

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE
2000

TO LEARN A NEW SONG

**A Quaker Contribution Towards
Real Reconciliation with the Earth and its
Peoples**

Susannah Kay Brindle

**Australia Yearly Meeting
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)**

The James Backhouse Lectures

The lectures were instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) on its establishment in 1964.

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

Coming to Australia under a concern for the conditions of convicts, the two men had access to people with authority in the young colonies and with influence in Britain, both in Parliament and in the social reform movement. In meticulous reports and personal letters, they made practical suggestions and urged legislative action on penal reform, on the rum trade, and on land rights and the treatment of Aborigines.

James Backhouse was a general naturalist and a botanist. He made careful observations and published full accounts of what he saw, in addition to encouraging Friends in the colonies and following the deep concern that had brought him to Australia.

Australian Friends hope that this series of lectures will bring fresh insights into the Truth and speak to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism.

This particular lecture was delivered in Brisbane, on land sacred to the Turrabal people, during Yearly Meeting 2000.

Colin Wendell-Smith
Presiding Clerk
Australia Yearly Meeting

About this lecture

Australian Quakers profess obedience to the leadings of the Spirit. But, in a land where what happens to the natural environment mirrors the sufferings of the Aboriginal peoples, Susannah Brindle asks, "What sort of Spirit? What sort of leadings?" This lecture is a plea for openness to a more inclusive Spirit than that defined by European Cultural traditions and scientific rationalism. Drawing from a Quaker heritage and truly being "present where we are", we become learners rather than teachers. Then we may yet find the love and courage to humble ourselves before the Earth-wisdom of Aboriginal spirituality, to venture beyond our acculturation and to "learn a new song" - the Earth's song of real reconciliation and true justice.

About the author

Originally from Sydney, Susannah Brindle spent more than 20 years in central coastal New South Wales, the Western Queensland outback and the North Queensland rainforest before moving to Victoria in 1990. At various times, she has been engaged in subsistence farming, snake hunting, wildlife drawing, rainforest action, raising children, peace activism, learning and playing the recorder in an ensemble, working with children with disabilities, several months bicycle touring in the UK in her middle-forties, geriatric nursing, and (more recently) tree planting, writing, facilitating Alternatives to Violence Project workshops, and working for Aboriginal justice. In 1980, she shared a Royal Zoological Society (NSW) Whitley Award for her illustrations for a book on possums, and is soon to publish a children's book which was written at the request of an Aboriginal elder. Susannah's life experiences led her to Friends in 1982 and have shaped her understanding of what it means to be a Quaker in Australia today. She has two adult sons, four step-children and two grandchildren, and now lives in Central Victoria with her husband, Ray. Together they are active in Victoria Regional Meeting and Australia Yearly Meeting, and co-ordinate the Seekers Open Letter.

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My text has not adequately acknowledged the encouragement of three particular Aboriginal women -

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Those Friends steadfast in their active concern for Aboriginal justice over many years also informed this lecture. I feel privileged to have been part of an ongoing Quaker tradition of "trying whether the seeds of war have nourishment" in our way of life.

I particularly want to acknowledge the support of Lloyd Williams. Two interrelated concerns - for Aboriginal justice and that Friends recognise the Spirit in all Creation - have inspired his actions for many years, and his insistence that I speak my truth has been Quaker eldering in the traditional and best sense of the term. The encouragement of another Friend, David Carline of the Kooma Nation, has given me a strong sense of security as I prepared this lecture, and I treasure his friendship.

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I could not have prepared this lecture without Ray Brindle's liberating selflessness and belief in my integrity. The issues raised herein are those closest to our hearts and have been the focus of our shared adventures and countless discussions for more than ten years now. Those years are as much a part of this lecture as are Ray's amazing love and formidable editing skills.

Susannah Brindle, 1999

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Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me fast.

Psalm 139; 7-11.

I was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted in an inward life, wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator and learns to exercise true justice and goodness, not only towards all men but also towards the brute creatures. That as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible Being, by the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world. That as by his breath the flame of life was kindled in all animals and sensitive creatures, to say we love God as unseen and at the same time exercise cruelty towards the least creature moving by his life, or by life derived from him, was a contradiction in itself.

John Woolman (1720) (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (1988) *Faith and practice*, p.115)

Environmentalists, churches, politicians and science, all are concerned about the damage to the environment. But their concern is for the good of humankind. So deep is this introspection that even now, few apart from eccentrics really care about other living organisms...

[T]he single-minded quest to save human-kind conflicts with the greater need to sustain the Earth as a fit and comfortable place to live. If we lose our habitat, the system of life and the environment on Earth, Gaia will go on. But humankind will no longer be part of it.

We are part of this Earth and we cannot consider our affairs in isolation. We are so tied to the earth that its [illness is] our [illness], too.

I find myself looking on the Earth itself as a place for worship, with all life as its congregation.

James Lovelock (1991) *Gaia*, pp. 16-18.

1 EXPOSITION

The Cleverman - An ancient myth for the 21st Century

Since the dawn of humanity, in all ages and places of the world, spiritually gifted men and women have been trained to undertake dangerous spirit journeys to unlock the earth's deep secrets and to engage with the spirit energy of the More-than-Human world of being.

These are the shamans or, as Aboriginal peoples¹ call them, the "clevermen"². In ways respectful of the great laws of the Universe, their calling is to bring to their people healing, wisdom and energy from beyond the human sphere. Although the community accords respect to the cleverman's skills, the position is not one of enviable power. The price of shamanic training is high. Suffering becomes an occupational hazard because the essence of the shamanic calling is to serve others.

Long ago, in the wilderness by a sacred river, there lived such a shaman. One day a young man with remarkable but unrealised gifts came to him to be initiated into the mysteries of Life. The shaman recalled the words of an ancient teaching and he knew instantly that it was to this young man that he must convey the whole body of his knowledge before he died.

As the shaman poured out the waters of initiation, the sound of a dove's wings could be heard. It was a sign that the initiate's power-animal had entered into him. Henceforth the spirit of the dove would protect and guide the young man's journeys between the realms of Creation's reality. Inseparable from his identity, it would imbue him with the characteristics of peace and love as he sought integrity and healing for an ailing humanity.

The young man wanted to discover what his newly acquired powers might mean for him. He therefore sought solitude in a wild place, far from the distractions of the city. He was tempted to use his new powers of manifestation to appease his hunger, but recalled how the shaman had warned that much more was at stake than the refinement of magic and that selfish misuse of power always led to disaster.

As the young man abandoned himself to the world of Nature he began to hear its still, small voice of mutuality. Without the fear-of-the-unknown whispering in his ears, the young man found kinship with the wild creatures he encountered. Instinctively he began to know which plants were beneficial to eat and which had powers to heal the gashes he received from the thorny bushes and sharp rocks. The whole of Nature seemed to yearn for relationship with him.

Paradoxically, when most at the mercy of the elements, he felt safe, as if held as in the loving arms of a parent. He did not fear the great storms that lashed the rocky ground. He understood how their violence replenished the earth and that death was but part of the great pulse of universal Life. The stars in the night sky shone so brightly and seemed so close that he knew himself to be part of their spiralling symphony of silence. He could sense that, in some mysterious way, he was both at the very beginning of time and, at the same moment, at its very end. Every cell of his body proclaimed his kinship with all Creation and he knew that nothing could separate him from this great, violent, creative, cohesive Love that was beyond human comprehension, beyond all rationality.

With knowledge as old as the Universe itself, the young man - now himself a Cleverman - recognised that this Love could be none other than the unspeakable, nameless One of his forefathers. Looking back over the history of his people, he grieved for their unnecessary suffering as they struggled to recover the secrets of living peaceably with each other and with the rest of Creation. What he had to do was now clear. He thought of the prophet Moses, trembling in terror before the desert shrub as it blazed with Mystery. Like Moses, he too was momentarily transfixed by fear of the task ahead of him.

Suddenly his heart was flooded with love and pity for his people who lived lives of meaningless, disconnected existence. He felt an overwhelming urgency to show them how their separateness was nothing but illusion and that Creation would welcome prodigal humanity back into the fold with great rejoicing. He would take them into wild places, into the mountains, by the sea, where again they might realise the truth that lay within each of them - that they had been fashioned from the stuff of All-That-Is.

It was clear, however, that he could reawaken people only if his words were matched by the integrity of his actions. The Love that burned within him fuelled his simple gospel of peace:

Till heaven and earth pass away not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law, which is –

That you love God in all Creation with all the energy you have and all other beings as yourself. Observe and listen carefully so that you may learn from the great diversity of Life.

As the sun rises and the rain falls on those creatures you perceive as evil and harmful as well as on those you perceive as good and useful, love those beings whom you see as your enemies so that you may know yourselves all to be true offspring within Creation.

Remember the sacredness of God's Fire that created the Universe and seeks you out to your very souls as if separating pure gold from the dross. You cannot serve God and materialism, Life and those things that destroy Creation, so do not put your energy into amassing material things for your comfort or status in society.

And do not be anxious about your life or afraid there will not be enough to go around. Rather come to re-experience Creation with the wisdom of a child, wondering at its beauty, accepting its integrity, trusting its bounty. If you are in right relation with all Creation, you have but to ask, seek, knock and all will be given and revealed to you. Look at the birds of the air, consider the lilies of the field and reflect on their ease within Creation. Seek first your integrity within Creation just as they do, and all shall be well.

Sadly, instead of ushering in a new age of peace and justice, the simplicity of the Cleverman's message was seen to threaten the very foundations of the civilisation the state had constructed for its own control. Inevitably, the Cleverman was put to death.

The Cleverman's friends had always struggled to understand him while he was alive. Now they attempted to preserve something of the phenomenon that had been his life and vision. But they did not understand that when, for their benefit, the Cleverman had mentioned "the many-mansioned abode of the Creator", he had been explaining the infinite diversity of divine expression. Instead, they believed he must be looking down on them from the finest city imaginable.

Thus it was that, in the following two thousand years, the vibrancy and universality of Earth-wisdom came increasingly to be restricted to the purely human, urban and humanistic context, to be couched in the sophistication of intellect and subjected to the manipulations of material power.

But in those Earth realms where clevermen and cleverwomen have managed to survive the barbarities of urban-based civilisation, some of the wisdom of the young Cleverman lives on, inspiring an undimmed faith in the

ever-present Dreaming, the retelling of such legends as that of Shambhala³, and rekindling visions of and commitment to establishing "the Peaceable Kingdom" -

a time that shall surely be,
when the Earth shall be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.⁴

2 OF QUAKERS AND FRUIT-BATS: RECONCILIATION AND RELATIONSHIP

In the topsy-turvy world of the Way of God as taught by Jesus, familiar categories turn upside down...

Living upside down in the rightside up world, we are asked to be and to do many things seemingly beyond human wisdom or power... If we are open to the Spirit, the signs of our times and our Quaker heritage, we will find new and unexpected places to give the fertility needed by the world, taking our own nourishment at the same time.

Janey O'Shea⁵

What I remember most about Janey O'Shea's 1993 Backhouse Lecture in Brisbane were the orphaned fruit-bats⁶ accompanying her. As a bat foster-mother, Janey could not be separated from her fragile charges which hung and elegantly swung upside down from various parts of her clothing. The message was powerful - that as Australian Quakers "living upside down in the rightside up world", we are obliged to see things in ways different from the normal perspective. Quakers, like bats, have not always enjoyed good press because, again like bats, we ultimately find we can do no other than follow our God-given leadings.

