grammar of the paper. Among those I want to thank are Hong Kong Monthly Meeting for their support over the years and for reading various drafts of the paper: Stan Lee who suggested Indra’s Web; Andrew Lawson; Volker Heine; Steve Palmquist; Peter Varney; David Aufrance; PW; Thomas Murray; Janet Scott; others kept me in their prayers, sent brief feedback and good wishes.

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