

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE

1997

Learning of one another

The Quaker encounter with other cultures
and religions

Richard G. Meredith

The James Backhouse Lectures

This is one of a series of Lectures instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on the occasion of the establishment of that Yearly Meeting in 1964.

It was delivered in Sydney on 4th January 1997, during the annual meeting of the Society.

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. He and his companion, George Washington Walker, travelled widely but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through their visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia.

The two men had access to individual people with authority in the young colonies, and had influence in the British Parliament and social reform movement. In painstaking reports and personal letters to such people, they made practical suggestions and urged legislative action on penal reform, on land rights, and the treatment of Aborigines, and on the rum trade. James Backhouse was a botanist and naturalist. He made careful observations and published full accounts of what he saw, in addition to encouraging Friends and following deep concern for the convicts and the Aborigines that had brought him to Australia.

Australian Friends hope that this series of Lectures will bring fresh insights into truth, often with reference to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism.

Patricia Firkin
Presiding, Clerk
Australia Yearly Meeting

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ABOUT THIS LECTURE

'Out there' in the world-wide family of Friends is a vast and exciting field for the inquiring and adventurous Friend to explore in the company of Friends from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. Gone are the days of missionizing. Our global Society offers us opportunities to move among and learn from the variety of our membership. We are invited to be sensitive to and understand where other Friends are coming from. We don't have to identify with their beliefs and practices, but we may find that basically we have more in common than we had anticipated.

UT OMNES UNUM SINT - THAT ALL MAYBE ONE

Quakers can be one in sharing the search for Truth.

In sketching some of the variety of encounters at the meeting points of Quakerism and other religions and cultures, Richard Meredith invites Friends to 'open the windows' and welcome every opportunity for encounter. The fields are ever-widening, with advances in communications technology and the opening up of hitherto closed regions.

About the Author

Richard Meredith was born and educated in Tasmania, gaining an Arts Degree at the University of Tasmania and the Diploma of Education at the University of Melbourne. His religious seeking was encouraged by contacts and nurture within the Methodist Church. During the troubled years of World War II he was fortunate to 'fall among Quakers', where he felt comfortable with the way of worship, with personal freedom in the search for Truth, and with the social testimonies of the Society of Friends.

He has undertaken a range of responsibilities in the Society, as Regional Meeting Clerk and Presiding Clerk of Yearly Meeting, and has been active in Peace and Social Justice Committees. He is currently Clerk of Elders, and Clerk of Quaker Service Australia. In 1965 Richard was leader of a team of three Friends from Australia and New Zealand Yearly Meetings whose mission during their six weeks visitation with political and religious leaders in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore was to take a message of goodwill and to seek to understand the issues of Confrontasi (Confrontation) between Indonesia and Malaysia. He was involved alternately as President and Secretary of the State Moratorium Committee opposing Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

As an educator, Richard taught at the Friends School, Hobart, for 26 years, becoming an Assistant-Principal. He spent three and a half years (1956-60) in charge of Papuan schools for the London Missionary Society and the Education Department. After leaving Friends School in 1973, he was Principal of two large multi-racial schools in Katherine and Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia, in the employment of the Commonwealth Teaching Service.

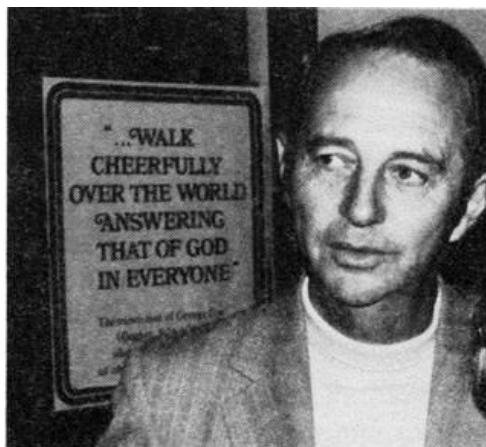
On retirement from teaching Richard accepted appointment as the General Secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation. He found this a very fulfilling role, especially as it opened windows to the world-wide membership of the Society of Friends. In addition, it provided specific opportunities for insight into the work of the Quaker United Nations Offices in Geneva and New York (since Friends World Committee for Consultation is the sponsor of these programs). After completing five years' service at the World Office in London (1981-85), he returned to Tasmania, where he continued as voluntary Secretary for the newly-formed Asia-West Pacific Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation.

Richard lists among his local community activities Marriage Guidance counselling and Hospice Care support service. He considers the training and experience in these fields, and similar involvements within the Society of Friends, are mutually enhancing.

Richard acknowledges the informed support and encouragement, in all these activities, of Bronwen Meredith during their 51-year partnership, which has included the nurture of five children and the enrichment of an extended family of fourteen grandchildren. To all Friends and colleagues who have contributed readily from their experience and observation, the named and the unnamed, Richard expresses appreciation of their contributions to the preparation of this Lecture.

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Richard G. Meredith

INTRODUCTION

When I announced to the Backhouse Lecture Committee my proposed theme for this Lecture, one member responded, in a personal letter, thoughtfully and realistically, as follows:

I am only dimly aware that different cultures have had an impact on Quakerism. I know this happens with us here in Australia where some issues raging through our Australian culture impinge upon our Yearly Meeting...Matthew Fox and new age theology is an example.

The evangelical movement is an historical example of how cultural influence was spread-eagled all over the Society of Friends; so there must be other present day influences. I have read about Hinduism tempering Quakerism in India, so other world influences could be instructive.

I believe we are diminished by not knowing sufficient about the world family of Friends. '

I found those comments encouraging and imaginative, but at the same time, daunting. But, before falling into desperation mode, I solicited contributions from many Friends around the world who have had relevant experience in the world family of Friends. I would love to have been able to invite them to a forum here today, and to have had the pleasure of orchestrating a presentation on the general theme of the **Influence of Cultures on Quakerism**.

Few of us realize the extent to which our own Quakerism is culture-shaped and culture-bound. Perhaps we recognize it more easily in others. It was noticeable to me, for example, when living in England, that British Quakers tended to refer to, and to link Quaker events with, the major events of the Christian (Anglican) calendar. Only recently a British visitor to my home referred to the day as Whit Sunday - for me, that was relatively meaningless - I tend to think of the Passage on the Barrier Reef when Whit Sunday is mentioned. And, in regard to the two major seasons, Christmas and Easter, I have a perverse habit of wanting to place these celebrations in the opposite order when they occur - or, rather, perhaps, consider their significance in opposite order - is that to show that I am not culture-bound?

So how can we avoid being culture bound? We must remember that we carry our own cultural baggage with us. Can we, or do we want to, discard that baggage in the pursuit of understanding Friends whose lives have been affected by the dominant religions and cultures of their region, and whose living patterns, social attitudes, ethical and moral behaviour may differ from ours? Do we seek to avoid being judgemental, and imposing our values and attitudes on others?

There are inevitably occasions when individually, or corporately, Friends have to ponder these questions.

Without attempting a potted history of the development of Quakerism in European countries, or on the North American continent, it is sufficient here to note that Quakerism has been affected by political, social and religious movements in those regions and countries. These factors have influenced not only the forms of Quaker worship, but also the structures of the meetings, business methods and decision-making processes. And while some iconoclasts in our 'Western' meetings may readily reject business methods and the appointment of officers, and steadfastly refuse to participate in the organization and business of the meetings, we can find similarly culture-bound Friends in other regions of the world who expect traditional leadership in accordance with their cultures. If we are to move easily among this variety of cultures, we must understand and accept where people are coming from.

ECUMENISM

*'Do you welcome the diversity of culture, language and expressions of faith in our yearly meeting and in the world community of Friends? Seek to increase your understanding and to gain from this rich heritage and wide range of spiritual insights. Uphold your own and other yearly meetings in your prayers'*¹

This Lecture will be largely concerned with Ecumenism, a movement in which many of my generation became involved in the first half of this century, especially through the Student Christian Movement. As understood at that time, 'Ecumenism' was the embracing of the world's (Christian) religions (or, more properly, sects), and even that excluded certain denominations. However, as my own observations and experiences have developed, I have identified two other forms of ecumenism - Quaker ecumenism, which embraces the diversities among Quakers around the world, and the much wider ecumenism that embraces religious faiths/systems around the world.

Having recognized these strands of Ecumenism, I was encouraged to note some similarity in the definitions of the 'ecumenical surge' put forward by Douglas Steere, a former Chairman of Friends World Committee for Consultation. He writes:

*'... a message of importance for us is to be found in the ecumenical surge that has already taken place among the classical Protestants, the free churches, and the Orthodox within the World Council of Churches; and, since the second Vatican Council, in the new gestures of openness between these groups and the Roman Catholic church itself; but especially in the new relations that are beginning to emerge between Christians and people from the other great religions of the world: Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, whose members far outnumber Christians in the share of the world's population which they include.'*²

In expanding the concept of 'Ecumenism', Douglas Steere adopts the meaning 'world embracing', a process which includes overcoming barriers of fear, of misunderstanding, of irresponsibility for each other, and seeks to find what common ground exists. As usual, Douglas Steere illuminates his definition with a moving story of a Quaker worker who died in Poland in World War II. As he could not be buried in a Catholic cemetery, he was buried outside. Next morning, Quakers discovered that the villagers had moved the fence so that it embraced the grave. This concept of ecumenism, then, can be seen as a moving outwards of every type of fence to embrace, but not to erase, the unique and very special spiritual witness of different religious groups.

There is an echo here, too, of the words of Thomas Story, 1737:

*'The unity of Christians never did nor ever will or can stand in uniformity of thought and opinion, but in Christian love only.'*³

In this lecture I will not deal, except perhaps indirectly, with Christian ecumenism, nor to any great extent with Quaker ecumenism, since there are already volumes available on that subject. I hope more to concentrate on the ecumenism that seeks to embrace the meeting points for Quakerism with the other world religions, and sometimes the resultant cultures. I hope, also, to be able to share some of the challenges and excitements available within our world Society of Friends in meeting Friends who have come into Quakerism bringing with them the richness of their local religions and cultures. There will be no attempt to direct Friends, but rather to point them in ecumenical directions. It will be an amalgam of personal observations, insights and experiences, combined with the insights and observations of Quaker colleagues and writers, seeking ways forward into a deeper experience of Quaker ecumenism.

In this pursuit we should note some advantages that Friends have in their openness, freedom from creeds, and their hospitable approach to, and acceptance of, members of other religious systems. We also frequently find some common ground in the decision-making process, though here some caution is needed, for this can be an area which requires sensitive observation and discernment, before drawing over-hasty conclusions. For example, it may be wise, but perhaps not always possible, to attend more than one decision-making session. We need to be aware, too, that language, and translations, may impede our understanding and frustrate our judgements. We need to be asking, also, whether women are equal, and active, participants in the decision-making, and to consider whether decision-

making is achieved by consensus, or through unity in the Spirit (the process aspired to by Quakers).