Janey's lecture dealt with the tensions and challenges Friends experience in creating their particular spiritual community. In this lecture I want to look at the way the community of Australian Friends relates within the wider community in which they find themselves -the community of the More-than Human⁷ world of Nature. I want to examine the extent to which our Quaker heritage can help us "give the fertility needed by the world" as an environmental crisis unprecedented in humanity's history gathers intensity. To avoid becoming daunted by the global scene, however, I want to look at what our Religious Society - and all people of the Spirit - may be called to do right here in Australia: to be "patterns and examples"⁸ on this continent into the coming century.

I am, however, unable to refer to the Australian natural environment without deferring to its integral relationship with Aboriginal peoples. For me, the two are inextricably one. Indigenous peoples are and will always be intimately and uniquely related within the More-than-Human world. Between our whitefella⁹ relationships with Nature and those with Aboriginal peoples there are disturbing similarities and parallels.

In this lecture I want to consider these issues from the "topsy-turvy", bat-like perspective of a Quakerism that once turned the "rightside up world" upside down. I believe that our Quaker understanding of the Spirit must lead us forward in a genuine and humble appreciation of the Earth spirituality of Aboriginal cultures. I am convinced that a fresh and open heeding of the Spirit's promptings has the potential to guide us toward a *real* reconciliation, not only with Aboriginal peoples, but also with their Earth kin and the whole of Creation.

For reconciliation to be effective, it must become more than a cosy word that makes us feel good. Real reconciliation reflects actual relationship. It demands the honesty and courage of self-knowledge, and the letting go of many previously held attitudes. To work for real reconciliation, we shall need to summon fresh Light to help us face what we must about ourselves and our culture. We shall need a spiritual awareness that challenges our comfortable parameters, and a faith strong enough for us willingly to go where we may never have ventured before.

Let us, in time-honoured fashion, begin with story-telling.

3 "WE HAVE FAILED TO RECOGNISE ..."

We are ashamed that we have failed to recognise the extent of dispossession, deprivation and trauma [suffered by the indigenous peoples of Australia] over the past 200 years. We have been and are part of a culture that has dominated, dehumanised and devalued Aboriginal religious, cultural and family life.

For this we are deeply sorry and express our heartfelt apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. We commit ourselves to working towards a reconciled Australia.

from the "Quaker Sorry Statement"¹⁰

Quakers for a Reconciled Australia (QFARA) is essentially a feeling, it is a movement of the Spirit within the hearts and minds of Friends across Australia. It is the manifestation of the Spirit working within us all. QFARA is that which gives us strength to venture into new and sometimes challenging actions with our local Aboriginal communities... QFARA allows us to speak truth to power and to the ignorant when it would be easier to be silent.

Anne Brown¹¹

Encounter in Kangaroo Valley

Well over a hundred years ago, two intrepid English Quaker missionaries, James Backhouse and George Washington Walker, decided to camp overnight in Kangaroo Valley, NSW, on their way back to Sydney.

The weather was stormy and the Quakers had been persuaded to take shelter in a rough stockman's hut. The wind lashed the tops of the tall turpentine and gum trees and incessantly banged the latchless door of the hut. Outside they could discern human movement. Campfires had been lit and, in the light of the flames, Backhouse and Walker could see an increasing number of Aboriginal people gathering quietly in the clearing around the hut.

What with the wind outside and fleas inside, the Friends were kept awake all night. They thought enviously of the ease of Aboriginal people within their natural environment. In spite of the frightening stories they had encountered

during five years of Australian travel, they sensed no threat to their safety from the campfire community. Perhaps only awkward English propriety kept them from joining the Aboriginal people and asking to be made welcome.

Next morning our Friends found that several different local mobs¹² - perhaps nearly two hundred in number - had gathered in preparation for a long journey. As the Quakers and some of the Aboriginal men were headed in the same direction, they decided to travel together, Backhouse and Walker sharing out their meagre rations in a loaves-and-fishes apportioning and the Aborigines assisting them in negotiating the precipitous Fitzroy escarpment to the north. The Quakers were intrigued to learn that the Aboriginal people were preparing to travel some great distance "to learn a new song that had recently been invented."¹³

Culture and spiritual discernment

As an Australian Quaker, I have found this encounter hauntingly significant. It occurred quite near the present Quaker-occupied land, "Werona",¹⁴ and involved kindly Friends. It also involved those the Friends saw as having some intellectual potential, "was it but rightly cultivated and expanded",¹⁵ but otherwise as a spiritually inept, doomed race worthy only of pity.

Backhouse had earlier seen the Noonuccal spiritual ceremonies on Stradbroke Island as little more than "boisterous child's play", although he conceded that "many of the amusements practised in circles of [British] society considered highly civilised might perhaps seem as absurd". In comparison with both, however, he considered "the Society of Friends to have made great advances in true civilisation beyond the rest of the world".¹⁶ As for a general appreciation of Aboriginal spirituality, Backhouse recorded that the Aborigines had "scarcely any ideas of a Deity" and "no [religious] law". He comforted himself with the knowledge that God would judge them "only according to the measure of the light they have received".¹⁷

This attitude of benevolent superiority towards "primitives", who were perceived as lacking a civilising spirituality in which the missionaries felt they needed instruction, should not be excused; a similar unconscious attitude may be found at the root of our own priorities and behaviour today.

Cultural perspective can be a powerful agent for limiting our discernment of the Spirit. While the plight of Aboriginal peoples affected them deeply,

Backhouse and Walker seem to have been unaware that their own culture had spawned such iniquities. It was their Britain that had already usurped a huge proportion of the Earth's land mass. As if by divine right, its colonies existed to feed a burgeoning techno-science with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of cheap natural and human resources.

Science-hungry Europe was poised on the brink of Darwinism. In the scientific ferment of the time, old prejudices were sanctioned and were to be given fresh vigour by Social Darwinism.¹⁸ Technological might could now be seen as scientific proof of a human ladder of superiority with the most sophisticated on the topmost rung. Mirroring their dominating, transcendent God, the European beneficiaries of this "new" philosophy, particularly British imperialists, believed they soared in wisdom and rightful power above other races. With discourse on evolution further confirming humanity's gradual emergence and perfection from some primordial existence, it is scarcely surprising that those closest the peak would come to view themselves as having a God-given right to dominate and subdue the rest of Creation. Such a theory of life, which has so little to do with Earth wisdom, could never have emerged from an Aboriginal culture.

The source of Aboriginal suffering, then, was not so much the brutality of specific colonial policies and practices as it was the very mindset and world view of the property-voracious culture of superiority in which Quakers of the time found themselves. Even so, Backhouse and Walker (and others) clearly saw the "vast pecuniary advantage derived by the Whites [who] have taken possession of the lands". They thought it was "scarcely to be supposed that... any person of reflection will be found who will attempt to justify the measures adopted by the British..."¹⁹ They did not mince their words when they declared that "the Aborigines have had wholesale robbery of their territory committed upon them by the government" and that "settlers have become the receivers of this stolen property".²⁰ Their ringing tones were noted by Barrie Pittock in his prophetic 1969 Backhouse Lecture when he asked:

What have we done, individually and corporately, as the members of the Society of Friends which Backhouse was so concerned to nurture in this country, to develop and further his insights?²¹

and called on us to –

act in love, truth and responsibility, but also with frankness and radical strength of purpose... to speak truth to power on race relations in a way which we have failed to do since the days of James Backhouse.²²

However, in spite of the pity and anger Backhouse and Walker felt at the sufferings of indigenous peoples, it is unlikely they could have seen how their own activities (even those on behalf of Aborigines) were part of the British colonising imperative. Backhouse eventually returned home to grow trees and travel further in ministry. As a nurseryman, he began to supply the increasing domestic demand for imported Australian plants, without any awareness of the respect due to the indissoluble spiritual kinship of these life-forms for Aboriginal peoples.

Walker, on the other hand, returned to Tasmania and, following a Quaker precedent, opened a bank.²³ After a total of six years' travelling among Aboriginal peoples, he seems not to have realised that he had thus chosen to become part of the cultural presence responsible for Aboriginal slavery,²⁴ for their continuing dispossession and for the destruction of their sacred lands. Even more notably, he appears not to have followed the example of Robert Cock (with whom he had found common ground on matters of Aboriginal justice and welfare) in paying rent for the privilege of living on Aboriginal land.²⁵ This despite the fact that he had acknowledged that "the Aborigines [are] the rightful owners of the soil" and stated –

that [British] occupation involves the reduction of those means of support to the Aborigines with which the Bountiful Author of Nature has furnished them & in many cases it involves their very extinction.²⁶

It seems that being a Quaker did not preclude a certain mental block when it came to the issue of white land ownership versus black land rights.

Thus, while Backhouse and Walker were, in Quakerly tradition, reformers in the areas of social justice, they were of their period and culture in matters religious, and that ultimately limited their perception of the spiritual importance of land ("country"²⁷) in Aboriginal cultures. It is relatively easy to overlook their belief in the civilising influences of European dress on Aboriginal peoples,²⁸ but it seems as if the time had long since passed when one such as John Woolman might confess to being led by love to visit with indigenous people "that [he] might feel and understand their life and the Spirit they live in, if haply [he] might be instructed by them".²⁹ Backhouse and Walker, like others of their time, were

unable to appreciate the essential spirituality and integral kinship nature of Aboriginal dependence upon country. Even less could they have imagined that country's vitality depended upon Aboriginal ceremony to sing its Spirit into being.

As they travelled north from Kangaroo Valley, Backhouse and Walker were thus prevented by the culture of their race and era from knowing that, as well as learning a new song, their "sable companions" were re-singing the ancient song cycles, a means of keeping Aboriginal peoples and country strong and united in the Spirit. They could not have guessed that only by calling on the deep wisdom of their ancestral spirits did these people have any hope of transcending the horrors of whitefella invasion. Only by weaving the nightmare of continued violation into their spiritual law - literally by means of enchantment -could their successors and their country have some chance of surviving what was yet to come.³⁰

As part of the continuing invader culture, I am haunted by what may have become of these people. Who were their law holders? Who were their gifted healers knowing the secrets of fire and weather, animals and plants, rocks and soil? Who were their wise ones? Were women and children with them? Which other mobs from the west and from the north may these Aboriginal people have joined with? And what were the Dreaming stories that guided them from birth to death? The full story about these people, this journey and this song remains unknown to us. What is certain, however, is that their spirits and this knowledge are in the land still.

I see them walking north towards the Waterloo Creek massacre³¹ in Kamilaroi lands only eighteen months into the future, and towards countless other massacres all over the country and into this century. I see their bodies becoming one with the soil and water of this continent, and feel their spirits inhabiting the rocks and trees and animals which our Western culture continues to abuse because it cannot bring itself to recognise or respond to the Spirit in the More-than-Human world or respect the experience of those who do.³²

What this story may mean for Australian Friends

The Western churches have been slow to understand that the Earth crisis is essentially a religious issue. Even so, it was eleven years ago that the World Council of Churches asked its affiliates to take up the cause of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) as a way of understanding that human justice and

human peace cannot be separated from what we do to Nature. While a few committed British Friends kept the concept afloat for about five years, it seemed that for Australian Friends it was a concern whose time had not yet come.³³

That this is an issue of a fundamentally moral and spiritual nature was recognised more recently by the Centre for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University. Between 1996 and 1998, it sponsored a conference series on World Religions and Ecology to examine the cause of the crisis, which was seen as "the imposition of culture over ecology"³⁴, and to determine the role of world religions in addressing it.

