



That of God in Every Byte?

By Gabriel
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THE INTERNET, 'NET' OR 'WEB' TO CLOSE FRIENDS, is a collection of digital information which makes the sharing of information rapid and widespread. Anyone can have a website to post an online journal, pictures, articles, anything. Many Quaker organisations have websites with vast quantities of information. While this information is certainly useful to someone, the question is who? Are they the same people who would read the information offline anyway? Of course we want to support these people and we might look to expand the audience at the same time.

Quakers believe that appreciating and cultivating simplicity as a way of life brings us more in touch with God, the spirit, whatever name we choose to give to the unexplainable that binds us all together. The web by contrast, is not simple. Ask my mother who often has computer questions for me. It's not.

Similarly, art is not always

simple. I have heard a good friend describe many steps involved in creating her artwork. Quakers value and nurture art and artists. Creativity in all forms can be simple or complex, but give the most to the audience when it is cared for. We nurture each other, artist and audience alike, through the creative process. Artists send a message to inspire or challenge the community, and the community supports the artist. The posters and written material we distribute are carefully considered in order to have the most impact and to best convey the desired message.

In order to continue supporting Quakerism, many meetings and organisations have decided to create websites, despite the complex underlying technology. After all, we can still make a simple website and remain true to the idea of simplicity. Right?

This is where I step in. I'm young, idealistic, and am still not clear on what role simplicity (or Quakerism, for that matter) plays in my life. I do, however, know (some) web design and computer stuff, in general. When I see a website with the bare minimum of styling, I see a blank canvas aching for some creative expression. In many places you will find all kinds of letter-sized posters stuck to utility poles. Only the more creative usually draw attention. This is the same idea in my mind.

I recently received a copy of *Quaker Faith & Practice* (thanks, Mom) which, not surprisingly, is quite simple. Whoever was responsible for the final presentation of the book, however, chose a less common typeface (Sabon, for those interested) making every page stand

out. Typefaces, are difficult to control on the internet, but other simple changes can have the same enhancing effect. Even without the download-requiring, latest-browser-feature-enabled kind of presentation, web pages can be creative. One could say they are the quilts of my generation. A patch work of information artfully assembled, with some skill and patience, to create a beautiful and valuable finished product.

In that light, I advise all meetings, regardless of size, to take some time to think about how you want your website to represent you. Chances are that you could find someone in your community who is a gifted artist who can give some thought to the overall look of a page, and then find someone who can take that look and make it happen on the web. The key here is to remain simple, yet elegant and eye catching and be willing to compromise — because different browsers can do very strange things to your beautiful pages.

The internet can be more than the information it contains. If we look at it as a canvas rather than complicated digital information, can we give ourselves permission to get creative? ↻

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few sites free of charge. Please contact him at: <gabriel@offcentre.ca> for details.