This theme has wide relevance for all Australians who now proudly proclaim their multi-cultural society. Friends should be, and often are, in the forefront of the thinking and development of attitudes that will enable us to participate in and contribute to this process. Knowledge and understanding of the religions and cultural heritages of our Friends in our own region, or Section, of the world family of Friends, and their meeting-points with Quakerism, are an essential part of this contribution. And we are fortunate that we can, through our world contacts, continue this exploration among the wider world community of Friends.

Our younger generation is more fortunate still, in that courses at most levels of education and opportunities to observe and share socially within the Australian community are available to them. As well, there are the possibilities of learning by living and working in a variety of countries, and experiencing the culture of those countries.

However, we may be still learning the full implications of the multi-cultural society, especially as we face what Dr. Stephen Fitzgerald refers to as the 'Asianization of Oz'.

In his article, which was mainly concerned with political and economic issues, Stephen Fitzgerald concluded with significant comments on the cultural and religious areas :

*'With the habitat for the future Australia being Asian, the challenge also was (is) to select and skill a work force which could allow us to move easily and comfortably within Asian cultures with as much ease as those who belong to that culture and language. We have to be serious chameleons - changing form to adapt and survive in the local habitat without compromising the substance, our Australianness and the values and ethical codes by which we live.'*⁴

In his 1964 Backhouse Lecture Kenneth Boulding spoke of the evolutionary potential of Quakerism as not yet exhausted, and indeed still very high. Over the past 300 years Quakerism has demonstrated its power to influence, and at the same time to be influenced by, societal and technological change. He

proceeds to affirm his belief that the Society of Friends has a vital role to play in the future development of mankind, stating:

*'I think this because I think Quakerism is an example of a mutation which was in a sense premature. The Quaker belongs to a kingdom that is not yet. This is an awkward loyalty to have. But it is an attitude and loyalty which points towards the future rather than towards the past. I regard both the religious experience, and also the ethical conclusion and the type of culture derived from the experience which are peculiarly characteristic of the Quaker mutation as having more relevance in the world to which we seem to be moving than in the world which we are leaving behind.'*⁵

Thirty three years further on, that comment seems even more pertinent, and to allay the fears of some Friends of an imminent mutation arising out of Quakerism, Kenneth Boulding considers that Quakerism

'will have to remain, perhaps somewhat uneasily, within the fold of Christianity'.⁵

Other Friends may welcome this possibly imminent change, or perhaps recognize themselves as agents of change!

But more relevant to the theme of this lecture is his urging Friends forward in the wider ecumenical movement:

*'One likes to think of Friends also as specializing in dialogue with other religions or non-religions and as constantly tending to open windows which people intent upon coziness tend to shut.'*⁵

The communications revolution, and especially the rapid development of international satellite television and the Internet, will surely make information readily available. But unless we are so motivated that may not carry over into spiritual awareness of and sensitivity to the beliefs and practices of other religious groups.

Here we need to pause and question ourselves. 'But - do we open windows?' Many Friends of the unprogrammed, non-pastoral, traditions (such as Australian Friends are) find difficulty in being open towards the programmed and pastoral, and evangelical Friends. In fact, they can be downright hostile and

rejecting of that 'other lot', without exploring their history and current faithful witnessing to the Gospel message.

There is currently under consideration in Australia a proposal for a National Church Centre in Canberra, an Ecumenical Centre for Australian Christian Spirituality, clearly through its logo and titles concentrating on Christianity in Australia. The proposal acknowledges the multi-cultural nature of our nation today, but nowhere expresses any intention of offering opportunities for study and dialogue with the other world religions represented in the Australian community. There is a desirable inclusion of Aboriginal culture and spirituality among planned activities, and there is an oblique reference to a 'focus for an ecumenical community'. If Australian Friends are able to make any input to the development of this Centre, I hope it will include a sensitivity to the values we can share in other religious systems by providing opportunities for meeting of minds and spirits at all possible levels.

My own first opportunity to experience living and working with people of another culture was during the 1950s, when I was in charge of London Missionary Society schools in Papua. John Woolman's oft-quoted statement of his motivation to travel among the Indians was much in my mind - 'to see if haply I might learn of them'. And, although I was contributing in some degree to their need, or desire, for western education, I soon realized that there were other values that were being communicated to me. In fact, it seemed like a 1:3 sharing, in my favour. I could learn from their spirit of relaxation, their acceptance of what life brings, their patience and sense of timelessness. Above all, I was beginning to understand their attitudes and values. Though they were not, and would not become mine, I could recognize their validity. This recognition served as a point of reference as I moved around the world in the course of my travels in later years on behalf of the Friends World Committee for Consultation. It continues to inform my relationships with peoples of different cultural and religious backgrounds.

My thirty years' involvement with Friends World Committee for Consultation which has included holding the offices of General Secretary of the World Committee and, later, Secretary for the Asia-West Pacific Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation, qualifies me to speak as a 'global Friend (at least, a 'developing' global Friend).

OUR DIVERSITIES - QUAKER ECUMENISM

My discovery of the diversity in the world family of Friends began with my representation of Australia Yearly Meeting at the World Conference of Friends in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1967. Like many of my associates of the unprogrammed tradition of worship, I felt initially challenged, and affronted, by the programmed worship, which seemed very close to the Protestant forms of worship which I had left when I became a member of the Society of Friends. I had even at one stage been involved in 'eldering' a Friend of the pastoral tradition who had 'dared' to establish a pastoral meeting at our local university in Hobart.

It was, therefore, a salutary experience for me to travel further in the USA that year, and experience worship in the several traditions of Friends, and to find myself feeling quite at home in Friends churches where programmed and unprogrammed forms of service were acceptably combined, and where the morning program included the conduct of all-age study groups. This positive experience has tended to colour subsequent experiences of programmed worship. Coming, as I did, into membership in the unprogrammed tradition of Friends worship, I naturally found difficulty with planned services of worship, robed choirs and hymn singing, places of worship called 'sanctuaries', and even altar calls during a service. I have been personally taken by surprise as a visitor to a programmed Friends service to learn when they came to the section marked 'Address' that I was expected to deliver the address - an expectation that does not come easily to a Friend of the unprogrammed tradition (even though many years earlier I had been a lay preacher in the Methodist Church).

I have learned to be more tolerant and understanding of Friends of other traditions. A brief encounter with three young Friends studying at the Earlham School of Religion several years ago proved valuable. Each of these students admitted that when he had come to E.S.R. he had been suspicious of the other type of Friend - like the Devil, he must have horns. But the activities of studying and discussion together of their Christian and Quaker roots had removed these clouds of suspicion.

I have also become aware that both traditions, the pastoral and the non-pastoral, recognize that the Christian gospel is a social gospel, and that each tradition in its own way and in its own social and political setting, interprets that gospel in its witness for social justice and peace. We all know that, within our own yearly meetings, Friends are bound to have differences of approach and interpretation. We should not gloss over those differences, but we can try to understand where these Friends are coming from, and be willing to accept the differences.

My hope for the world Society of Friends can be summarized in the words of the caption that for many years appeared on the cover of **The Friend** (London Yearly Meeting) :

*'In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty;
in all things, charity.'*

I propose, now, to traverse some of the exciting ground that can be surveyed in this exploration of our diversities from the viewing point, if it were possible, of a Quaker helicopter, or better still, a Quaker satellite, with a view to discovering our spiritual unity. I hope that these gleanings or glimpses will stimulate groups, and meetings, in their search to know and understand one another through reading, discussion, travel, and, above all, sharing of their observations and insights as way opens.

It is my further hope that the few illustrations that I have chosen will highlight features of our global Society that will stir the knowledge and wisdom that is latent in our groups and meetings, stimulating the processes of research, discovery and study.

As an educator, I have always been comfortable with the philosophy of Kahlil Gibran:

*'No man can reveal to you aught but that which lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge... If he is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.'*⁶

It is in this spirit, that these random glimpses of Quaker life and thought (by no means comprehensive or exhaustive) are offered.

There are several labels that are used to identify the main traditions of Friends' worship and practice. In the area of worship form we tend to use the terms 'programmed' and 'unprogrammed'. Within both of these groups can be found a sub-division of 'evangelical' Friends. In the 'programmed' tradition, we generally find the 'churches' staffed with 'pastors', whose role is pastoral, rather than priestly. They are involved in pastoral care - home visiting, community social support programs, prison and hospital visiting, counselling and the like. The teaching/preaching role is shared with elders, or recorded ministers. This practice is common also among 'evangelical' Friends groups. 'Unprogrammed' Friends meetings such as Australia Yearly Meeting do not employ 'pastors', though larger yearly meetings are staffed by paid secretaries, and paid service, peace and education personnel whose programs must, of necessity, provide an extensive teaching ministry.

For ease of reference, I find it satisfactory to refer to the simple divisions of Friends as pastoral. and non-pastoral Friends, and in passing, would note that the pastoral Friends considerably exceed in numbers, the non-pastoral Friends in the World Society of Friends today. At the level of global Quakerism, the most divisive issue among Friends is the suspicion, fear and unease arising from the existence of these two main traditions - pastoral and non-pastoral. Australia Yearly Meeting, in its worship practices, will readily be seen to belong to the unprogrammed, non-pastoral tradition, though even here variations may be introduced on occasion.

While those of the non-pastoral, unprogrammed tradition remain immovably attached to their form of worship, and it has even been suggested may have reached the point where they worship silence itself, they scorn the suggestion of introducing into meetings for worship other forms that might express joy, praise and thanksgiving. The young folk of the unprogrammed tradition would surely be startled if song and dance were introduced into a Meeting for Worship.

On the other hand, observers of the pastoral, and evangelical forms of worship can find satisfying spiritual experiences in some of the programmed services, and especially in those that experiment sensitively with the use of a combination of programmed and unprogrammed worship. The tolerance of non-pastoral Friends is somewhat stretched when they are exposed to the full program of planned service, robed choirs and altar calls in a sanctuary that may be topped off with a spire.

But, while these unexpected features of the Friends churches come as something of a shock to the inexperienced unprogrammed Friend, one might expect that the unprogrammed meetings of the undisciplined 'popcorn' variety (in which there is a fairly continuous stream of unrelated vocal contributions on personal concerns) could come as a shock to the programmed Friend.

What is the common heritage, the common meeting ground for this variety of people calling themselves 'Friends'? Is it possible that they can have a common origin and faith? Both groups have well-developed programs of study of their Christian and Quaker roots - perhaps more intensive programs can be remarked among the pastoral Friends. Both are exploring forms of outreach to a variety of ethnic communities. Perhaps more attention to funding and fund-raising makes it possible to employ paid staff to undertake the outreach programs, and programs of social justice and peace witness. It is a matter for rejoicing that more Friends are making time to visit among Friends whose tradition in worship and witness is different from their own. Alastair Heron, of London Yearly Meeting, has shared some of his observations of such visits made in 1984.⁷ Travelling with an open mind (or an 'opening' mind), he records that many aspects of their Quaker heritage were valued, despite the choir, organ and sanctuary.