Among the Buddhist, Jain, Taoist, Jewish, Islamic, Shinto, Christian and Hindu contributions to the series were a few representing indigenous traditions. I was saddened to discover that Australian Aboriginal peoples seem not to have been invited to speak about their understanding that the Earth is their religion, the substance and focus of their entire spiritual expression.

Neither, it seems, had Quakers been invited to contribute to the conference series. I began to wonder what Friends - a people renowned for following the Spirit's leadings into the radical realms of truth-seeking and peace-making - might have had to offer this pan-faith forum.

Theology promising fulfilment in the hereafter has not ranked high in Quaker priorities. Instead, we have sought direct knowledge of God in the here-and-now of social action. We regard this as a strength of our witness for human peace and justice. We have also tended to welcome those advances of applied science (in the areas of medicine, agriculture and energy, for example) that have seemed to benefit the humanity in which our God is revealed. Ironically, we may thus have retarded our ability to address both Australia's genocidal policies and practices, and the current Earth crisis - peace issues, surely, on the grandest scale.

This is not to deny Friends' long-held and at times passionate concern for the welfare of Aboriginal peoples. Once reflected in the work of individual Quakers and then of a Yearly Meeting Race Relations Committee, this concern - as Quakers for a Reconciled Australia (QFARA) - has taken a radical turn with the potential of becoming the central focus of Australian Quakers into the new century.

In 1999 QFARA's work (of expanding Friends' understanding of "reconciliation" so that all may take responsibility) was minuted to include

"paying the rent"³⁵ and "becoming more aware of how we have profited and continue to profit at the expense of Aboriginal people". With the spiritual courage and honesty Quakerism is renowned for, QFARA has also taken on an exploration of the issue of genocide in Australia.³⁶ It is at such times that I literally quake in awe before the working of the Spirit in our midst.

To what extent QFARA can recognise the wider implications of Aboriginal genocide, particularly its More-than-Human aspects, remains to be seen. The Quaker silence has rarely contributed to the search for a corporate spiritual response to the environmental crisis. We may need to recall that a testimony to unity with Creation not only preceded, but informed early Friends' peace testimony as "the basis for all their thought and behaviour."³⁷

Perhaps now, with increased awareness of what our culture has done, not only to Nature but also to the Aboriginal world we invaded, we can consider what - if anything - Quakerism and Australian Quakers, in particular, may have to offer to a situation that concerns life as we know it in Australia and in the wider global context.

As I write, Aboriginal peoples from all over Australia are appealing to the whitefella law of this country to recognise that taking Aboriginal land infringes not only their constitutional right to freedom of religious practice,³⁸ but is yet another breach of the international Genocide Convention³⁹ which was ratified by the Australian government in 1949, but has not yet been enacted in Australian domestic law.⁴⁰

We may be shocked into action by hearing Aborigines speak of the genocide of their people,⁴¹ yet not immediately see its connection with the similarly extreme assertions of biocide and geocide.⁴² It may be hard for us to recognise that, although we - like others in Australian society - have said "sorry" for the deprivation and trauma over the past 200 years,⁴³ the way we live and act may stand in the way of reconciliation.

As Anne Pattel-Gray, former Donald Groom Fellow⁴⁴ and eminent Aboriginal theologian, says -

It takes considerably more than an apology to make up for cultural genocide... Aboriginal people do not want to hear hollow apologies from the government and churches. We want instead to see serious change take place, changes that address

the balance of power and not the sweet gestures and posturing by the government and churches for which they are known.⁴⁵

Understanding the parallels and connections between an Aboriginal perspective and that of Earth-caring and recognising our part in the invaders' culture of possession and exploitation are important to the theme of this lecture and, I believe, directly relevant to us all.⁴⁶

If we can pause in our Quaker busyness and prepare ourselves to learn from rather than merely "care for" Aboriginal peoples (as Backhouse and Walker were not quite able to do), we may begin to see the extent of our culture's damage to the soul of the country we occupy. What our culture has done to Aboriginal peoples, we continue to do to their country. If we can hear that, we may yet recognise that what we have done to the land we still do to Aboriginal peoples.

With characteristically clear perception, grass-roots Aboriginal peoples draw our attention to the intrinsic meaning of our own words. "Reconciliation" in this country cannot "restore a balance" for there never has been a golden age when blackfellas and whitefellas were in harmony. Many Aboriginal people are unable to take part in a "reconciliation" process that is based on expunging the past and starting afresh.

For Anne Pattel Gray, the reconciliation movement is "justice by facsimile - distant enough to spare whites direct guilt, yet close enough to allow a symbolic correspondence".⁴⁷ "Why do the Aboriginal People have to wait until the year 2001 to see if their rights will be recognised?" she asks. "What happens if all we get is white people being nice to us, and still no change in our social, political and economic realities? Are we to accept that 'we are now reconciled'?"⁴⁸

Anne maintains that the "reconciliation process... that the government and the churches have now endorsed is about dealing with the symptoms of racism, not its sources. White society is unable (or unwilling) to see that the conditions of the Aboriginal People are a direct result of the white majority's greed."⁴⁹ She cites our insistence on mining as "a racist disregard of Aboriginal traditional beliefs [and of their need of] keeping the integrity of their traditional spirituality and culture."⁵⁰ If we can hear Aborigines say that their pain is also the Earth's pain, we shall recognise that "reconciliation" with and for Aboriginal peoples cannot be achieved without unremitting spiritual support of the struggle for ecological justice.

We are challenged to venture beyond the comfort zone of what we each may call "the Spirit", to where things are not safely circumscribed by our definitions of where the Spirit may be found and how It may be experienced. As we clamber and swing from the end of one age to the beginning of the next, a bat-like perspective may render us more able than were Backhouse and Walker to honour the Spirits of this powerful land and to hear the strains of a new song to learn for the sake of all Life on this planet.

For consideration

Oh mat we who declare against wars, and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, may walk in the light and therein examine our foundation and motives in holding great estates! May we... try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.

John Woolman⁵¹

4 QUAKERISM AND NATURE

In the simpler communities I knew, every action was sacramental: the way in which men and women ploughed the land, cooked their food; their festivals, ceremonials and rituals; their taboos, laws and political procedures - all these derived from and expressed a divine order understood and accepted by all.

... How long, I wonder, can we survive unless we can recover the sense of the divine both in ourselves and in the atom?

*Adam Curie*⁵²

At the first Yearly Meeting I attended, an experience of the Spirit's power to weaken the individual's resistance, so that we were all swept into a unity of Love and Truth, confirmed my faith in Quakerism's potential to "raise up the good in us"⁵³ and change the world. Humble, abandoned prayer and silent waiting, with the expectation of being changed by the process, have the power to achieve the seemingly impossible, and any group of people, no matter how small, who meet together to align themselves with the Spirit of the Universe is a force to be reckoned with.

There have been times when Friends have been the "great people... gathered" of George Fox's vision.⁵⁴ At other times, however, our preference for asserting our individualism, even spiritual individualism, has tended to override any sense of corporate mission. One of the awkward problems with prayer, of really opening up to the Universal Spirit, is that we may be challenged to change - our plans for a comfortable retirement, our pet attitudes and favourite activities, even our carefully crafted beliefs. At such times the demands of the Spirit can seem far less attractive than a personal, even private, spirituality, where we remain at the controls of our lives. I suspect that, far from being a safe haven for the faint hearted, or spiritual-hobbyist, essential Quakerism cannot help but lead Friends to the edge of the precipice.⁵⁵

Quakerism - personal discoveries and disappointments

Early Friends had little truck with a fragile or hesitant spirituality as I discovered from the beginning of my enthusiastic reading of Quaker writings. Let me share some of my Quaker journey with you, from ecstatic discovery through a kind of despair and on toward a new and perhaps better grounded hope.

George Fox described his conversion experience as -

com[ing] up in spirit through the flaming sword, into the paradise of God [wherein a]ll things were new; and all creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter.⁵⁶

When I came across these words, I found parallels with the time I had been swept up into the shining certainty of a uniting Spirit that filled every aspect of life in the surrounding bush - including atheistic me - with meaning and ultimate purpose. The old perspective fell away. New ways had to be found. I began searching for a spiritual community of people whose loving concern extended in action to the whole of life, rather than to an elite section defined by anthropocentric doctrine and practice. I believed my search was over when I read Thomas Kelly's experience of -

an inflooding, all-enfolding Love... which embraces all creation, not just our little petty selves... a tendering of the soul toward everything in creation, [and the] sense in which, in this terrible tenderness, we become one with God and bear in our quivering souls the sins and burdens, the benightedness and the tragedy of the creatures of the whole world, and suffer in their suffering and die in their death.⁵⁷

From early childhood I had heard the voices in the land - voices of grief and loss and constant yearning that made me unbearably sad inside and bore no relevance to the white Australia I was educated to grow into. It was in the bush that I always felt surrounded by a loving, accepting Presence, something I often lacked while among humankind. In the bush I felt I might find answers to the questions I had barely begun to frame.

Indeed, it was in the bush, while camped one night in a remote area of North Queensland known as Kennedy's Gap, that I first became aware of the genocidal atrocities my invader's culture had kept secret from me. A full moon lit the rock and spinifex landscape starkly and the wailing of the stone curlews told me something terrible had happened there. The locals I later questioned told me

proudly about a massacre of the Kalkadoon people by pioneer pastoralists, many decades before.

The voice of the Earth I had seen violated by the excesses of mining and forest slaughter, and the voice of its dispossessed and violated Aboriginal peoples, now seemed to be the same cry of pain. It became clear that the need for peace and justice in the suffering human realm was mirrored in the More-than-Human world of the dying rainforests, grasslands, oceans and rivers.

When I encountered Quakerism, I saw Friends as offering mutual, spiritual support to those open to knowing the Spirit experimentally. Now I was among them, I could learn more about peace and justice and loving humanity, as well as test the truth of my numinous experiences and discover the right way of integrating them with action. As a geographically isolated Friend, the Quaker literature I read voraciously had to take the place of Meeting. Although it would mean leaving the bush, I yearned for close fellowship with Friends.

At first I was confused by the insistence of some weighty Friend (who may just have spoken about "our oneness with all Creation") that the Spirit was to be best, even exclusively experienced in the inter-*human* encounter. Many such insistences later, I began to wonder if Australian Friends saw God in the More-than-Human world as little more than a backdrop to Worship. It seemed that Nature could provide poetic metaphors for the spiritual life - acting as a powerful reminder of God's omnipresence and a useful trigger for spiritual renewal - but I began to doubt that it could ever be accepted as *central* to a legitimate Quaker concern. Issues of the More-than-Human sort that concerned me would not, it seemed, be deemed worthy of true Quaker consideration. To be sure, the Advices and Queries encourage Friends to live simply⁵⁹ and be gentle to Nature,⁶⁰ but I sensed that, in practice, such sensitivity had to be kept within the "reasonable" bounds of "normal" behaviour. The interests of people were to be protected at all costs.

I began to suspect that an orthodox understanding of the Genesis story⁶¹ constricted the Quaker relationship with God and that Quakerism was no less anthropocentrically⁶² inclined than any of the more doctrinal religions. For all of its benevolence, the tacit message was that humanity held centre stage. *Its* priorities and *its* perceived needs still came first and ultimately overrode any ecological responsibility.

