

The Quakers and Lack of Structure

Is it a good idea to start a movement that has very little structure or written conventions?

This is fine if the leaders are good, chosen wisely and hand over to other good leaders. However these leaders often have more depth and complexity to their devotional lives than they admit. When people come along who only have the bits that they profess are sufficient – ‘Just God’ – then it will get messy. The movement could go in any direction, because there was originally more to it that was admitted – the professed essentials are so few and so vague that anything could arise from them.

I think that many people take their own beliefs and experiences for granted. For example, many rich people look at those on a council estate who are unemployed and think that they are pathetic. They say to themselves, “If I was out of a job I would do this and that, and save and build etc.” What they often do is forget that they have many more advantages than just money – in particular education, also connections and great confidence. They think that if they had no money then they would be on a level pegging with the poor – when they would not. They have many many great advantages over them which would allow them to quite quickly rise above those circumstances.

In a similar way some atheists who have grown up in a Judeo-Christian environment and are very nice think that there is no need for religion. They seem to think that they have always been nice, their parents have always been nice – that there is an inherent niceness about them which does not need to be

instructed or fed but is simply just there. Therefore, we can get rid of all religions and we will be totally fine!

Back to those starting religions. These people often study hard and have a strong private devotional life. They ignore this and think that they are getting along just with God – it's all so simple. Then somewhere down the road people without this background take over and it gets messy.