Alastair Heron comments further on

*'the close connection between a meeting being programmed and pastored, and the amount and regularity of systematic Bible study... I found a great many Friends are ready to give their time and energies to the task of seeking fresh light for themselves... I found a heartwarming recognition of the necessity to "share our spirituality with one another".'*⁷

Surely, experiences of this kind make it all the more imperative that we expose ourselves to the pain of the experience and take time to dig deeper and together to find, in John Woolman's words, 'If haply we might learn from one another'. If we do not, our ignorance leads to suspicion and fear and mistrust - which most of us are aware has already occurred.

Speaking of Quaker worship, Hugh Doncaster wrote in *The Quaker Message*:

'... I have declared my personal understanding of the unprogrammed type of worship as being more consistent with essential Quakerism. Here it is right to reaffirm that those of us living in areas of Quakerism in which

*our worship is entirely unplanned, desperately need to learn from our pastoral Friends something of their ways of giving religious instruction to their adult membership. Unprogrammed worship undoubtedly needs supplementing by good teaching at other times.'*⁸

I wonder if Hugh Doncaster might today revise that claim for the unprogrammed form of worship.

I felt quite comfortable when attending a meeting of Ministry and Counselling (Elders and Overseers) of a pastoral church in the U.S.A. On this occasion, the meeting was clerked by a woman elder, the pastor participated as a member of the group and the procedures were quite familiar to one of the unprogrammed tradition. In this church, there were three paid pastors who divided their responsibility between ministry, pastoral care and education (an impressive program). One agenda item involved the wife of one of the pastors, a previously ordained minister of another Protestant church, and now a convinced Friend - who had been nominated as a Recorded Minister (unpaid) because of her obvious spiritual gifts nurtured by her training. It was she herself who demurred 'having some questions in her mind about whether recording some persons, and not others fits our conception that every believer is a minister'. After very deep, prayerful consideration, it was felt that to record her as a minister made some ministries possible because of legal and institutional practices (e.g. hospital and prison visiting, marriage celebration and preaching in those Friends churches which prefer a recorded minister). But the hesitation stressed our testimony to the 'priesthood of all believers'.

These observations lead me to suggest that our primary considerations should be in the matter of the quality of our teaching ministry and, correspondingly, in the quality and forms of our worship and witness.

To those Friends brought up in the Anglo-Saxon culture and inheriting what we consider traditional Quaker beliefs and practice, there is something of mystery, even of shock, when confronted with Quakerism as it has developed in an Asian or African or Latin American climate - a melding of Quakerism and Christianity with local religious systems - and today, seeking an accommodation with the various aspects of Liberation Theology, and appropriate ways to relate to grassroots movements.

Friends may accept that there is a role for 'evangelism' (a word that sits uneasily with unprogrammed Friends). Evangelism in its simplest form refers to

the sharing of a message, in this case, the 'gospel', or 'evangel' of Christianity. Evangelical Friends can be found in both the programmed and unprogrammed worship traditions of Quakerism.

The Evangelical Friends International - North American Region - established in 1990, is a voluntary association of Evangelical Friends. Taiwan Yearly Meeting, the numerically largest Yearly Meeting in the Asia-West Pacific Section, became a founding member of Evangelical Friends International in 1990. Liberal Friends, especially those of the unprogrammed tradition, tend to be suspicious of evangelism, particularly because of its association with mission activity and its emphasis on Biblical authority.

Friends may learn that there is some validity in a varied pattern of worship, they may learn of programs of ministry in the increasing urban population centres, they may learn more of family patterns, about the depth of Christian discipleship, or about the impact of wealth and poverty on the quality, level and faithfulness of Christian witness.

What does this mean at the practical level of visits with Friends from other regions? For most of us, the opportunities to visit in their countries and homes are limited, but we are most likely to have some one or other visiting us in our homes/meetings at some time. Have we passed the stage of regarding our visitors as curiosities? Do we see them as people? Do we feel that we must show them all we have, overwhelm them with talk, especially about our own activities, our own spiritual journey? Or do we say - we have a visitor from... What can we learn from her/him? **Let's listen!**

ENCOUNTERS WITH OTHER FAITHS AND CULTURES

Let us look now briefly at some of the difficulties and opportunities that face Quakers in other cultures, religions and political systems. Do their experiences, their insights, speak to us? Have they any special messages? Are we prepared to respond? Or are we too beleaguered with our own problems, limited by our own lack of vision? our inward-lookingness?

These are questions I asked myself when I read, several years ago, this letter from a West African Friend to his East African counterpart:

'You have written to me on a number of occasions if I could write something for the Africa Newsletter. I try. But I fail. Don't get me wrong. What I mean is that I write, but after writing, I lose interest in what I have written.

Why should I write? Again, don't get me wrong, Friend. A man must write about what he believes in. Tell me, Friend what do I believe in? Don't please, repeat the cliché about God in every man. What does that mean? A statement of fact or of Faith?

What does that statement mean to me in my surroundings of poverty, squalor, disease and superstition? It is 4 a.m. this Sunday morning, and I am sitting at my table in my University flat.

And I am thinking about God in relation to myself and my mother. I, who am so well off and my mother who lives in the bush and is so poorly off, living a life of misery like millions of other women in her situation. And I'm wondering how to communicate with her, and get across to her the idea - or is it a concept - of God in every man.

But I can't. I just can't. I tried it before and I failed. How could I try? The words sounded pompous even before they were uttered. And ridiculous, to say the least. Do you understand, Friend? I could not talk of 'God' in every man to my illiterate mother in the bush. I who am a University graduate and consort with Vice-Chancellors and Ministers of State and Professors!

Again, don't get me wrong, Friend. The great and fundamental error made by Missionaries in my country was that they preached the Bible story and claimed conversions and built churches and put up schools and proclaimed they had planted Christianity. But had they?

Must we - you and I and all Quakers - repeat the same mistake? Must we bemuse and deceive ourselves with outward trappings for the substance and reality of things?

So how do I, a University Graduate, living the life of tolerable affluence, discuss Quakerism with my illiterate, peasant mother whose life has been one whole series of intolerable deprivation? How do I avoid the temptation of taking on the role of a preacher and preach at my mother? How do I prevent the danger of my mother seeing her son as an oracle and so accepting everything he says?

Do you understand, Friend. Day has now broken. There are a number of things to be done and I must not forget Meeting for Worship at 11 a.m. But do I really want to go? It's a question I ask every Sunday. '

In this dramatic outburst, our African Friend has encapsulated many of the issues that we, as individual Friends, must face continually as we proceed on our personal spiritual journeys, as we relate to Friends within our own culture, to the variety of traditions among Friends themselves and to our Friends from the wide range of ethnic groups, cultures and religious systems that comprise our global Society. Then, perhaps, we will 'come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every **Friend**' (that's where we have to begin

The opportunities to observe and experience some of the great wealth of spiritual resources and insights within the global Society of Friends are offered and encouraged through the gatherings and conferences of the Friends World Committee for Consultation. Admittedly, one rarely has time to dig deeply enough, or, to change that metaphor, to explore the spiritual countries that flicker daily on the horizons as one traverses the global Society of Friends.

Loida Fernandez (to whose pamphlet on Latin American Friends I refer later), in speaking of our responses to today's challenges of violence, underlines the importance of our making efforts inside our own family of Friends to dialogue amongst ourselves, to reconcile, acknowledging our own failures and **knowing that we still have a lot to learn from each other** (my emphasis).

Loida's comment is echoed by my former Friends World Committee for Consultation colleague, Gordon Browne, who has served as both Executive

Secretary, and Clerk, of the Section of the Americas. Gordon initiated much of the current involvement of the Hispanic (Spanish-speaking) Friends in the World Committee, and I found his personal summation of the task I am undertaking in this lecture accorded so well with my own feelings as I contemplate the diversities within our World Society that I want to share it with you. I hope it illuminates my aspirations, and my limitations.

'It's easy to make other cultures and ways of life sound exotic. It's much harder to talk about cultural differences and preserve a sense that "those odd ones" - different from us, that is - are our spiritual brothers and sisters whose Quakerism is as valid as our own, that they are human beings of as great worth and importance as we feel ourselves to be, and as much beloved of God. '

As I copied that paragraph, some peculiar quirk made my mind flash back to a TV documentary featuring Western tourists in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Of necessity, they carried all their trappings of civilization with them, and must, of course, take home the usual 'homey' photos and slides. So, the trim, well-dressed, female must have a photo of herself sitting beside the mother and child, bedecked in colourful Highland regalia. She beckoned the woman alongside, who, complying with the request, came to sit quite close to her! At this point, the tourist gestured clearly, and quite audibly exclaimed - 'Not **so** close!'

This fleeting incident is indicative of what we are not, or should not be about, as Friends, learning of each other. Dialogue - sharing - learning to know and understand where each comes from - and respecting and accepting where the other is now - these would seem to be the desirable objectives in our development as global Friends. This is the form of closeness that we should be seeking

It is instructive to research pronouncements of Friends who have had long periods of experience and association with members of other faiths, and to listen to their urgings to us to develop similar associations and understandings. Nette Bossert, a Dutch Friend, long-time resident in India, wrote in the study document for the 4th World Conference of Friends in 1967:

*'Today, many Friends go out in many lands, to build for better understanding, to construct wells, schools, community centres, restore those who suffer. But, as yet we Friends (with the exception of a few individual Friends) have still to make our first effort towards the discovery of God's mysteries in other faiths. '*⁹

If that can be accepted as an accurate comment for the 1960s, how much greater validity does it have in the 1990s, when the service work and individual involvement of Quakers, and non-Quakers, has expanded so greatly? And to the numbers of service personnel we now must add a vastly increased number of government, industrial and commercial personnel rushing to exploit opportunities in those countries. What preparation, what orientation courses, do Quakers have on offer? What courses do our educational institutions offer that will prepare our participants in these fields to approach their new and challenging situations in a spirit of openness and sensitivity to the beliefs and insights of their hosts? Some such form of preparation seems to me an imperative imposed on us in the oft-quoted passage from George Fox's journal, 1656:

'Let all nations hear the word by sound or writing. Spare no place, spare no tongue nor pen, but be obedient to the Lord God and go through the world and be valiant for Truth upon earth; tread and trample all that is contrary under...

Keep in the wisdom of God that spreads over all the earth the wisdom of the creation, that is pure.

*Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.'*¹⁰

Unfortunately, the full text from the Journal is not quoted in the 1960 **Christian Faith and Practice of London Yearly Meeting**. I have frequently been troubled by what I discerned as some ambiguity in the two halves of this excerpt. The first half possibly inspired Friends' missionary activities well into the twentieth century. The second half might be seen as an explanation of a developing reluctance towards any form of proselytizing at all. But the sentence that I have underlined above is often omitted. It seems to me to dispel the fear that George Fox might have been advocating some kind of war against "pagan" beliefs when he said - "Tread and trample all that is contrary under." I hope that this injunction refers to the evils and prejudices within ourselves, and the underlined sentence is a recognition of the Truth, or of 'that of God in everyone'. But, I am relieved to note that the full text has been quoted in Britain Yearly Meeting's 1994 publication "Quaker Faith and Practice" #19.32.