I lacked the courage to share my experiences of the Spirit in Nature with the Meeting. They therefore remained largely hidden and at the mercy of my "better" judgement to try to reason them out of existence. How my double life as pagan⁶³ and Quaker might have fared in the long-run I fortunately did not discover for, during a conversation I had about the compatibility of Aboriginal spirituality with Quakerism, David Carline confirmed my Nature experiences as being related to the Aboriginal Spirit of this land. His encouragement enabled me to begin speaking and writing my truth and gave me a key to knowing Aboriginal peoples "in the things which are eternal". It seemed clear that my voices would neither let me turn aside nor ignore their message indefinitely.

Encouragement from Quaker roots

One of the things that has always kept me going was finding in the turbulent beginnings of Quakerism a constant source of inspiration and challenge. What to modern sensibilities may be off-putting "God-language" seems somehow integral with the immediacy and power of those early numinous experiences and the sincerity and passion with which they were received. We today are ready to own the independence, iconoclasm and bravery of the early Quaker movement, but perhaps stand to lose something uniquely precious if we underestimate or, in our awkwardness, gloss over the power of that mystical impetus, which underpinned it all.

It was just this mystical quality, this dangerous rawness of Spirit, that Backhouse and Walker's "Victorian" Quakerism managed to filter out - as had preceding generations of sensible Quietism inspired by the best wisdom, knowledge and learning of contemporary secular society. As is our own, theirs was a very different Quakerism from that which had been conceived from and born into a period of English history of unprecedented social, political, economic and religious chaos.

A bewildering array of radical movements - the Griddletonians and Muggletonians, the Fifth Monarchists, Levellers and True Levellers (or Diggers), the Ranters and the Quakers - had sprung up in a nation suddenly shattered by the political murder of Charles I, whose right to rule had hitherto been considered divinely ordained. Many of these groups expressed a personal, fresh understanding of scripture. The polemical boundaries of the religious and the political blurred frequently as philosophies developed, allegiances changed, and governmental persecution waxed and waned. It was this desperate, individual

search for meaning, spiritual truth and guidance that provided both map and *raison d'etre* for the early Quaker movement.

One of the most influential pamphleteers of the day was the Digger and proto-Quaker, Gerrard Winstanley⁶⁵, whose vision of Creation was a universe shining with the Divine Spirit. Winstanley's God "dwelt in every creature" and he was consequently convinced that -

[I]f you would know spiritual things, it is to know the spirit or power of wisdom and life... dwells with and governs both the several bodies of the stars and planets in the heavens above; and the several bodies of the earth below, as grass, plant, fishes, beasts, birds and mankind.⁶⁶

Winstanley believed that if one truly followed the guiding of the Inward Light (the "Spirit of Righteousness within", or Jesus Christ) then it would follow that one would be brought "into community with the whole globe and have community with him who is the Father of all things".⁶⁷

He held that "to reach God beyond the creation" (ie. to conceive of the Spirit as distinct from matter) -

is a knowledge beyond the line or capacity of man to attain to while he lives in this compounded body.⁶⁸

His indignation at iniquities dating back to the Norman invasion six centuries earlier fuelled Winstanley's land-rights movement. With the notion of joint human ownership of land, the Diggers' political slogan - that the Earth was a "common treasury for all" - must have resonated in the hearts of many dispossessed country people. Winstanley's rhetoric seems aimed at the race memory of those who once knew the Earth in pantheistic intimacy. There is a timeless integrity to his polemic which is in direct line with the Earth spirituality of the early Christian Church in Britain. He expressed his experience of the Divine in matter, as that which -

knit every creature together into a oneness, making every creature to be an upholder of his fellow, and so everyone is an assistant to preserve the whole: and the nearer man's reasoning comes to this, the more spiritual they are; the farther off they be, the more selfish and fleshy they be.⁶⁹

When he dug deep into the soil to plant his spring vegetables on the St. George's Hill common-land, Winstanley consciously and actively engaged with the Spirit that was available to all within the Creation. For him -

the body of Christ is where the Father is, in the Earth, purifying the Earth; and his Spirit is entered into the whole creation, which is the heavenly glory where the Father dwells.⁷⁰

In the "new heaven and new earth" he hoped would be established –

a man shall be made to see Christ in other creatures, as well as in himself; everyone rejoicing each in another, and all rejoicing in their King.⁷¹

George Fox's teenage years could scarcely have escaped the pantheism - or the pacifism⁷² and politicism - of Winstanley's revolutionary pamphlets. Perhaps not coincidentally, Fox and Winstanley later shared the services of the same radical printer.⁷³ Describing his conversion experiences, Fox wrote:

The creation was open to me; and it was shown to me how all things had their names given to them, according to their nature and virtue... I was... taken up in spirit to see into another... state.... in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues thereof, may be known.

[A]s people come into the subjection to the spirit of God and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the word of wisdom, that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being.⁷⁴

Presumably the power of this awareness led Fox to write:

What wages doth the Lord desire of you for this earth that he giveth to you... but that you give him the praises and honour, and the thanks, and the glory; and not that you should spend the creatures upon your lusts, but do good with them;... for nothing brought you into the world, nor nothing you shall take out of the world, but leave all creatures behind you as you found them...⁷⁵

Like the "primitive and right order"⁷⁶ of the Christianity it emulated, Quakerism was an expression of Spirit-led dissent. Fresh, and free of cloying dogma and accepted wisdom, it sought to experience religious reality directly. The ability to glimpse universal interrelatedness has always been the fragile gift of the mystic, heretic and prophet down through the ages. It is therefore not surprising that James Nayler (once considered by some to be the leader among

Friends) was prompted to declare that "God is the Life of every Creature, though few there be that know it".⁷⁷

Powered not only by the purity of revealed truth, but also by the formidable organisational skills of Fox and his wife Margaret Fell, Quakerism (if not individual Quakers) managed to survive the Restoration's savage persecution that wiped out many other spiritual sects of the English Revolution. It is ironic that the first statement of the Quaker peace testimony of 1661 was delivered at the same time that Friends, suddenly finding themselves under threat of death if accused of dissidence, frantically distanced themselves from those excesses of the Spirit that might seem to link them to more politically dangerous groups.⁷⁸

Among these excesses, which the young Society of Friends of the Truth was anxious to distance itself from, was a pantheism which could be redefined today as "panentheism".⁷⁹ With it disappeared the opportunity, during the next three centuries, to allow the mandate of peace to embrace that of God in the More-than-Human world.

Panentheism was not missed, although a later flowering occurred when the brilliant and aristocratic Quaker convert (also friend and hostess to George Fox) Anne Conway, formulated her concept of vitalism - the divine spark in all of Creation. It was a theory that was to inspire the work of Gottfried Leibniz. But Anne (a woman!) soon died and Leibniz's star was to be eclipsed by the meteoric brilliance of Isaac Newton.⁸⁰

In imposing an age of religious oppression, the Restoration government had helped sow the seeds of Quaker Quietism. The new monarchy was to sweep the remains of the Church's interpretative power into the lap of the newly formed Royal Society, with which Quakers, there from its inception, were to become associated in increasing numbers. In the coming generations, Truth was to be determined more and more by science. The Royal Society's passion was technological knowledge; its focus encouraged the colonisation of global resources and continents, their people and their secrets. Whereas Gerrard Winstanley had equated Christ with Reason, now Reason became synonymous with the new alchemy - scientific materialism.

Significantly, it was the gently eccentric John Woolman⁸¹ (whose conviction of the full humanity of the African led him to oppose slavery in every aspect of his life) who challenged his culture's coldly dis-spirited view of the More-than-Human world. He pleaded for the right use of the Earth's resources in

spite of contemporary customs⁸² and, in words that apply equally to our own times, lamented that -

So great is the hurry in the Spirit of this world, that in aiming to do business quickly and to gain wealth, the Creation at this day doth loudly groan.⁸³

On the rough Atlantic crossing that brought him to London Yearly Meeting, it was not his own frailties that were uppermost in his mind but rather the miseries of a crateload of bedraggled chooks.⁸⁴ Loath to inflict further suffering on the enslaved coach-horses,⁸⁵ he chose instead to walk from meeting to meeting until he arrived in York where, very likely weakened from the ordeal, he died of smallpox. For Woolman, "love was the first motion". In words which could well have been spoken by St. Francis of Assissi, he was able to say of himself:

I looked on the works of God in this visible creation and an awful tenderness covered me; my heart was tender and often contrite, and a universal love to my fellow creatures increased in me. This will be understood by such who have trodden the same path.⁸⁶

Even in his day, John Woolman was regarded as somewhat of a saintly anachronism. It is to Friends' credit that they eventually overcame their acculturation, heard Woolman's message and took it to heart for, initially, the elders of London Yearly Meeting had dismissed Woolman as a colonial oddity, the weightiest among them suggesting he should turn right round and go home again.⁸⁷

The elder who spoke thus is said to have been none other than the elegant and erudite Dr. John Fothergill. A Friend of great culture and wealth, his botanical gardens rivalled the royal gardens at Kew in grandeur and colonial species diversity. It is conceivable that, via the network of Friendly botanists, Fothergill's friendship with Joseph Banks influenced the latter's choice of a young Quaker, Sydney Parkinson, as natural history artist aboard the Royal Society's flagship, *Endeavour*, bound for the South Seas under Captain James Cook.⁸⁸ The voyage was to change the face of the known world forever and Sydney Parkinson was to die before returning home.

So, into a topsy-turvy world, where the peoples knew their identity within Creation's kinship system and lived meaningfully within a mutual reciprocity of respect and nurture, sailed the *Endeavour*. Launched by a technological ethic that

had reduced Nature to the position of a giant machine made by God for man's benefit, the national philosophy of most of those on board was one that regarded those who lived by Nature's laws as having a mindset "little superior to that of monkeys".⁸⁹

The fate of the Great South Land was thus sealed. This ancient continent and its offspring, both human and More-than-Human, were henceforth to satisfy every whim of a culture secure in its superiority and seemingly unstoppable in its momentum. No longer the embodiment of Spirit, its Nature was to become a chattel, to be raped and manipulated to serve the insatiable desires of an Empire at its zenith.

In the one hundred and thirty years since Creation had opened itself to Fox, Quakers - successful tradespeople and, in particular, scientists and technicians associated with the adventures of the Royal Society -had, in innumerable ways, helped create the world represented by the *Endeavour's* voyage.⁹⁰ A mere sixty years on, Backhouse and Walker were accordingly able to plant their benevolent steps in an antipodean landscape cleared for them by that same superiority and perceived invincibility. It was a landscape wherein the peoples were raped and murdered, the country conquered and subdued by clear-felling and, as far as conditions would allow, moulded into a semblance of British decorum and competent productivity.

We may not wish to blame Backhouse and Walker for not being able to comprehend in their time the links between their culture, and the land and the welfare of the Aboriginal peoples for whom they cared so much. We today, however, have no such excuse, and it is to that difficult topic that we now turn.

For consideration:

It were happy if we studied nature more in natural things; and acted according to nature; whose rules are few, plain and most reasonable.

Let us begin where she begins, go her pace, and close always where she ends, and we cannot miss of being good naturalists.

