

## RELIGION IS A WAY

When I was training to be an architect I was taught that the qualities we should try to achieve in our buildings were "commodity, firmness and delight". Commodity (fitness for purpose) and Firmness (making them stand up and keeping them warm and dry) come from a scientific understanding of the problems. To make a building "work" you need a lot of calculations; there are different answers for each building, but we always use the same formulae. That is science. But to create a building that inspires, you need something you can't describe or touch, but something which you can certainly recognise when you have found it.

So, what can we learn from this? It is that we so often mistake the answer for the method. Science is our word for a method, just as we use the word "religion" for a set of beliefs. Science does not depend on the truth or falsity of any particular theory or set of calculations; it was not discredited when we discovered that atoms could be split, rather it was strengthened. Religious thinkers could learn from this parable. Creeds requiring belief in historical events or precise definitions of the nature of the deity are using words for matters that must be beyond words.

Religion should be a method for learning about the spiritual, as science is for learning about the physical world. Different religious groups may have grasped fundamental truths, but it is not belief in these truths which should be central, it is the method by which they are reached and the way in which they are used. For over 350 years Quakerism has demonstrated that to try and live as disciples of Jesus, it is not necessary to have Creeds. We see the essence of religion being in the spiritual search centred on a worship of seeking, where we try to become conscious of and open to that power beyond any human understanding. None of us can say exactly what its purpose may be, but we experience it as inspiration and feel that it is good because it leads to action. We do not even need to make its existence a dogma, for we only have to approach it as a working hypothesis, as scientists do with their theories, for then we can see that it leads to actions and lives that feel right.

Our experience of this power is in some way similar to our awareness of the earth's magnetic field. We are not conscious of it all the time, though we know it can be detected. We know however that it shows us a direction. It does not specify a destination, but it directs us and others to paths that seem parallel but which are in fact converging. We do not all need to be on the same path for our destinations to be one. By witnessing to the importance of the goal, I hope we may help others to avoid the danger of making truths into idols.