Now, I want to emphasize two phrases from this quotation 'Be patterns' and 'then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.'

I am going to suggest that one of our problems is in finding the appropriate pattern. It's difficult enough to find the pattern that will enable us to 'answer that of God in everyone' in our own land and community. But, nobody can underestimate the task we have been called to of finding the right pattern for answering that of God in everyone in other lands and cultures - an even more formidable task. No doubt anecdotes to illustrate our difficulty in finding patterns of reaction and behaviour to match the needs of the variety of cultural and ethnic groups that have been exposed to Quakerism abound - and we can all lament lost opportunities for spreading the Quaker gospel.

A superficial examination of the history of the spread of Quakerism to 'every country, continent and island', and of the present state of the Society of Friends in over twenty countries, might suggest that those who have attempted to carry the Quaker gospel to other lands have had genuine difficulties in developing patterns appropriate to the great variety of local circumstances and situations. These difficulties may have been due to insensitivity to, or intolerance of local cultures and religious systems. They may have arisen from an arrogance and pride in the spiritual and organizational life of their home Meeting. Quaker language itself can be a barrier to communication. It may be that some Quakers have communicated their suspicions and fears of other sects and religious systems to their contacts in various subtle ways. Whatever may arise from a systematic analysis of cause and effect in this regard, experience and observation of the wide variety of Friends indicated that in some countries today Quakerism seems more likely to become an active indigenous religion where its adherents have overcome their fears of local religious systems, work within the local community and maintain contact with the local traditional religions.

It has been of great interest to discover a collection of papers prepared for the seventh session of the Friends World Committee held in Bad Pyrmont, Germany, September 1958. Of initial significance is the title of this collection, 'Sharing our Quaker Faith', which might imply some missionary activity. But already in his introduction to the volume Edwin Bronner was directing Friends to follow the lead of Douglas V. Steere, who had urged Philadelphia Friends in 1956 to evaluate their attitudes towards

1. evangelism

2. missions
3. the ecumenical movement, and
4. world religions.

In that same volume, Ranjit Chetsingh, an Indian Friend and one-time General Secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation, gives prominence to what he considers 'sympathetic words' of Douglas Steere in questioning Quakerism as a missionizing faith. Steere writes :

'Being uncertain about this whole area (missionizing), service projects and educational projects, especially those of the more pioneering type such as centres dedicated to inter-racial or inter-cultural or international understanding, appeal to these Friends as things of which both the society and the community at large can universally approve. They would point out that through these projects, a 'way of life' can be shared, and if the questions come as to why Friends are there, frank answers can be given. [t must be admitted, however, that these Friends would be most hesitant about taking the initiative in communicating their own beliefs to the people they are seeking to assist. ' 11

Marjorie Sykes, who interpreted India and Indian religions to the Western world for over half a century, contributed forthrightly, as ever, to this volume. Considering the 'unity of life' theme, and recalling how Quakers claim the tradition of an "everyday religion", she observes Marathi women at work, singing their many songs associated with every humble and common piece of work. She comments:

'This way of life is for these women such a natural thing that in their company our conception of "the sacrament of daily life" seems almost shallow, and one feels that "whereas I was blind, now I am just beginning to see". ' 12

Marjorie Sykes agrees with Douglas Steere on the 'mutual irradiation' or enrichment that she has found in the meeting of minds between people of different ways of thought.

'I can only repeat that at the "living core" of other faiths I have found enrichment, not contradiction, of my own. ' 13

Marjorie issues a challenge that many Quakers, and others, have taken up, before and since, but which is nonetheless relevant to our Quaker thinking in the late 1990s - she asks:

*"By what authority do we declare that the revelation that we have received is unique and final, or that there is no other Name by which men (sic) can be saved?"*¹⁴

For me, there is a good Methodist hymn that expresses a similar outlook and attitude of openness though I suspect it was not intended to apply to religions other than Christianity -

*We limit not the truth of God
To our poor reach of mind,
By notions of our day and sect,
Crude, partial and confined.
No, let a new and better hope
Within our hearts be stirred;
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His word.* ' George Rawson 1807-89¹⁵

I imagine that this hymn writer would have balked at any suggestion that the Light and Truth might have been revealed to, and through, adherents of other religious faiths. But that is surely what Marjorie Sykes means when she goes on to say:

*'Many who never knew the earthly name of Jesus have known that Power'*¹⁶ (the vital power of Jesus).

And Marjorie goes on to declare her openness to further discoveries, and revelations - an openness which I feel sure many 20th and 21st century Quakers would desire to entertain and embrace.

*'I dare not say that the ancient symbolic language of Indian religious culture could not reveal the Eternal Christ, the power and wisdom of God, to the men (sic) of Asia with as deep and compelling a power as that which I myself feel in the symbols and language of the culture in which I was born.'*¹⁷

And, again:

'I dare not say that the seed of God could not grow in some other soil into a flowering of holiness with a different but not less lovely fragrance than that which flowered in Galilee'.¹⁸

RECOGNIZING MEETING POINTS – MUTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Many of us would be more than willing to entertain this attitude, even though we might not have had the appropriate opportunity to do so - or might not have explored the full implications - or perhaps we have been deterred by some of the visible religious practices whose significance we have been unable to comprehend. But an important question to ask ourselves is: 'Are we prepared to give time and energy to explore the "holiness" within another religious system? What are the implications for the non-Asian Friends of our Asia - West Pacific Section? for personnel involved in aid and trade projects? for the increasing number of travellers in Asia?'

Several of my Indian Friends; who have had the good fortune to have experience and knowledge of non-Christian religions as well as Christianity, have noted the meeting points of Quakerism with Indian religions. One remarked that the teachings of the Advices and Queries are no different from those in the Gita. Buddhist monks, too, find Quaker teachings comparable to their own Buddhist way of life. Perhaps, then, our common ground is in the quality of living to which our religious beliefs lead us.

IN LATIN AMERICA

The 16th Triennial Meeting of FWCC in Mexico in 1985, with its accompanying events and experiences, emphasized the existence of the reputedly fastest growing area of Quakerism in the American hemisphere. Latin American Friends live with difficult challenges and enormous opportunities. Can Friends generally acknowledge a responsibility to share these challenges, learn from Latin Friends' ability to communicate across diversity, and build the bond of spiritual Friendship with the thousands of Latin Americans whom God has gathered into our Society?

At the gatherings, conferences and triennial meetings of Friends World Committee for Consultation in the past two decades, there has been evidence of

considerable growth of the Society in the Spanish-speaking world. While there is obviously variety in the patterns of growth, observers have been impressed by the freshness in interpretation and witness to the gospel, and the vigour and vitality of some of these Hispanic groups of Friends. The Society should be encouraged by the current earnest seeking to find patterns of ministry that will meet the needs of the great number and exciting varieties of cultural groups and life styles open to us in today's global village. Participants in these gatherings have been encouraged and impressed by the vitality, resourcefulness, self-reliance and independence of the Bolivian Friends in particular. The Bolivian Yearly Meetings have developed as a result of the activities of Quaker missionaries from the pastoral North West Yearly Meeting, and it is significant to note that the 'parent' Yearly Meeting has encouraged these qualities, and that the Bolivian Friends have responded by initiating their own programs of development in their communities, and independently joining Friends World Committee for Consultation.

At the 18th Triennial of FWCC held in Ghost Ranch, New Mexico in 1994, Friends heard from Bernabe-Yujra-Ticona, Clerk of the Iglesia Nacional Evangelica de los Amigos (INELA) of Bolivia about their programs of social work in Bolivia. Their evangelizing work in the rural areas led them to discover many difficult social problems in the high plain (Altiplano) of Bolivia. In showing their love for the people, they have addressed problems of hunger, health, and education, so that they have a team of veterinary technical agents (the Friends' Evangelical Agricultural and Livestock Technical Support Group) working in the farming area, a health centre in La Paz, and are planning to develop equipment for a team to improve children's nutrition. Their agricultural experts are tackling the problems of destruction caused by the use of chemical fertilizers and vaccinations, and are investigating the use of traditional folk medicine and natural crop fertilizers. "In that way, the crops that we get would be of much better nutritional value for people, and the earth does not lose its fertility," said Bernabe. All this is in addition to the establishment of 36 schools, since 1974 - one in the city, 35 in rural areas. Exciting development work indeed!

In 1994, Loida Fernandez, currently Executive Secretary of the Committee of Latin American Friends (COAL) and frequently translator/interpreter at Quaker gatherings, delivered an address to New England Yearly Meeting, entitled 'Variations on a Theme by Fox'. Loida has the advantage of familiarity with the languages and cultures of the Hispanic communities and the 'Western' and English-speaking communities. Loida begins by reflecting on the importance of music to the 'Other Side' of the Religious Society of Friends. Music and singing

for Latin American Friends have been an integral part of their life as a spiritual community, as well as of civil society in general.

*'Music, whether sung or played, whether indigenous, popular or high-brow, is without question part of our creative vocabulary for our feelings and experiences.'*¹⁹

It pre-dated European arrival five hundred years ago, and has continued to be part of the ethos, the essence of the peoples. Music, Loida states, brings people together. It gives them an identity which, as time passes, becomes universal. There are countless songs which give voice to the whole feeling of a nation, of society - and people have suffered and died for continuing to give voice to them. Branches of the Christian church endeavoured to quash this thousand-year-old 'pagan' cultural tradition. Conflict over this issue has continued until quite recently.

At world gatherings, Friends have been entertained and amazed with the ready sharing of their musical gifts by Bolivian Friends. Of the Bolivians, Loida comments:

*'You will find Quaker men and women there whose daily experience of their relationship with God comes out in a marvellous song imbued with heritage and sung by voices whose timbre and tone hardly any of us could match. Accompanying it will be Andean flutes, panpipes and drums. And all the brothers and sisters of the community rejoice, as children of the Day and of the Light, convinced that the Lord God is working amidst the dark night that they feel - the dark night of poverty, the dark night of injustices, the dark night of obligatory military service, the dark night of ethnocentrism which forces them to speak another tongue than that of their people if they are to be heard and respected by the dominant society.'*²⁰

Their songs record their firm faith. The ecstasy of the experience has an extraordinary depth and conviction, which Loida avers we could not silence, nor could we call it pagan. And this faith and conviction is common among Latin American Friends - with whom we share a common spiritual origin. Bolivia seems to be one part of the Quaker world where strong cultural roots have demonstrated themselves in indigenous initiatives in the area of social witness.

Lest we dismiss these records as a form of euphoric evangelism which avoids the witness for social justice, it is salutary to note that seven of the twelve

groups that claim Quaker roots in Bolivia have come together for lengthy discussions which have resulted in a desire to join in a declaration of faith and to ask the government to study alternatives to obligatory military service.