The creation would not be longer a riddle to us; the heavens, earth and waters, with their respective, various and numerous inhabitants, their productions, natures, seasons, sympathies and antipathies; their use, benefit and pleasure would be understood by us: and an eternal wisdom, power, majesty, and goodness, very conspicuous to us, through those sensible and passing forms: the world wearing the mark of its Maker, whose stamp is everywhere visible, and the characters very legible to the children of wisdom.

And it would go a long way to caution and direct people in their use of the world, that they were better studied and knowing the creation of it.

For how could men find the conscience to abuse it, while they could see the great Creator look them in the face, in all and every part thereof?

Therefore ignorance makes them insensible; and to that insensibility may be ascribed their hard usage of several parts of this noble creation, that has the stamp and voice of a DEITY everywhere, and in everything, to the observing.

William Penn (1693)⁹¹

5 AUSTRALIAN FRIENDS AND THE CULTURE OF SUPERIORITY

I speaking story and this story you got to hang on, no-matter who you, no matter what country you...

This law, country, people... no-matter who you people, red, yellow, black and white... but the blood is same. Country, you in other place but exactly blood, bone... 'e same.

Feeling with my blood or body, feeling this tree and country. While you sitting down 'e blow, you feel it wind and same this country you can look but feeling make you...

Someone can't tell you. Story 'e telling you yourself. 'E tell you how you feel because tree or earth because you brought up with this earth, tree, eating, water.

That way they give us talk.

So I'm saying now, earth is my mother or my father...

White-European got to be listen this culture and this story because important this one.

Bill Neidjie⁹²

Friends often insist on putting a significant distance between the Christian missionary paternalism of Backhouse and Walker and the broad-minded, humanistic tolerance of non-credal, non-proselytising Quaker practices in contemporary Australia. It is sobering to discover that the same assumption of a European spirituality and culture, so advanced that it has nothing to learn from a belief system we have mostly learnt to call stone-age, still supports our whitefella life.

Such an attitude of superiority,⁹³ no matter how skilfully disguised, makes it easier for us to believe that, through our good-will and greater knowledge of the way things really are, this land and its people may ultimately be better off for our civilising presence.⁹⁴ It is a premise which helps even Friends forget that, before the invasion, the Aboriginal peoples had every need met through a strict adherence to their law. It helps us forget that our non-indigenous lives and livelihoods are built on the fact of Theft.⁹⁵

Invasion and Theft

I believe that we incomers must face this fact of Theft, moment by moment in our daily lives, if we are to build any viable relationship with Aboriginal peoples and if we are to make any significant shift in the way we treat this land, and ultimately this Earth. While self-destructive guilt for what cannot be reversed is, of course, a senseless waste of energy, a constructively shaming acknowledgement of this fact of Theft has the power to humble us into a new way of being.⁹⁶

Like all non-Aboriginal Australians for the last two centuries, we arrived in or were born into a country as different as possible from everything our culture taught was the way things should be. The disappointment of early settlers - in the deceptively poor soil, in the untidy, fire-prone bush, in the seasons' dramatic treachery to agriculture - is to be found identically expressed with surprising frequency among even fifth and sixth generation whitefella Australians today. Ours has generally been a transplanted reality and our history has consisted of labouring incessantly to recreate a viable European landscape, both human and "natural", from this most contrary of environments.

Our religions, too, have been transplanted. Friends may have brought to these shores George Fox's concept of a great people gathered in the freshness of the Spirit, but it has been a Spirit circumscribed by our cultural mores and the religious imagery of Europe. In a land where fire and water represent the major forces of regeneration, we cling to concepts of light and darkness, which bear little relevance to the reality of our Australian experience.

Along with the rest of the English-speaking Western world, we have inherited the invaders' spoils, have perpetrated the legacies of the scientific and industrial revolutions and have distanced ourselves from an intimate relationship with the Earth by centuries of growing individualism and concomitant materialism.

However hopeful we are of reconciliation and sorry that our culture has shattered the Aboriginal past, we remain unconscious of how our culture's headlong ecological destruction continues to distort the Aboriginal present and of how it steals the Aboriginal future. As long as we remain insensitive to the relevance this ecological destruction has to our own spiritual lives, we shall be unaware of its genocidal significance to Aboriginal peoples.

Our part in ongoing genocide and ecocide

As migrants, and mostly urban at that, we have long been denied an experiential knowledge of the lands of our ancestors. Possibly for this reason we are oblivious to an indigenous system of law so strong that it enabled thousands of human generations to live in physical and spiritual cooperation within a natural environment of challenging extremes.

It is hardly surprising that we Australians of European descent feel safer affirming the sanctity of a culture of comfort-seeking, personal wealth and economic growth than we do defending the sacredness of the Earth and the wisdom of its elders. Ultimately, because we hold the power, it is what we deem best from a Eurocentric perspective that holds the casting vote, whether it be about pasture-lands versus the bush, employment versus old growth forests, mineral-derived prosperity versus the integrity of the Earth, or about fundamentals such as human birth, health, and dying. Even in the struggle for Aboriginal justice we feel that non-indigenous structures (like ATSIC) and laws (like Native Title)⁹⁷ will offer the best deal - perhaps because they challenge our cultural values least. Until we can step back from such cultural centrality, it is unlikely we can be aware of the extent to which our very ways of thinking and perceiving may hold within them the seeds of what Aboriginal peoples call continuing genocide.⁹⁸

Eighty per cent of us choose to live in urban settlements that huddle on our coastline as if ready for imminent evacuation. As if to ward off the spectres from Australia's bloody past, our domestic environments are paved over, built up, exotically planted, eternally lit and incessantly on the move. Safe here from the night sky's scrutiny, from the secret whisperings of the bush and the dangers of wilderness, we feel protected from the Earth's feedback which those who rely directly upon the elements must monitor. Our excursions into the "empty" interior, or even to a piece of unknown bushland, are frequently of short, timid duration and tethered by the umbilical cord of a twentieth century technology excessive in its use of irreplaceable energy. However gently we feel we walk upon the bitumen of the city, we are mostly unaware of the massive pressure our footprints impose upon the Earth's life-systems.⁹⁹

No matter how dearly we may love the wilderness, the offerings of civilisation (or, rather, urbanisation) are what increasingly we feel we cannot live without. Cities nurture us with libraries and good bookshops, live-music and the theatre, superior education for our children and the stimulation of intellectual

company while, for our infirmities and to prolong our old age, they ensure the latest in medical technology. For Friends, especially in our big Meetings for Worship and our multitudinous Committees, cities are where it all happens and some urban scientists tell us that the bigger the city, the better!¹⁰⁰ We may concur with the permaculture principles of diversification which teach us that monocultural crops are weakened and susceptible to diseases, yet fail to see how ailing, how vastly damaging and unsustainable is the monoculture, both physical and spiritual, of the urban landscape.

The urban ideal seems to be lauded even in the Bible. Here we find humanity's story beginning in a "garden" of abundance (where God is a constant, immanent companion), but ending (if we are good) in a celestial city. Something doesn't quite hang together here. While disobeying Nature's divine laws causes humanity to be expelled from close relationship with the divine in Creation, repentance is not rewarded by a return to the pristine state. Does this mean that not even for God's laws should we ever relinquish attachment to the human achievements of our culture?

For Canadian farmer and Quaker, Keith Helmuth, this image of Heaven is based entirely on a vision of urban Utopia: "a vision in the collective imagination of Christendom as it turned into Western civilisation [that has driven] the whole modern project of economic development - both capitalist and socialist" to the present day:

Ultimate convenience and total leisure. No work, no struggle. Total peace, joy and contentment. No conflict, sadness or suffering. No decline or decay or death ... the exact opposite of a rural or wildland life or economy ... The concept of a heaven, like the design of our central urban environments, is based on transcending the fundamental meteorological, biophysical, energetic, metabolic and economic conditions of Earth process...¹⁰¹

To generate the energy that feeds these urban cultural demands, we have dammed and rechannelled the wild and sacred rivers, destroying their communities of fish and water-weed. To produce the tastes of Europe in abundance, our overstocking pastoral practices have degraded more than half of all grazing lands and our agricultural practices have done likewise to more than two thirds of the arable land. To irrigate the food crops our cities cannot produce, we have driven holes into the Earth's secret wells and have come to reap a harvest of bitter salt. It is predicted that in fifty years time salt-poisoned soil caused by land clearing and irrigation practices will occupy five times the area it does today.

In spite of an amazing body of scientific knowledge, our awareness of Life's interconnectedness is still so embryonic that it has effected little change to the way we expect to live. "Since country is so tender to touch ... even where we mean to mend her, we end her."¹⁰² Behind the front of the national parks, the reforestation, Landcare, and recycling programmes, materialistic expediency is still the order of the day. Whatever little reparation is achieved is far outstripped by a day's work on the subsidised land-clearer's bulldozer - at the rate of more than 200,000 hectares each year.

Of the number of precious mammal species lost to the world in the past two hundred odd years, half were once native to this continent. Currently Australia has the world's highest percentage of endangered, threatened or vulnerable mammal species, and the extinctions continue. It is estimated that by the end of the 21st century, one half of Australia's bird species will have vanished. Frogs are classically regarded as a sign of ecological health, yet grave concern is held for twenty per cent of our globally significant frog species.¹⁰³ Since I left North Queensland ten years ago, three of the frogs I knew intimately in the highland tropical rainforests have disappeared.

Since the first Quaker set foot on these shores, the demands of a culture we like to think of as one of learning and refinement has annihilated more than half the unique forest covering of this land. At least half of that destruction has occurred during the last fifty-five years.¹⁰⁴ "Green cradles" of the Earth's oldest genetic lineage and each one of them miracles of tenacity and endurance throughout aeons of dramatic climate change, the Gondwanan rainforests have been clear-felled or their areas drastically reduced and impoverished.¹⁰⁵ In little more than one hundred and fifty years, the grasslands in Victoria have been reduced to less than 0.2 per cent of their original shimmering expanses of kangaroo grass, golden murrnong and lilies.¹⁰⁶ Because of the extent of land clearance, crop-boosting and control, grazing and weed-infestation, delicate ecological balances have been shattered and the aged remnants of a tree-canopy once sheltering the earth from the ravages of the weather are no longer able to reproduce. The mines that contribute to our ideas of civic wealth and progress have, in many areas, poisoned the aquifers, and irrevocably destroyed the most ancient of soils and areas of breathtaking beauty. Although mining affects much smaller areas than do agriculture, pastoralism and even urbanisation, it invariably drives mortal wounds into the heart of Aboriginal spirituality.¹⁰⁷

Other unique expressions of the Divine will not come again. Unaware that our language, historically and in its acculturating power, is one of theft and colonisation, we have helped to impose English here as this country's language. Of the two hundred and fifty unique and sophisticated Australian languages (and at least six hundred distinct dialects) that existed prior to invasion, eighty-five per cent will never be heard again.¹⁰⁸ Apart from annihilating this sacred tool of Earth-wise cultures, such extinguishment also means that across the greater part of the continent, the animals and birds, rivers, rocks and trees will never again be greeted or celebrated in song by their human relatives.¹⁰⁹

In many ways we continue to deny the essential nature of this land. We are afraid of a pyromaniacal God who threatens our essential way of life each summer.¹¹⁰ Although our experts have begun to glimpse the complexities of Aboriginal fire-wisdom, they still feel such knowledge can be acquired without reference to the ancient *spirituality* that sources it.¹¹¹ Fire, however, is not only the terrifying, the untameable, the destroyer. It is also the powerful and sacred element of purification and regeneration for this land and its Aboriginal peoples. Fire is fundamental to life - the life of the cosmos, the life of the bush and of our own materialistic souls. To hope for new-life without Fire in this land, is akin to expecting Resurrection without the Crucifixion, or looking for the Light while denying the darkness it shows.