In Honduras, Friends, along with Mennonites, Brethren and other church groups, have made a similar request, and at last a civilian government is talking about passing a law to declare Honduran military service non-compulsory. The tiny group in San Jose, Costa Rica, is involved in dialogue about alternatives to the existing jail system. At Easter, 1994, a group of British Friends visited Friends in Cuba. Despite the enforced economic deprivation (denial of raw materials and markets) over the years, they were much moved by the work, and the loving and generous caring extended to them. Marigold Best, one of the group leaders commented:

*'The visit showed us a society, and a people, shaped by values of community concern and generosity for which we yearn. I have found that Cuban f/Friends will find a way to preserve that spirit amid whatever changes the future brings.'*²¹

In attempting to understand Latin American Friends, we need to recall that Catholicism has been a primary, universal cultural influence in the past several hundred years. So that for them, rejection of outward sacraments in favour of inward reality is a major witness, tested every day. This explains the burden of the sermon from a woman pastor in Ciudad Victoria, Mexico, whom we heard addressing just that issue. She emphasised the non-acceptability of the outward sacraments, but more importantly the positive aspect of the necessity for inward, spiritual commitment. It explains, also, why some years ago, four Honduran Friends churches were disowned for allowing outward sacraments to those requesting them. Latin American Friends are daily challenged on this traditional witness that most European, Australasian, North American Friends consider as rather a quaint part of our ancient history.

You may have wondered, as I have, why Friends in some Central American countries have not demonstrated a witness for human rights during some of the appalling brutalities of recent decades. It would appear that some of the earlier missionaries preferred to focus on evangelism and discipleship training, but it is encouraging to note that the individual yearly meetings that have developed more recently in that region are embarking on programs of social witness. From the World Conference in Elspeet, 1991, my most vivid recollection was the report in my group meetings from one of the women from Central America who was using

her home to support and counsel drug victims - an admirable and moving witness to her concern, and the social gospel of Christianity.

Another and not unexpected area of cultural expression is the denial of and condemnation of homosexuality - an attitude that has caused difficulty, and necessitated skilful counselling, in the preparation for and conduct of international gatherings in such places as Honduras. It is fairly easy to attribute these attitudes to the influences of Catholicism and Evangelism. And - to be , fair and honest - we need to acknowledge that the changes in attitude that have occurred in our own meetings in regard to homosexuality and to heterosexual partnerships without legal contract also, have been achieved, sometimes quite painfully, only over the past two or three decades.

We of the unprogrammed tradition of worship should be encouraged to note that the programmed Friends of Latin America, having met unprogrammed worship at FWCC events, have come to value it, not as a substitute for their usual worship but as a valuable ingredient to true worship which they have missed. Having rejoiced at this evidence, perhaps we should consider what Latin American Friends have to teach us. It is recorded that the Aymara, for example, were animists whose life in one of the most inhospitable regions on Earth had convinced them that they were surrounded by evil spirits such as lightning, hail and flood, at whose whims their lives and fortunes could suffer. Christian Quakerism changed none of the physical circumstances of their lives, except for the provision of educational and medical opportunities. **But their world view changed.** They need not waste their limited goods to propitiate capricious evil spirits. There was a loving God, creator of all, who cared about them and about what happened to them, and whose unfailing love would sustain them and strengthen them through their trials. Hence, Bolivian and Peruvian Friends are fervent and gifted in vocal prayer, their worship is filled with celebration and joy. This is the great gift of Latin American (and African) Quakers to all liberal doom-sayers. They share readily the little they have with all of their brothers and sisters in Christ. They read the Bible and accept the offer of hope and love and the experience of God's love to a beleaguered people. Music - imported and indigenous - is central to their worship experience. Pastoral leadership is the norm. Each believer is responsible for her/his own relationship with God, a true Quaker concept that is a real break from the surrounding culture. The pastor is not seen as the priest, the authority and interpreter of the Truth.

Those of us who have long experience of Quaker business organization and Quaker decision-making processes based on unity in the Spirit may raise our

eyebrows when we observe that similar organization and decision-making processes are not always carried into or practised in other areas to which Quakerism has travelled. These are occasions when we need to exercise our proclaimed tolerance and explore the cultural, and societal factors that may have influenced the practices - especially the prior use of the voting method, and male dominance in leadership and decision-making. We should, also, be willing to acknowledge that desired changes are developing, especially in the recognition of the role of women in organization and decision-making.

OPENINGS IN EASTERN EUROPE

Changes in Eastern Europe over the past decade have given rise to very interesting developments for the world Society of Friends. Five indigenous Russians have joined the society through the International Membership Committee of Friends World Committee for Consultation, attracted to aspects of Quakerism which have resonance in Russian mysticism. Their letters reflect a deep yearning for the spiritual message of Quakerism and dedication to the social message of working in the world to mend it.

A similar comment might be made in relation to some of the other 'Quaker' groups emerging in Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries. These groups tend to be self-initiating and call themselves Quakers principally because Friends writings have appealed to them. One might recall that this is not a new development in the history of the spread of Quakerism - Quaker groups seem to have formed and disappeared in many areas of the world - and maybe 'Quakerism' served a useful purpose while it lasted. For those involved with or observing the growing links between Quakers and inquirers from Russia over the past several decades, this involvement has been a rewarding, but very delicate process - and of course, this is by no means a novel event in Quaker relationships with Russians over the past three centuries.

In a recent Pendle Hill Pamphlet, Anthony Manousos who has served on the Quaker US/USSR Committee, writes of the considerable links with a Russian Friend, Tatiana Pavlova, who recently joined the Society on the International Membership List. Significant for the theme of this Lecture is a quotation from Tatiana Pavlova herself.

*'We are forging links with the world outside. The gifts it can offer us are inestimable and beyond price. **But we too have much to offer** (my emphasis). In the end we have a thousand-year tradition of spiritual*

culture. We have writers who have long been the conscience of the people. We want to talk to the outside world, and in this time of turmoil we need, now as never before, the assurance that the world is listening. Perhaps, slowly and by degrees, hostility can be replaced by tolerance, indifference by concern, and anger by love. ' 22

This appeal takes us forward in our sharing of spirituality, of our spiritual journeys and of our cultures. We can meet on a basis of mutual respect and appreciation - as people to people, as people with people.

Anthony Manousos gives an account of a Soviet -American project of reconciliation in developing an anthology of Soviet and American poetry and fiction. He records that during the course of creating the resulting pamphlet entitled '**The Human Experience**' bonds of friendship developed between Russians and Americans, and that they learned some unexpected lessons about themselves and the working of the Divine Spirit. Anthony Manousos hopes that this work will encourage others to heed the leadings of the Spirit and to proceed in faithfulness towards what Anna Brinton called 'undiscovered ends'. He concludes -

I have come to appreciate that there is a place for inspired amateurs, for those who listen and labour in love. ' 23

The reaching out towards Friends continues in this part of the world. Mikhail, a recent Moscow applicant for membership, records his participation in the 1995 Mothers' March for Life and Freedom in Chechnya, initiated by the leader of a Buddhist monastic order in Moscow, with Christian, Muslim and Jewish participants. This unforgettable experience gave Mikhail a strong feeling of belonging to Friends spiritually. Beginning from this time he felt the mystical and practical sides of Quaker spirituality strongly tied in his consciousness.

We ourselves may not, of course, be able to become involved in exchanges and encounters in this particular area of the world, but in general we must seek to create our own opportunities to listen and learn, and to share with one another the outcomes of our learning experiences. This could mean being willing and available for that sharing wherever opportunity arises - and it may be in our local neighbourhood here in Australia.

Fascinating questions arise in this connection:

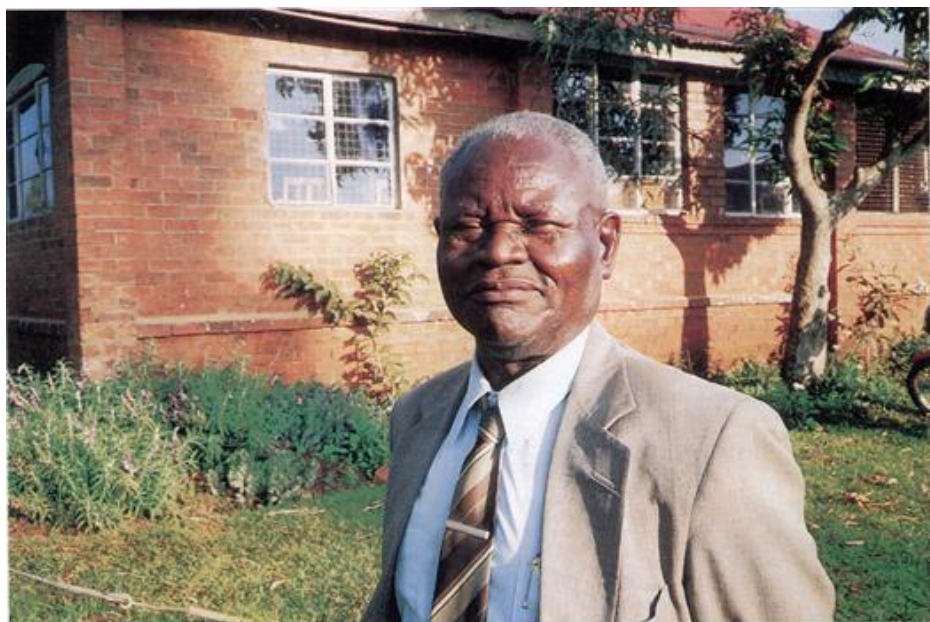
What are the limits of Quakerism?

Who has the right to determine those limits?

Is what they say and do part of an established Quaker tradition?

If so, which, or whose?

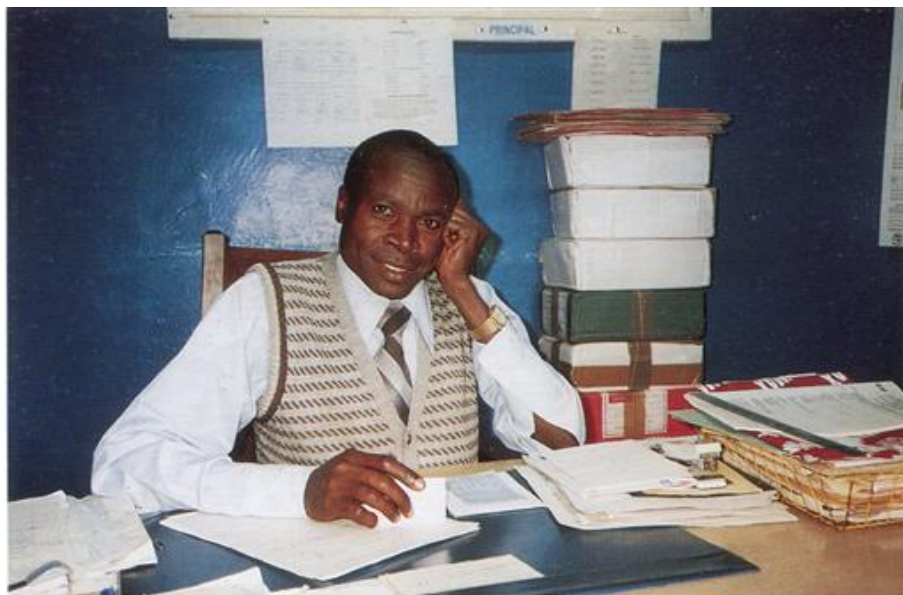
Is there a Quaker authority to handle these questions?



Josiah Embego, clerk, East Africa Y.M. (South).



Susumu Ishitani, clerk, Asia-West Pacific Section, Peter Eccles, treasurer and Val Ferguson, general secretary FWCC, 1989.

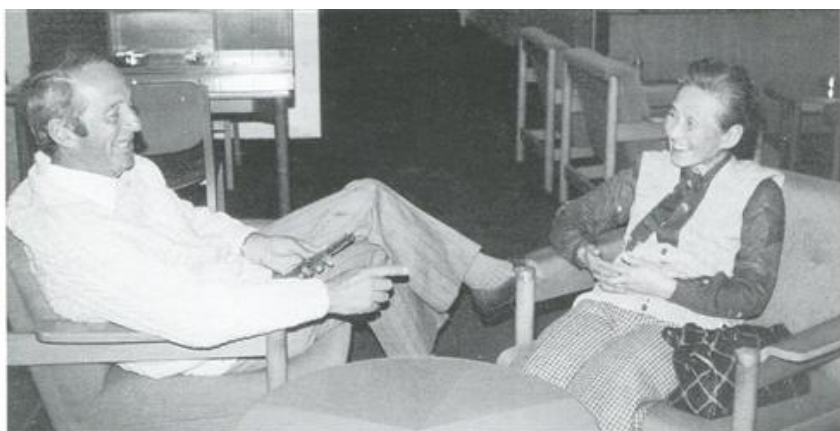


Oscar Lumwago, director, Friends Bible College, Kaimosi, Kenya.

Danielle, Felicity
and David
Niyonzima,
Burundi Y. M.



Thomas Taylor, general secretary, FWCC
and Galina Orlova, clerk,
Moscow Monthly Meeting.



Richard Meredith in conversation with Tayeko Yamanouchi.

Shima Gyoh,
Nigeria Friends
Meeting.

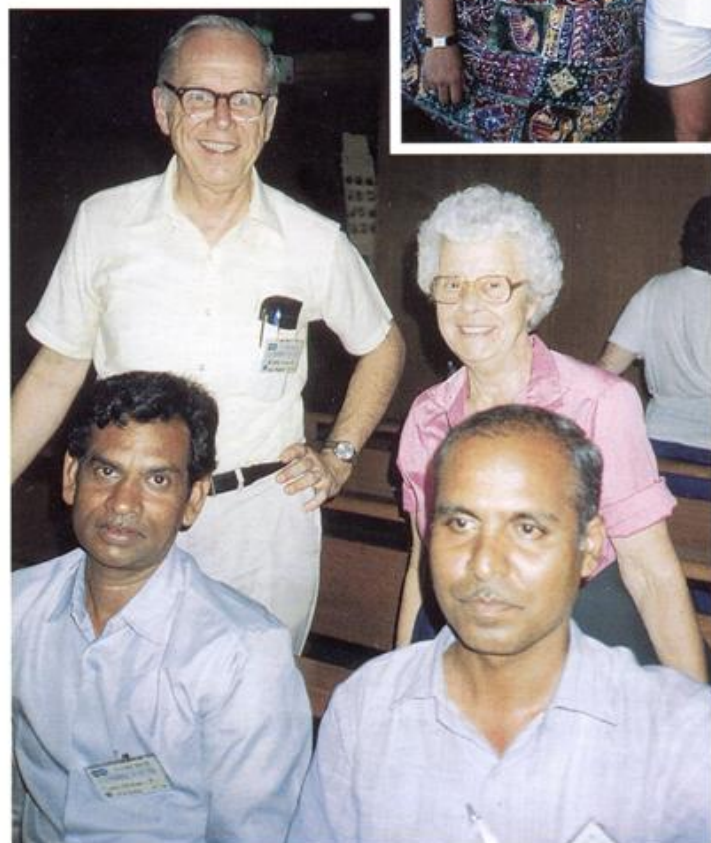


Nira Kegode (Nairobi Y.M.) and Ute
Caspers (German Y.M.)





Sdrach Quisbert serenades the group at Honduras Gathering 1991.



Loida Fernandez, secretary Comité de los Amigos, Latinos Americanos, Jonathan Snipes, Philadelphia Y.M., Asia Bennett, executive secretary, FWCC Section of the Americas.

Gordon Browne, Section of the Americas, Edith Browne, New England Y.M.

Bottom:
Christopher Lall, Mid-India Y.M.,
Derdas Shrisunder, Bhopal Y.M.

QUAKERISM AND ASIAN RELIGIONS

Douglas Steere provided the inspiration and impetus for the organization of two Colloquia in 1967 - the first, near Tokyo, involving a selection of Zen Buddhists and Christians, and the second involving an equally wide representation of Hindus and Christians in the south of India. The records of these gatherings and their opportunities for dialogue are exciting, but more important for us today is Douglas Steere's recognition of the special role Quakers can play in this ecumenical approach to both great world religions and other Christian confessions by starting at the right end - that is, from within, with a minimum emphasis on outer forms.

Regrettably, there has been no direct follow-up to these colloquia, though it is possible that similar concerns for dialogue have been or are being pursued in other forums. It might be possible for the Asia-West Pacific Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation to sponsor further dialogue as a Section project. Having observed that Quakerism and Zen have so much in common, the next step would seem to be to explore opportunities for further dialogue and cooperation. How can the advances in understanding that were made by the initial colloquium in 1967, and its successors from 1967-1976, be followed up in these later years of the twentieth century?

Otto van Sprenkel reminded us in his Backhouse Lecture in 1973 of the advantages of our non-credal nature in that we are not constrained by limitations of beliefs. He reminded us of the theological consequences of the full doctrine of the Inner Light: Quakerism's universality in its belief of

'that of God in everyone' - 'a bridge from Quaker Christianity to the non-Christian world, and an acknowledgement not only of the universality of the spirit but of the solidarity of mankind'.²⁴

There could be some Quakers in our Asian neighbourhood who might welcome participation in similar colloquia, or dialogue - a ringing challenge in

this regard was made by our now deceased Korean Friend, Ham Sok Hon, in 'Kicked by God'.

*'Are we not crying out for a new Renaissance which can usher in a period of religious reformation? If so, then there must be a new interpretation of the past. There must be renewed research into the classics. And, since the Western classics are "used up", we are forced to examine more closely our own Eastern classics. A renewed appreciation of the East will furnish the key to the revitalization of the stagnated Western culture.'*²⁵

In quiet and unobtrusive ways, individuals, and groups of Friends, are exploring, through 'pilgrimages', or personal spiritual journeys. One such Friend, Angela Cotton, of Britain Yearly Meeting, reports something of her discoveries on her pilgrimage, and her conclusions reflect the 'mutual irradiation' of Douglas Steere, and the 'enrichment' of Marjorie Sykes, when she writes:

*'I find myself more able to see the holy everywhere, and the face of the divine in everyone: to experience the Inner Light even in myself.'*²⁶

As workers - Quaker, non-Quaker - religious or secular - in economically deprived areas of the world, we need to be consciously aware of the impact that our own cultural trappings have on local people: cameras, jewellery, money, clothing, motor vehicles, refrigerators, cigarettes, alcohol, to name a few. And at the same time, we need to be aware of such accepted norms, or conventions, as 'fair go', taking people at their word.

Having noted these precautions, I am reminded, with some slightly cynical amusement, of my own experience when I was travelling to a Quaker Conference and Seminar program in Bali in 1970. Here was a great opportunity to buy a slightly more sophisticated, and more expensive, camera at the Duty Free Shop. With some annoyance, I found it was dearer than at my local shop, so I refused to buy a new one. I rationalized this decision by reflecting on the theme of the coming conference - 'The Impact of Western Civilization and Capitalism on the Religions and Cultures of Asia' - and on the nature of the personnel invited to the Conference who were mainly religious and social leaders of East Asian countries. To my considerable surprise, I found that the Thai Buddhist monk seminar participant was sporting a far more expensive Minolta - which in his case, of course, had been gifted to him!

Another experience with the conduct of our Quaker Service Australia's Cambodia English Language Teaching Project also comes to mind. A particularly difficult situation arose one year when our non-Quaker teaching staff in Phnom Penh became aware of corruption and/or nepotism in the selection of entrants to the University classes. They virtually refused to accept some of the students recommended by the Ministry. The teachers expected immediate support from our Committee, but the Committee deliberated at great length, aware (as we expected our experienced teachers would be) that nepotism is a way of life and advancement in most economically deprived countries. To what extent should we become involved in the political manoeuvrings within a country where we were providing a service? And yet our Quaker integrity was called in question by our teachers - and could we overlook this corruption entirely? The Hobart-based Committee agonized over this issue for a year. Suffice it to say here that with the firm stand taken by our Quaker Field Manager in Phnom Penh, and the consistent application of Quaker principles by the Committee, understanding and reluctant co-operation was eventually achieved - with an added undertaking by the Cambodian Ministry that they would respect Quaker Service's unwillingness to accept students from the Defence Forces!

*'What is needed by the times is a religion that goes beyond the world of opposites, into the deep reality of existence, a religion that transcends colour, races, cultures, political systems, and even religions, a religion that knows that human kind shares one and the same life and spirit with the rest of nature, a religion that not only knows but acts to realize what it knows. I hope such a religion will emerge out of the close communion between Quakerism and Zen.'*²⁷

*'True religion does not turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavours to mend it; not to hide their candle under a bushel but to set it upon a table in a candlestick. This recluse attitude runs away by itself and leaves the world to be lost. Christians should keep the helm, and guide the vessel to its port; not hide away at the stern of the world and leave those that are in it without a pilot.'*²⁸

Three hundred years separate these two quotations, and needless to say, the needs of vastly different worlds are being addressed at the ends of the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries. One might also observe that William Penn had not moved beyond Christianity as the dominant and responsible religious system, whereas Teruyasu Tamura, though deeply aware of his Zen heritage, has

empathized with the Quaker methods of worship and social witness, and recognizes the value of a religion that is a blend of Quakerism and Zen.

It is interesting to note the comments of Yukio Irie, our Japanese Friend who presented the Backhouse Lecture on Zen Buddhism in 1973, with those of Teruyasu Tamura, in his Pendle Hill Pamphlet of 1992. Both recognize the differences between Zen meditation and Quaker worship, especially the vocal ministry of Quakerism which interrupts the mystical experience of Zen meditation. Teruyasu Tamura discerned a meeting point in Zen meditation with Thomas Kelly's experience of those deeper and rarer times in Quaker worship when Kelly wrote -

*'In the Quaker practice of group worship on the basis of silence come special times - when an electric hush and solemnity and depth of power steals over the worship.'*²⁹

The observation of an Australian Young Friend might be considered akin to Thomas Kelly's experience when she noted that 'the silence crackled'.

Both writers note that Quakerism and Zen share mysticism as their core experience, and with their stress on simplicity and moderation they are both promoting ways of living.