Our invader culture spreads across the landscape, yet our senses are insulated from recognising how its impact results in a litany of tragedies. Not only the soils, grasslands, forests and waterways, but Aboriginal lives are devastated - by substance abuse, violence and suicide that are the direct result of having the ground of their being torn from them.

What we do not know about, we cannot pray about or act on behalf of. Because we do not recognise the Spirit in all life, we cannot make the connection between what happens in the human and the More-than-Human spheres. As we fail to address the source of such violence, what we do (or don't do) pronounces it irrelevant to our prayer, our worship and our corporate concerns, and the losses continue unnoticed, unmourned and unaddressed by us as a community.

Australian Quakers and the Spirit in the More-than-Human World

Although there yet seems little real awareness that the living Earth is more than just a useful background for our human endeavours, Friends have lately

joined the throng who say something must be done about how we "treat the environment". Our testimony to simplicity seems tacitly to advocate reducing, recycling and reusing; we refer to our interconnectedness with all life and "that of God" in all Creation; we speak of "befriending Creation" and "walking gently on the Earth". In spite of this, our words seem to lack the convincing ring of direct, complacency-shattering experience and sound more like a Quakerly afterthought of postmodern spiritual correctness.

There is no doubt that Friends do try to act with loving concern, but most of us are, nevertheless, Westerners, first and foremost. It is hard for us to accept that, with our heady vantage of Western intellect, technological sophistication and four hundred years of the Age of Reason behind us, we ourselves could be part of the problem. Our alienation from the Earth has made it well nigh impossible for us to appreciate the validity of a spiritual perspective in which the minutiae of human life relate intimately within the vastness of the cosmos, the myriad tasks and tools of practical, material daily life being indivisible from the indwelling Spirit. As a people who traditionally encourage each other to bring the whole of our lives under the ordering of God's Spirit, we Quakers should find a distinction between the spiritual and the practical-and-tangible antithetical. Yet, despite our words about interconnectedness, we act as if the Earth were spiritually separate from us.

Perhaps we have been no more ready than Backhouse and Walker to credit that the sixty thousand years of unimaginably rich knowledge of the same Spirit, which informed our Christian tradition for but two millennia, may have anything to teach *us*. One of the risks of engaging fully in the social problems of our time - as Quakers try to do - is that Friends ingest no less of the matrix of Scientific Rationalism than the rest of society. We seem no less reluctant to compartmentalise and are no more willing to face the rawness of the Spirit and ask what It might demand of us. Although we hope our meetings are held in obedience to the Spirit, we - like the rest of Australian society - are the inheritors of the spoils of conquest and the technological exploitation of the land. We have changed our ways only in so far as our own culture changes, that is, in order to keep pace with the supernova of Western technology. We find it difficult to face the fact that the Earth's dying is our dying, too.

As long as we refuse to acknowledge our prodigality and the pain of our consequent alienation from the Earth, we shall be prevented from recognising the alienation we have created for others. Our dilemma often is that the Spirit can seem at variance with the scientific logic that our culture demands be the guide and protector of our modern lives. We confuse anthropocentrism with

"unconditional love", and the voice of our logic and scientific knowledge - and even more recent psychology-wisdom - with "the voice of the Spirit". If we continue to do this, we are unlikely to think it possible that we - and our culture and its fundamental attitudes - might be mistaken.¹¹²

In our desire to redress the wrongs done to Aboriginal peoples, we have focussed on alleviating their material suffering with measures we consider appropriate - better housing, education, health-care, greater representation in our whitefella political structures, more jobs, more money. We want to be fair; we want to be generous; we want to include them in our life here. It is often hard to accept that, as long as our ecocidal practices continue, our well-meant offerings are frequently experienced as a continuation of the genocidal policy of assimilation.¹¹³ How can we discover what Aboriginal peoples need if we consider *ourselves* to be the hosts in this land? How shall we ever listen to the Earth's needs if our own desires clamour above our ability to hear?

Recognition of the Spirit in anything other than the human sphere still generally belongs to Quaker's no-man's land.¹¹⁴ I have discovered that I am not alone and that other Friends (and non-Friends) are familiar with the Spirit in the More-than-Human world. But the inability to know what to do with such knowledge in this humanistic, a-theological (perhaps even atheistic), scientifically-rational Quaker world can often be isolating. In trying to discern the true and universal Spirit in this way, these Friends have looked to our Meetings for spiritual support and say they have not often found it.

If we, as a cultural species, are to change our ways of behaving within the community of Nature, we shall have to do more than green our current life-styles. Just as grass-roots Aboriginal peoples tell us that "reconciliation" cannot be built on a whitefella-business-as-usual basis, so Earth spokespeople everywhere insist that we need to "reinvent the human at the species level".¹¹⁵

Barrie Pittock, an atmospheric physicist, warns us that any new relationship with the environment must include a "fundamental revision of traditional Western values".¹¹⁶ Anything short of "new thinking, new concepts and new words... about our whole relation to the non-human world", and changing "a habitual priority system, one which seemed relatively coherent because we were used to it, but which is no longer workable"¹¹⁷ will be useless.

The shift needed will be too great for us to remain radically unchanged by it. Like the Aboriginal people who befriended Backhouse and Walker, we too will

have "to learn a new song" if we, as well as the objects of our care and Quaker service, are to survive.

If we are serious about learning that new song, about challenging the genocidal, biocidal and geocidal impetus of our dis-spirited and dis-encharnted times, we shall need to align ourselves with the greatest power we know. This will not be found in fear-breeding forecasts of environmental doom, nor even in the well-meaning kindness of Friends. Rather, I believe it will be found "in the virtue of that life and power" that is Love.

For consideration:

Sometimes we forget that Friends talked about their witness as the "Lamb's War", a witness characterised by "revolutionary faithfulness". Without that tremendous vision it has been easy to slip into the worldliness accumulating that John Woolman refers to as cumber, which prevents us from living the revolution to our fullest extent. Loaded down with this cumber, we tend to emphasise individual change and compassionate response to oppression and injustice because it is easier in the affluent society, where identification of the largely middle class Society of Friends with oppression is largely intellectual, and can as easily be dropped as entered into.

[I]f we are to have any relevance in the movements of change which surround us, then we must develop a catalyst role, taking on tasks where we can realistically fulfil our expectations [and] emphasising those "peculiar" aspects of our faith which brought us together as a Religious Society of Friends in the first place.

Peter D. Jones ¹¹⁸

6 "LOVE AS THE FIRST MOTION"

When we see nature as flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood whose handling will not only affect us directly by the feelings we sense through our actions but also indirectly because every change we cause in nature will influence us and others now and in the future, for better or worse, then we will be moving to wholeness, to health. The environmental movement is pointing to the close interconnectedness of our terrestrial spaceship, but is not yet releasing that love which alone can adequately reverse present trends.

What we need is a rebirth of love for matter, becoming friends with rocks...

*Theodor Benfey*¹¹⁹

As a consequence of hearing an account of a visit to Aboriginal peoples in northern and central Australia, the 1976 Yearly Meeting Epistle records that Friends were reminded "forcefully of [their] ability to become tools of the Spirit if [they] tread with humility, listen with imagination and carry deep love in [their] lives".¹²⁰

After food and shelter, nothing seems to drive us more than the search for love - what it really is and how we may know it - and nothing seems more misunderstood or elusive. With so many experts in so many fields expounding on love for so many centuries, I feel shy of even bringing the word before you; I cannot think that I have anything new to contribute. Yet, while it seems that theory and knowledge will be insufficient to push us across the safety barrier into the unknown territory of the Other, perhaps by continuing our faltering search for mysterious, untameable Love we can help each other achieve that end.

During my search for a spiritual community, I began to recall my Sunday School teaching - how Jesus' love had led to "the Cross", how he was supposed to have "done it" once and for all, and how, by making him special, we mortals were saved from the pain and loneliness of such a path. Somehow a vital ingredient seemed missing. Only later did I encounter the concept of "the way of the Cross".

During the early period of my Quaker reading I encountered ordinary folk who nevertheless seemed charged with a transforming power to rise above the odds and achieve extraordinary things. Not infrequently these Quakers managed

to go "the way of the Cross" because of their openness to this transforming power, which was Love. For all their lack of theological tutoring, their experience of the Spirit taught them that a life of love and justice comes at a high price but that, if they were to be fully human like Jesus, they had to expect to pay it. It seemed to me that the story of Quakerism was less a saga of good deeds by courageous men and women than a continuing testimony to the power of a universal and infinite Love at work in lives open to the unexpected possibilities of the Spirit.

Knowing this Spirit experimentally is to live perpetually on the edge, where one is constantly challenged and facing change. Rare souls, no doubt, can go it alone, but most of us are frail, timid, and yearning after a trouble-free life. We need each other to help us stay the distance, to keep us steadfast in a world which makes tranquillity at any price seem highly desirable. We need the support of a community that shares the broader vision of our part in bringing Heaven to this Earth, to this life, now.

I hope this quintessentially Quaker commitment is still true of Friends, for without constant and rigorous examination of what we mean by Spirit and what our experience of this Spirit is, we cannot assume we are acting in accordance with Its leadings. A continual sharing of stories, ancient and current, is one of the practices that keep Aboriginal peoples true to their Dreaming, mindful of the significance of every occurrence and fully awake to the Spirit in everything.¹²¹ Nothing less than such mindfulness of the Spirit in our own lives will give us the motivation needed for change and the vision required for us to help redirect the future.

What price Love?

Two hundred years ago Love was the prime-mover in a great socio-political reversal. Many Friends, who hitherto had felt scant stops in the mind about the propriety of slavery,¹²² awakened to the existence of the Spirit in the black slave. The unthinkable was thought and the unreasonable was acted upon. The foundations of burgeoning capitalism in England and America were shaken by the groundswell of the anti-slavery movement.

Behind the honouring of Aboriginal achievements in the whitefella world and the respectable curtain of Reconciliation a violence exceeding that of slavery exists in Australia today. The environmental destruction alluded to in the previous chapter has polluted and disturbed the natural levels of sacred water-holes;

mountains and hillsides have been mined of their sacred power; places where the Ancestors dwell are barred to Aboriginal access by our whitefella usage of them; seasonal cycles of biological interrelationships celebrated in song, dance and story and giving each people their unique identity have been destroyed or fragmented. Even our National Parks (frequently areas of great sacredness to Aboriginal peoples) are "protected" by whitefella concepts that owe more to museum curatorship than to an understanding of how humans may live within the natural world; they separate Aboriginal peoples from "the ground of their being" as do all our incursions into their sacred spaces.