Yukio Irie noted too that the average Japanese attitude to religion was not so much indifference as contempt, but he observed then that

*'It is not that people have lost faith in religion itself, but that they have lost faith in temples and shrines and religious people, both ecclesiastic and secular.'*³⁰

Aziz Pabaney, an Indian Friend from a Muslim Sufi background with Hindu antecedents and Christian (Catholic) schooling recently was accepted into membership of the Society of Friends on the International Membership List. This List is maintained by the International Membership Committee of Friends World Committee for Consultation, which virtually acts as a monthly meeting to provide support and care for individual Friends and small worship groups around the world who live in isolation from a yearly meeting.

Az, who has wide international professional experience, attributes his desire to join the Society to its openness, its willingness to seek that of God in

everyone, and its serious concern, and organization. Aziz writes in a recent personal letter:

'The all pervading emphasis on spirituality, towards a direct relationship with God, the Inward Light, has meant much to me... It is the spirituality that is a unifying force in this troubled world. '

This opinion seems like an echo of a sentence in a 1932 report, entitled 'Rethinking Missions', quoted by Ormerod Greenwood.

'We are to consider ourselves not as bearers of a definite message, but as "brothers (sic) in a common quest" with the non-Christian religions. We are to find and "stand upon the common ground of all religion, to recognize and associate ourselves with whatever kindred elements there are in the non-Christian religions"... The missionary will look forward, not to the destruction of these religions, but to their continued coexistence with Christianity, each stimulating the other toward the ultimate goal, unity in the completest truth'.³¹

Quakers have had quite a long involvement in India, ranging from 'missionary' activity of the proselytizing variety, through education, health, and rural work, to top-level association with religious and political leaders, especially through the years of the Independence movements. At the spiritual-seeking level, one of the most encouraging enterprises in which Quakers were involved was the formation of the Fellowship of the Friends of Truth. This concept developed from discussions between long serving English Quaker worker in India Horace Alexander and Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi. Horace Alexander had asked Gandhi what Friends could do to help in the rebuilding of confidence among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Gandhi suggested that Friends could bring together believers of different faiths and foster mutual understanding. The resulting Fellowship of the Friends of Truth was launched at Rasulia in November 1949 at a gathering hosted by our Friends Erica and Donald Groom at that time serving in India. This is an event which establishes a warm link for Australian Friends.

Horace Alexander has provided a very concise statement of the purpose of the Fellowship:

'We invite the adherents of the various religious faiths to find heart unity by Worshipping God together... We do not assume that the followers of anyone faith have learnt all the Truth, nor do we attempt to make

invidious comparisons; still less do we seek to 'convert' one another... All of us need to be very humble about our Faith, for we know how poorly we witness to it. Our Fellowship, far from asking anyone to water down his Faith, or to abandon its essential features, invites him (her) to become more faithful. ' ³²

Horace Alexander made unsuccessful attempts to bring his concern about the Fellowship of the Friends of Truth to Meeting for Sufferings in the 1950s. Perhaps British Friends at that time were not open to suggestions of inter-faith dialogue. But it was only in the next decade that Douglas and Dorothy Steere stimulated events that led to the Japan Christian - Zen Colloquia (already described) and a Christian - Hindu colloquium in India. And, of course, in the ensuing decades, social, political and religious developments have encouraged much more individual and group exploration and study, and associations, with a variety of other faiths, especially those of Asian origin.

Douglas Steere has provided a stirring and brief description of the Colloquia. Perhaps one of the most significant passages is the account of family life, sharing of stories from their scriptures and worship together - practices that seem to have largely disappeared in the busyness of our lives. Concludes Douglas Steere:

'It is a most uncomfortable task for Quakers to go among Zen Buddhists and Hindus. They rouse in the mind so many pieces of unfinished business in our tradition, and they have a way of shattering so many of our snug stereotypes and compelling us to endure the pain of looking freshly at them and at ourselves. Anyone who has been through such an experience knows well enough that for the future he must either avoid Colloquia of this sort entirely or become reconciled to getting pushed off his balcony and forced on to the road again.' ³³

As a Friend who has made several brief visits among Friends in India, I begin to question the appropriateness of 'Quakerism' in that already highly religious country. The small Quaker meetings struggle for an existence, and an identification with 'Western' Quakerism tends to alienate them from their indigenous religions and compatriots. Perhaps we should be rather encouraging some other regional fellowships, like the Friends of Truth, or the Wider Quaker Fellowship, that would enable them to be 'at ease' within their own cultures and religions while still enjoying the advantages of sharing their spiritual journey with Quakers. The statement of the Basis of the Fellowship of the Friends of Truth

would seem to provide an admirable framework for embracing the aspirations of all true seekers.

'The Fellowship of Friends of Truth is alive to the urgent need in the world today of bringing together people of different Faiths in a common endeavour to realize the good life for all through the way of truth and love. It attempts to do this on the basis :

- 1. of reverence for all religions, implying thereby frank acceptance of the fact of variety in man's growing apprehension of truth;*
- 2. silent worship;*
- 3. of united brotherly (sic) action on non-violent lines.*

The Fellowship invites people of all Faiths to share through their Fellowship the richness of their various religious traditions and experiences in this adventure of the spirit.

Those who join this Fellowship will be expected to support one another in the struggle for world peace and social justice, identifying themselves as closely as they are able with the oppressed and the disinherited and treating all men as brothers (sic). Members of the Fellowship will also unite with other groups and individuals who are working to these ends. ' ³⁴

Another factor affecting the development of Quakerism, along with Christianity generally, has been its inevitable association with colonialism, and its denial to peoples of their own paths to fulfilment. We can only hope that Quakers avoided, and continue to avoid, the major negative effects for surely becoming Quakers could be - and should be - a more liberating experience on the path to spiritual fulfilment.

QUAKERISM IN THE AFRICAN REGION

During the past two decades, 'Western' Friends have been considerably exercised and distressed by conflict among Friends in East Africa. For a long time, American and European Friends did not understand the cultural nature of the disputes language and culture (such as the practice of polygamy) created strains. Eventually, several yearly meetings have emerged from this period of conflict, and, perhaps we should consider these episodes as a period of growth, too. And, certainly, those of us who have enjoyed the welcome and generous hospitality offered to us in Kenyan homes and families have learned a great deal about basic Christian life and witness.

Many Friends have benefited from such visits, or longer periods of service, among Kenyan Friends. Two of the more recent service providers at Lugulu Hospital were American Friends Tom and Liza Gates, as doctor, teacher, and parents. Finally they asked themselves if it were necessary to go half way around the world to learn about new values - humility reliance on God (rather than self, or modern technology) - hope - above all, God is love, in action.

The experience of living in a different culture taught us how Christianity, especially the Quaker variety, can be such a challenge to the dominant culture around us. Escaping the blinkers of our own culture allows us to see more clearly the conflict between Christianity and the world.

In Kenya, becoming a Christian can mean making a decisive break with one's own culture. It may mean refusing to participate in quasi-magical ceremonies, especially those relating to traditional beliefs about death and burial. It may mean rejecting the authority of the elders of the clan, perhaps marrying outside of one's own ethnic group, placing brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ higher than tribal loyalties. It may mean a costly refusal to participate in the pervasive culture of corruption and bribery. Christians in Kenya face these issues daily, and I respect their faith and courage in doing so.

But, sometimes the line between Christianity and culture can become blurred... we could sometimes see ways in which compromises were

diminishing the church. Kenyans could be blind to the negative parts of their culture, such as sexism (and its continuing demonstration in bride prices, and polygamy), attitudes towards leadership and authority that are directly opposite to the gospel ideal of servant leadership, ethnic and tribal chauvinism that poisons public life in Kenya today. ' ³⁵

Perhaps, as Tom and Liza note, one effect of these observations in Kenyan life, is to see ways in which our own faith is, or should be, a challenge to the wider culture in which we live. We also have our blind spots, as noted elsewhere, chief among these being consumerism and materialism. Perhaps too, we have to dig deeper to understand the cultural motivations for the practices that do not accord with our own values - such as bride prices and the practice of polygamy.

Recently Friends around the world have been greatly moved by the account of events among Friends in Burundi, following the recent tribal conflicts there. David Niyonzima is a pastor and school principal in Burundi. About 20% of the population consists of refugees from countries like Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire. Burundi's population consists of Hutus and Tutsis. David is a Hutu, his wife is a Tutsi. During a military coup in 1993, his school gave refuge to Tutsis. Despite killings, the Friends stayed when others fled. Further violence followed and at least eight students were killed. David and his family spent two weeks in hiding but then returned to their completely looted home and tried to encourage and support others who might be brave enough to return.

'Sunday worship has been a place for Hutu and Tutsi to come together in peace. A 7,000 strong "March for Peace ", organized by Friends, proclaimed the Peace Testimony and multi-level seminars for reconciliation are planned. ' ³⁶

The simple faith of these Friends, whose meetings are the result of the work of Friends Evangelical Missions, and their adherence to the teachings of Jesus as they understand them, must make us humble, and more willing to recognize our common Christian/Quaker heritage.

I would like to share with you a story told by another West African Friend, Shima Gyoh. I received it just as the Lecture was being sent to the printer. His personal experience, which is the opposite of the one quoted earlier from another West African source, may serve as a cautionary tale for all budding theologians.

Shima Gyoh writes:

The year was 1964, and I was a fourth-year medical student at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. During vacation, I flew back to Nigeria and took with me an article I was preparing for the University magazine called "Black and White". I was reviewing "Honest to God" (by John A.T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, SCM Press Limited 1963). What interested me was that the Anglican Bishop was seriously challenging the three-decker universe, and suggesting that one should not look for God "out there", but find him in one's relationship with other people. I sat there in the village, reading that book and making notes for my article.

In the same room also sat a maternal uncle of mine, then aged over fifty. Though illiterate, he had been taken by the British to fight their war in Burma, then returned after the "World War" and dumped in the village. Wearing the traditional loin cloth, there was no sign that he had been outside the village, not to talk of Nigeria or Africa. He was saying his rosary quietly, occasionally making the sign of the cross with the beads.

"What is that?" I asked facetiously as he crossed himself.

"It is the Sign of the Cross, and the words I said were: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!"

"You have a father and a son, where is the mother?" I asked.

His eyes narrowed as he puzzled over that.

"Perhaps the Holy Ghost is the mother, but it doesn't matter because it is One God."

"Where is this God?" I asked.

"In Heaven, of course," he answered.

"Where is Heaven?" I pressed on.

"Up there," he replied, pointing vertically upwards.

"Exactly where, on the moon, the sun, or one of the stars?" I wanted to know.

He hesitated and frowned as he considered that one.

Then he said,

"Do you really know where God is? You will find him in your relationship with other human beings."

And he walked out of the room.

I felt shrunken. How did he get that? It certainly was not what the Catholics had taught him. He did not learn about that in the army, and being illiterate, he had not got it out of a book. I realised that the man was my intellectual superior. I had many ideas in my head, but they were put there by teachers or books. Had I

ever produced or invented my own idea or theory. Here was this man summarising the contents of the book I had brought from Britain and was assiduously studying. Even if he had been told it by someone else, he had the intellectual capacity to appreciate and accept it from a very difficult position - illiteracy.