Injury to their ancestral lands, to their water, to their kin-creatures is felt personally, physically, in the organs of their bodies, in their minds and in their spirits.¹²³ Aboriginal people tell us repeatedly that this is why they get so sick, yet we would rather look for any other cure than returning their lands to them.¹²⁴ In desperation at our obtuseness, they drink themselves into oblivion rather than turn their anger onto us,¹²⁵ and Aboriginal youth (inherently so stunningly clever, so vibrant with life) commit suicide. The difficult thing for us to accept is that this is happening because the culture of which we are part continues to steal essential meaning from their future.¹²⁶

Ten years ago Jo Vallentine alerted Friends to the urgency of the Earth's crisis and begged us to take it seriously.¹²⁷ A walk in the forest, in touch with the beauty and healing powers of Mother Nature, may lift our spirits, but such self-gratification is worth little unless it is part of a conscious, ongoing relationship with the More-than-Human world - a relationship that manifests in prayerful understanding of the issues and practical actions of support.

Ecological violence is an issue that needs every nuance of our Quaker peace testimony. It has reached such unprecedented proportions that I wonder at how we Friends can speak of Aboriginal and "green" concerns as if they belong to separate special-interest groups in which not all of us will want to participate. Not all the twenty-five uranium mines scheduled to follow Jabiluka will be situated in one of the world's favourite beauty spots.¹²⁸ Not all their Aboriginal custodians will have the resources to offer a clear invitation for us to stand in solidarity by their sides. Uranium is only one form of mining, and mining is only one form of sacred country devastation threatening the intricate web of relationships which give Aboriginal peoples their very being. Ignoring the environmental crisis will render us unable to distinguish the true voice of the Earth from the reasoned and rational arguments of vested human interests, and incapable of recognising that

ecological destruction here is enslavement of the human as well as of the More-than-Human.

I suspect it is fear that encourages our well-educated, invader culture to keep the Spirit imprisoned in the realm of the human and our concept of proper religion carefully non-pantheistic. A true recognition of the inalienable rights of those we have dispossessed, both human and More-than-Human, would challenge the foundations of every accepted economic, legal, medical, agricultural, educational, ethical practice, and turn our smug, materialistic, whitefella world upside down.

The integrity of really loving

From my Sunday School days I recall the baffling words "We love because He first loved us." They meant nothing to me then, but when I think of the trees I know and recall great overwhelming of love from Nature, I believe I do know something of their meaning.

We affirm that "God is in all Creation; all Creation is in God".¹²⁹ However, in observing the nature of our corporate actions, I cannot but wonder if this is an inescapable, experienced reality or just a comforting, intellectual concept. Aware of the great distance between intellectual knowledge and the Spirit's knowing, Australian Quaker Clive Sansom observed:

We, with microscope before us,
Know that the wildflower's single leaf
Is million-celled, miraculous
And beautiful beyond belief.

But only with the mind we know it –
Our mind dissects and probes, completes
The diagram and graphs to show it;
Our heart maintains its eighty beats.

Only the child of ten and under,
The very simple, or the very odd,
Can feel the flower in all its wonder
And know its essence to be God.¹³⁰

If we are not careful as individuals and as a spiritual community, "obedience to the Spirit's leadings", which is still claimed to be intrinsic to Friends' actions, may become little more than a picturesque figure of speech. A sure sign of Love's integrity is that it never relies upon the spoken word alone, but hastens to become the flesh of action.

The elements of love-in-action are fundamental to building true community:

- being present for and engaged with the reality of the Other (whether this be the grass-roots Aboriginal peoples, or the More-than-Human world);
- paying attention and listening, even when what we hear terrifies us;
- having the courage to drop what shields us from facing the pain we have inflicted;
- being willing to learn how to approach the Other and how to allow the Other to come close to us;
- cherishing our divinely created differences;
- being open to experiencing the Other as our close kin;
- recognising that we are no worthier than the Other of Life's riches;
- summoning the energy to let go all that is not essential to who we are.

Our common heritage, the Earth, demands reciprocal relationship. Although the Other can seem to be there for our enjoyment, refreshment, edification, we must be there for the Other, too. Like John Woolman, we must be open to experiencing "an awful tenderness towards our fellow creatures". Somehow Love must be "the first motion" for us, too, because nothing else will have the power to grow us into who we must become.

The risk of loving

Taking the risk to be open to unknown, unpredictable areas of the Other can be terrifying. Once I drop my shield of superiority and lightness, lose my bargaining power and control, and disclose my vulnerability, there is nothing for

me to do but to wait in the silence without guarantee. It can seem like imminent death and, in a sense, it is. Understandably, change is something I usually resist until some force propels me forward into a new area of growth and awareness. Love is just such a force.

Love can lead us into the abyss of folly and risk-taking. Many years ago I was struck by the empirical evidence of those involved in truly non-violent action that when one refuses to act aggressively toward the Other, even to the extent of self-protection, the violence is greatly reduced. I began to see the bacteria and viruses, which cause disease, and the so-called weeds and pests, which have plagued our agricultural efforts for the past ten thousand years, as threatening Others, against whom we have waged war. I wondered what might happen were I to practise peacemaking with these More-than-Human antagonists.

While planting trees, I once gashed one of my fingers deeply. My work with the Spirits of Nature had been so focussed and passionate that when I was told my finger had become infected with staph bacteria,¹³¹ I could not bring myself to take antibiotics because I knew they would kill so much of the community of life in my body. Instead, I addressed "that of God" in the staph and asked It not to take over but, instead, to respect my life, too. Although I am not sure I necessarily could repeat the process, I do still have ten fingers.

Some years ago we rented a suburban property which was impossibly choked with oxalis weed. With greater knowledge of this gardener's nightmare than I, Ray took a powerful weedicide to it and, when that had no effect, I spent weeks systematically removing each little nut-like root from carefully marked areas. Our efforts netted an oxalis crop surpassing that of our neighbour's in determined virility. Only then did I remember "that of God" in the oxalis. In less than six weeks not one oxalis could be found although their acid-yellow flowers could clearly be seen on the other side of the fence. Our garden was free of them for over six months until we moved out. Then they began to creep back.

We have a peace-pact, too, with the rabbits where we live. In spite of several warrens among the rocks and stories of devastation to everything planted by our neighbours, the rabbits cause no damage to our tree plantings or kitchen garden, and although we occasionally see them, their warrens seem no longer open for business.

You may be wondering how an environmentalist can feel compassion for introduced pests, particularly one that has caused so much devastation to the soil

of this country. When I consider the damage done by us whitefellas - invaders just like the rabbits and the oxalis - I am reluctant to get too self-righteous. As I have never heard Aboriginal peoples suggest that we vanish from their land, I feel obliged to look for less violent alternatives to eradication of other introduced pests.

Love is Mystery and may also be a mystery. It is often hard to admit we may have a problem with loving. I used to think it was just people like me - those from what is now termed "dysfunctional" backgrounds - who struggled to know the what and how of love. It was not until I visited a representative of my local Aboriginal community and began to "pay the rent", that I began to suspect my whole culture might have a problem with love.

"Paying the Rent" can be a harrowing business. When I first decided to do so, I felt as if I were falling headlong into the unknown. I had to counter the dire warnings from friends and neighbours about inevitable eviction and property confiscation by a mob of blacks if I gave them an inch. After more than six months, I eventually discovered the local grass-roots community. The man I spoke to listened, his full attention reassuring me as I struggled to find the courage to admit that every aspect of my life lived on Aboriginal land had been founded upon gross injustice. I spoke from the shame I had felt for all those years of empty, echoing hillsides, for the blacks' camp down by the river on the way to the rubbish dump, for the aunties drunk outside the pub and for the kids in my kids' classes getting beaten every day because they were black. I explained that I felt I had to acknowledge in some tangible way that I had no moral right to the land I lived on.

Then, out of the blue and in a way I had never heard anyone speak before, the man began to talk about love - how he loved his country (quite different from patriotism), how he loved his people, how he loved his family... The telephone rang, and it was his mother ringing from a thousand miles away. He finished his conversation with her and then suggested that if I would like to get to know his people and his country, I should be made welcome. All I had to do was go down the main street of Mataranka and ask for his Aunty. She would look after me and take me out to the camp along the Roper River.

Whether it had been my confession or whether they just did things differently this side of the race-divide I wasn't sure but, as I handed over my annual rent cheque of a mere \$12, I knew things would never be the same for me after such a close brush with love. Far from its being the tokenism I have heard it

described, "paying the rent" offers a practical way forward for whitefella Australians to honour the spiritual reality of inextinguishable Aboriginal sovereignty.¹³² Entering into a "tenancy" with the Aboriginal owners of the land I live on has provided a just foundation for coming to know Aboriginal peoples "in the things which are eternal".

Forgiveness

For some years I searched everywhere for a wisdom that could teach me how to forgive. While acknowledging the necessity of forgiveness, our culture's wisdom seems confused and inexperienced when offering a practical guide to beginners. Popular wise words, such as "you must first forgive yourself, gave me the sense I had missed the tail-end of a circular argument.

I once sat in a rainforest that I knew was to be logged for the purpose of scientific comparison with commercially logged forests. At the time, a lawless timber industry was hell-bent on beating World Heritage listing to the treasures of the pristine forests. Loggers worked overtime to cut great swathes through the singing canopies and their timber-jinkers ferried out the naked hulks of trees which were often more than a thousand years old.

The sense of imminent loss of unique beauty, of the unstinting generosity of such boundless life, and, most of all, of the still, patient, listening, healing Presence, seemed unbearable. I felt a hopelessness, and a sense of profound shame that we Westerners had brought such savagery into a place of such sacredness. As I sat aching with despair, an image of trees dying that a new awareness of the sacredness of Nature could be reborn in our hearts began to form.¹³³ The certainty of a power, a wisdom, a love, and an understanding beyond definition, gradually stole over me and filled my heart. I can only describe this experience as one of forgiveness.

For a time I thought such forgiveness could be experienced only from the More-than-Human world. Then, one afternoon I found myself sitting with an outback Aboriginal community. I had just been given a skin-name and, as each new person arrived, I was introduced to a particular member of my family, my new older-sister sitting beside me, explaining and translating when necessary.

Suddenly there was a commotion on the edge of the circle. A man, very big, very drunk and very angry, gesticulated threateningly. It seemed that he was

shouting violent abuse at me, and at the others for associating with me. I have to confess that fear at suddenly finding myself far from home among people so different from me was even greater than my shame at more than two hundred years of whitefella violation. I bowed my head and, as sole representative of my culture, I waited to be punished.

I began to hear murmurs from the others, words such as "sister", "niece" and so on. Then my older sister whispered, "He's your father, you call him ganthathu." The man, too, had been told and his face softened. He walked over to me, took my hand and leaned down to kiss me in greeting. He was sorry, so very sorry. He had not known that I was his daughter. He began to reach into his pockets for treasured photos of his sons and daughters so he could show me my brothers and sisters.

Forgiveness, too, is Mystery. I have, however, come to suspect that we may find it comes as a gift of grace from all Life when we experience ourselves as close kin to the Other and, at the same time, are most truly, most nakedly, most humbly and unpretentiously ourselves.

The fear of loving

Sometimes I think it is fear that prevents us from opening ourselves fully to loving and being loved. I am sure there must be others who, like me, have spent a lifetime trying to justify their existence because of a belief that the essential self is unworthy of so great a gift as love. We may be advised to "be ourselves", but our culture's strong feedback is that this self is but a starting point. The message is that for us to be truly lovable, the self must be overlaid with acceptable appearance, education, creativity, property, personality, deportment, good works, niche in society and so on. While the stresses of conforming frequently prove too great for us to continue, our failure does not necessarily ensure that we truly come to know our essential selves.