This was one of the episodes that cured me of intellectual arrogance. I was to find out on many other occasions, among the illiterate, incontrovertible evidence of people whose intellect towered above mine. I would say:

"By Jove, if this one had the same opportunities that I had, the sky would have been the limit..."

They may be devout, but hardly ever fanatic. It is rather the educated who are frequently fanatic and shallow. When you go deep on intellectual conversations with some illiterate persons, they often do much better than the literate.'

CONCLUSION

In the 60 years since the establishing of Friends World Committee for Consultation in 1937, the World Committee and its Section Committees have been active and adventurous in providing opportunities for Friends from a variety of countries and cultures to come together in business meetings, conferences and gatherings, and in facilitating a variety of forms of intervisitation.

The following are significant comments from some of the organisers of the World Conference of Friends in 1991, and the Young Friends World Gathering in 1985. The splendid publication *Faith in Action* records experiences and discoveries of participants in the 1991 World Conference on three sites, and it seems appropriate to highlight here some of the comments relevant to the general theme of Quaker ecumenism:

*'grappling with the richness, diversity and untidiness of the Friends family.'*³⁷

*'I have changed and that is going to make a difference to all the people I meet.'*³⁸

*'exploration of our Quaker diversity not only challenged Friends, but at times enraged, intimidated and offended us. We often wondered whether there is anything Quakers can say as one.'*³⁸

*'I hope we found we could proclaim "there is a living God at the centre of all, who is available to each of us as a Present Teacher at the very heart of our lives".'*³⁸

Following the 1985 World Gathering of Young Friends, many significant comments were made by participants. One had learned to understand the other kinds of Friends, though she could not identify with them.

More than one unprogrammed Friend expressed appreciation of the use of music and songs in worship, while some programmed Friends realized that

barriers of race, language and nationality do not matter in order to worship Christ and to feel united by our faith.

A younger Friend concluded that we each have a piece of the truth, but it is only a tiny piece. We must continually look for the truth that others possess, else we risk the danger of believing that our tiny piece is in fact the whole truth.

As one who has long considered that the Truth is like a giant kaleidoscope, colourfully exciting, yet never completely visible at one time to anyone person, challenging the seeker in the restless search, I find this latter observation brings us to one of the most rewarding experiences in Quaker ecumenism. One of the most encouraging outcomes of the shared times of worship, discussion and socializing at this and other world gatherings, has been the recognition of the unity in diversity among Friends. Some who would - and did - find difficulty in accepting fiery, emotional language, who might have questioned the choice and use of Biblical quotations, would have found common ground in the call to witness - to seek to put into action our faith in God - and rejoiced in the varied forms of Quaker witness around the world.

Perhaps some would find it surprising that a resounding call for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation came from a member of the Evangelical Friends Church, Eastern Region (U.S.A) who concluded her address by an interesting link with George Fox's preaching:

*If George Fox were to return today, I believe his message to us would be consistent with his ministry in England in the late 1600s. No matter what cultural patterns we are accustomed to, he would exhort us to believe in our own accountability to a loving and forgiving God...*³⁹

Unfamiliar words, perhaps - different paths - common, basic principles of faith - motivation to common action and witness to the Love and Truth that we have discerned. Let us go forward in this venture of understanding and sharing our spiritual journeys - with a willingness to 'learn of one another'.

We must be ready to be sensitive to differences, to explore the bases of those differences, to understand and accept diversities. At the same time, we must be flexible, but confident and constant in our own beliefs and practices, and not feel it is necessary to identify with the beliefs of others. We must be prepared to discover the 'flowering of holiness' and its 'fragrance' described by Marjorie Sykes, in other lands and cultures.

I feel moved to conclude this Lecture with a quotation from our much-revered Japanese Friend, Tayeko Yamanouchi, whose gentle wisdom and warm friendship have touched the lives of many in the world family of Friends. In these words on 'Ways of Worship', she shares her experience and practice in the worship process, exemplifying the mutual enrichment and irradiation that can occur in religious and cultural encounter:

'As I silence myself I become more sensitive to the sounds around me, and I do not block them out. The songs of the birds, the rustle of the wind, children in the playground, the roar of an airplane overhead are all taken into my worship. I regulate my breathing as taught me by my Zen friends, and through this exercise I feel the flow of life within me from my toes right through my whole body. I think of myself like the tree planted by the rivers of water in Psalm 1, sucking up God's gift of life and being restored.

Sometimes I come to Meeting for Worship tired and weary, and I hear the words of Jesus, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are weary, and I will give you rest. And having laid down my burden, I feel refreshed, both physically and spiritually. This leads me on to whole-hearted adoration and thanksgiving for all God's blessings.

My own name, Tayeko, means "child of many blessings" and God has surely poured them upon me. My heart overflows with a desire to give him something in return. I have nothing to give but my own being, and I offer him my thoughts, words and actions of each day, and whisper "Please take me as I am". Thus, having offered myself to him, I have centered down to be one with my God, and I reiterate Isaac Pennington 's query, "Are ye truly united, so as to become one spirit with the Lord? Are all the walls of partition broken down? And is there nothing now between you, but of two ye are made one in that which uniteth." ⁴⁰

The Universal Light

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren.

John Woolman, 1762

FOR DISCUSSION

Variations in Practices, Organization, Witness

1. In their lighter discussions, Friends often raise a question which goes something like this - 'If George Fox were around today, with which lot of Friends would he identify?' Behind the question is the anticipated answer that, of course, he would identify with the tradition of the poser of the question. And whatever that tradition, the discussion can ebb and flow - in good-natured Quaker style, we hope!
2. Would George Fox be more at home with pastoral, or nonpastoral, Friends? The evidence from his own life is that there is a time and place for both forms.
3. 'Exploration of our basic Quaker and Christian foundations can lead towards a richer understanding and appreciation of each other's tradition.' Can you affirm this statement from your own study, or visits among friends of other traditions?
4. 'Our openness and flexibility is our strength.' How far should this go? What are the limits of Quakerism and how are they determined? By whom or by which group Local/Regional/National Meetings?
5. The term 'Christian Quakerism' is sometimes used. How do Quakers feel about this?
6. Would George Fox be comfortable with pastoral services, choirs and hymns, and dancing? Perhaps Margaret Fell might have felt more at home with these practices.
7. What about the detailed study and use of Bible references? Certainly, George Fox knew his Bible far better than most Friends of the unprogrammed tradition. It has been said that if the Bible had been lost during George Fox's life, he knew the text well enough to provide for its republishing. Nevertheless, there may well have been differences of interpretation.

8. Would George Fox have felt disturbed that modern Friends have insufficient grasp of the link between the inward and outward aspects of faith? or concerned at a lack of social witness on the one hand, or, on the other hand, too much concentration on social witness at the expense of the nurture of the spiritual life and the search for truth?
9. Japanese Friend, Yukio Irie, noted in 1973 that the average Japanese attitude to religion was not so much indifference, as contempt, but he also observed that 'it is not that people have lost faith in religion itself, but that they have lost faith in temples, and shrines and religious people, both ecclesiastic and secular.'

To what extent are these comments applicable to the Australian Society of the 1990s? Do similar attitudes affect members of the Society of Friends in Australia?

10. 1995 statistics reveal that there were 1071 members of the Society and 701 attenders. Do these figures relate to Yukio Irie's comments? or to a reluctance to 'join'?
11. How would you rate the active participation of your Meeting members in the life and witness of the Meeting?
12. Are we open to suggestions coming from new members, or attenders?
13. Where does authority lie in our meetings?
14. Here is an interesting response from a British Friend to my question: 'Would George Fox feel at home with us today?'

If the man were suddenly transported into this house today, astounded to find the date is 1997, and that he has a Quaker sitting at this word processor, he would proceed to talk with me and question, I suspect he would be appalled at what I said. I would be deemed "chaffy", self-indulgent, improperly unheeding of the Quaker mission, I might consider him stiff, ignorant of the pressures upon personal psychology and the stress of modern life, of the facts uncovered in the last 350 years that demand attention, etc.

But, if he would allow me to feed him, hug him, thank him for what he had established, what it had offered me, and if I could persuade him to visit Friends all over the world, humbly to learn of differences that time

had made, I believe he WOULD eventually recognize that we ARE the, albeit wayward, offspring of his vision, and there is still a job for him to do - as there is for me - us.

15. Some individuals - and some national groups of Friends have strong reactions to Quaker structures and organization, to what they consider is obsessive rigidity within the organization. George Fox recognized the need for, and values of, organizational structures. Perhaps, we need continually to question and re-examine our structures, handbook regulations, and the like, especially to check whether they are impeding our openness to the Light.
16. The generally accepted form of Quaker decision-making is based on seeking unity in the spirit. But there are some communities where this process is not fully understood, or is abused. Would it be more appropriate to the cultural norms in some cases to adopt voting systems? And would some form of voting be preferable to our variety of forms of selection and nominations for positions in the Society?
17. So - what would we consider the basic minimum attributes for a Quaker, in any cultural setting? To what extent can Quakerism accommodate differences arising from cultural sources?
18. What opportunities are available within your local community/or in Australia for observing and sharing in the cultural or spiritual practices of other religious traditions?
19. What are considered to be the Quaker norms? And who makes this decision/judgement?
20. How are we preparing for the demands that the communications revolution may place on our Society?
21. Although Friends have a Handbook of Practice and Procedure, there are still conventions and customs that are not included. New members often find they offend against these customs, and also find difficulty with Quaker language (Quakerese). Can you identify some of these conventions, customs, and language that have troubled you?

Is there a need for a 'Quaker Code of Conduct' to explain these puzzling concepts? or a publication explaining 'Quaker-Speak' ?

Influence of Friends on other religious bodies

22. Friends have made a strong impression on the World Council of Churches, especially on the Peace Testimony. Significant contribution has been made in Australia, too, in regard to peace witness and conciliation, in the Australian Council of Churches, to status of women and gender relationships, and to actual framing of the constitution for the new National Council of Churches. Australia Yearly Meeting has successfully resisted a credal basis for membership of the National Council. Is this contribution/witness of value?

Some surprising discoveries!

In one Yearly Meeting, visiting Friends found all members were baptized, since no-one in that country would believe that a person was a Christian unless he or she were baptized. Openness in regard to sexuality, and especially homosexuality, is not universal in the Quaker world. Openness in sexual matters, in the western Quaker world is a recent development - and even there, we can still find a grudging tolerance/acceptance, arrived at through lengthy and painful processes.

Nepotism is not uncommon - in fact, it is an accepted custom - in some societies, and Friends are not immune. It can involve career or business advancement, educational place selection, selection for Quaker offices, and maybe 'electioneering' in various forms for selection for office.

Gender equality is not yet universal among Friends although women may do much of the fund-raising in East Africa, the men keep the books.

Your future may lead you into association with Friends in other regions of the world where one or more of these practices becomes an issue. How will you deal with the situation?

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