The contrast with the Aboriginal attitude startled me when I first encountered it. Simply because someone exists, there is purpose to that life. "We're not interested in what you are like on the outside. It's what your heart is like that is important" is something I often hear Aboriginal people say. To them, the things I have worked so hard to cultivate count as nothing. With Aboriginal peoples I am a beginner all over again. To re-learn what it is like to have the

simple directness I was born into, I have to leave behind those acquisitions so important to the Western world.

It is like that with Nature, too. During a particularly painful and confused period in my life, when it seemed the only companions I could trust were the trees in the nearby rainforest, I found that while they could-

bear [my] woes [and] hear of [my] happiness, it was pointless to offer them [my] clever lies... cunning defences... smooth talk... all that learned, stimulating, fraudulent stuff - that tricky closed up, pseudo friendliness and charm - so easy and habitual... those automatic, cunning verbal constructions and strategies assembled and enacted between souls to prevent them from simply being together... [because] trees can't hear that sort of thing. It's madness to even try it.¹³⁴

Still there is fear. Apart from deriving a sense of inner integrity, offering the truth of ourselves to the world brings no guarantee of a peaceful life, social acceptability or security. In fact, far more often the reverse may be the case.

Despair, hope and healing

There may be another fear, too - that of feeling so much love that we shall ultimately become paralysed by the despair and hopelessness at inevitable loss. Nearly thirty years ago Clive Sansom, himself profoundly inspired by the sensitivities of Francis of Assisi, spoke of the need to empathise with, "to feel with" nature.¹³⁵ Having heard something of what has happened to Aboriginal peoples, we have at last begun to know something about their pain. How, though, do we "feel with" a torn-up system of intimate relationships once so full of spiritual meaning and so intricately balanced that it ensured the safety of all life on this continent and exemplified for humanity a way to live respectfully and responsibly within the More-than-Human community? How do we empathise with a suffering so vast, so irreversible that it reaches eschatological proportions? What can we do with the knowledge of such pain or with our powerlessness to "make it right"?

Although "what can we do?" may be the first agonised question we ask, this urge to "do something" may be motivated less by a desire to fix things up than of alleviating the pain we ourselves feel. Simply waiting without hope, "for hope would be hope for the wrong thing",¹³⁶ can be hell whether or not one is an activist. Yet it may be the best we can offer the situation and ourselves at that

moment. Allowing ourselves to feel the pain at the deepest level will create in us such "a sense of all conditions"¹³⁷ that the Spirit can truly lead us forward into ways our busyness may hitherto have concealed from us.

Into a period of heart-heavy despair, my friend Sue Charles, of the Jaara and Yorta-Yorta Nations, brought her four beautiful "story-board" paintings, mandalas which she uses for healing among her people. Each story-board represents an aspect of the devastation Aboriginal peoples have suffered in the past two hundred and twelve years. As she explained the symbolism of each painting, the pain in my heart seemed to grow heavier and cut even deeper until I thought I could take it no longer.

It was then that I noticed how the mandalas had been presented. Embracing each painting in a scaly coil lay the Rainbow Serpent, unchanging except for the cycles of life. Its re-creating acceptance evoked for me the ultimate safety of life's rhythms,¹³⁸ and waves of healing began to flood my heart.

It is important to wait in the pain, hopelessness - and ignorance -so that we may receive the Spirit's guidance. One moonless night I was lost in the rainforest and got caught up in an entanglement of thorny lawyer vines. I searched for signs of a break in the tree-canopy that would indicate a way out. Although I knew the streaks of "false moonlight" on the ground to be phosphorescent fungi, I found myself instinctively following them and became even more disorientated. There was nothing for it but to give up, curl up on the wet forest floor and wait it out. Next morning I found myself at the edge of a precipice. The sun, rising out of the ocean, lit the thick mists with fire, and as I turned back to look again at the forest, a perfectly circular rainbow ringed my shadow in the forest moisture.

Quietly observant of our puffed up ways, Aboriginal peoples call us "lost-souls" and wonder why we live life in such cerebral complexity. In Aboriginal cultures, spirituality is much larger than the individual self - not just personal but shared, not just human but reaching across into the More-than-Human world - and is experienced in all that exists and ever has existed. As Yanyuwa elder, Mussolini Harvey, explains,

There is still Law on the country. It has not gone. We still hold the Law.

This Law... is not a lie, it is the truth. We can't make it up. We want people to understand us. We want people to learn...

The Dreamings made our Law... This Law is the way we live, our rules. This Law is our ceremonies, our songs, our stories; all of these things came from

the Dreaming. One thing that I can tell you though is that our Law is not like European Law which is always changing - new government, new laws; but our Law cannot change, we did not make it. The Law was made by the Dreamings many, many years ago and given to our ancestors and they gave it to us.

The Dreamings are our ancestors, no matter if they are fish, birds, men, women, animals, wind or rain. It was these Dreamings that made our Law. All things in our country have Law, they have ceremony and song, and they have people who are related to them.¹³⁹

To be spiritual, then, is to live with awareness of this totality, to celebrate, create, respect and care for the Other because the Spirit is in all. To be spiritual means also to be quintessentially human. It means to experience in our physical body all that connects us with the Earth's life and to realise in ourselves the qualities of what enriches the Earth -its humus - in human-humbleness.

As the *Endeavour* sailed up the east coast of Australia, Sydney Parkinson observed a remarkable double rainbow reflected perfectly in the tranquil waters below. It seems tragically ironic that such a sign -of the force of eternal Creation for many Aboriginal peoples, and for us a symbol of hope, promise and forgiveness - should have preceded more than two hundred years of atrocities.

Perhaps like the Rainbow Serpent of the story-boards, Parkinson's double rainbow holds us all in its circular embrace, even now. Although the Earth and its indigenous people are crippled by such suffering, it may not be too late for the healing to begin. Perhaps there is yet time for us to examine what keeps us locked into our invaders' ways and to humble ourselves before the greater Earth wisdom of Aboriginal spirituality. Perhaps, in confessing our prodigality to an Earth yearning for us to return to it, we may rediscover the nature of the divine forgiveness we were once taught God has for us. "For where else is the Divine," Winstanley might have exclaimed, "but in the Earth itself! Can you not feel the Earth's longing for us to be reconciled to It - and, thereby, to each other?"

We have for so long lost the vernacular of our original 'country' and retain such dim awareness of our kinship with Nature, that for us to insist we understand the needs of the Earth on the basis of a few decades of ecological consideration, is profoundly insulting (as well as ludicrous) to Aboriginal peoples. If Quakerism is a religion with the evolutionary potential¹⁴⁰ we hope it has, it may be that we need to start by looking again at some of our older teachings and -

ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee;
and the fowls of the air, and they shall teach thee;

or speak to the Earth, and it shall teach thee;
and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.
Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?
In whose hand is the soul of every living thing...¹⁴¹

There is a longing in the Earth itself and among indigenous peoples everywhere for us to awaken and come home to the reality of the Spirit in the More-than-Human world.

There is a need for us to share our experiences, to become clear about what we believe and about the ways in which those beliefs oblige us to act. Perhaps, then, in our prayer, in our worship, in our Quaker action, we may at last be ready to listen to the voices of the Earth and "to learn a new song". In embracing a new way of being that will assist the healing and true peace that the Rainbow has promised, it may be that we shall have to reclaim religion - that which binds us in common purpose.

For consideration:

Challenging market economics with a Biblical sense of the goodness of God in creation is to join a spiritual struggle. Faith in God, solidarity with the suffering poor and all other forms of life demands that we take a stand and say, "This destruction must stop." We must be perfectly clear about the implications of undertaking this responsibility. It is more than just setting up household recycling bins, growing organic vegetables or riding a bike to work. It is more than a talking job. It is a renovation which will change everything: the way we do business, the way we eat, the way we travel, the houses we build, the products and services we can expect and the prices we pay for them, the way we feel about trees and the way we worship God.

Keith Helmuth¹⁴²

7 RECLAIMING RELIGION - COSMOLOGY, COMMUNITY AND RITUAL

*I cannot bring you home again
until you hear the secret words
of silence in the air
creation that lived there
long long before the time
when time began.*

* * *

*until you hear the singing trees
the crooning earth
the living dreams
until you hear
the throb of blood
inside a stone
I cannot bring you home.*

*Kevin Gilbert*¹⁴³

In ways still too deep for us to comprehend, still too complex for us to glimpse more than fleetingly, Aboriginal cultures have been spiritually and economically one with all Creation in its minutiae for at least sixty millennia. Aboriginal cosmology and all of life's activities are inseparable. Life is charged with reciprocal relationships. For humanity to be cared for, country must be cared for. Though cause for personal grief, Death is also to be ritually celebrated. Ancestral songs sing the spirit of the deceased back home to the Earth to replenish and re-create sacred country. The rocks, the water, the winds, the soil, the plants and the animals fill with the song of the individual's soul which becomes one with the song of the Earth itself. With humanity welded in such intimate kinship with every aspect of Life, whether on the land or in the sea or in the sky, the whole of Creation becomes the spiritual classroom.¹⁴⁴

Learning how to understand the signs offered by the appearance and behaviour of the landscape and weather in their particulars is the stuff, not only of ordinary life, however, but of Ancestral Law. The one is the other in a timeless

union. The enspiritedness of the whole cosmos is such an obvious, everyday matter that the only practical response is to get on with living and relating within it. When asked how to express "all living things", a Yanyuwa elder at first offered wurdalawiji, meaning "being with spirit" but then indicated the irrelevance of the question by saying with some scorn that "the old people never spoke that way anyway!"¹⁴⁵

We do Aboriginal peoples a disservice when we refer to "sacred sites", as if other places were devoid of Spirit. When Ray and I were welcomed onto the land where we now live, we were told, "What you gotta remember is that all Jaara land is sacred!" Although there are special dreaming places, the Spirits are everywhere and in everything, whether or not our whitefella culture, for its own purposes, has transformed them beyond recognition. When, as a child, Aunty Pauline Gordon asked where her special dreaming place was, her mother showed her a waterfall in the hills: "When you die you'll go back in there. And you'll be there forever. You'll be in that waterfall, watching the seasons come and go like your spiritual ancestors. In that spot you will be part of the land." "That is why," explains Aunty Pauline, elder of the Bunjalung people, "when we lose our land, we lose a part of ourselves."¹⁴⁶

We may have been taught that the Australian wilderness is "interesting and unique", but our cultural urbanism discourages us from experiencing it as other than threatening - meaningless to the priorities of our "real" lives, even empty and lifeless. Yet, as Aunty Pauline declares: "the land isn't empty to us, it's alive with our people."¹⁴⁷

Even for those Aboriginal peoples whose culture has been ravaged in the extreme, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular.¹⁴⁸ Everything is imbued with the Spirit. Again, as Aunty Pauline says: "Our culture hasn't disappeared... The land and the laws are still in existence... They're alive. You feel it in the bush. Oh, my God! Sometimes you feel like you want to cry. It's a very powerful spiritual feeling that makes you feel humble."¹⁴⁹

That for so long anthropologists thought of Aboriginal peoples as having little, if any, religious understanding, is an indication of Western spiritual shallowness and the extent of its ignorance. For all of its amazing scientific advances and recently acquired body of wisdom, our culture has given us little knowledge of the purpose of human existence, "embedded in life cycles and dependent upon ecosystems".¹⁵⁰ We can only grope towards such understanding as best we can.

As increasing urbanism distances us Friends from the ability offered by the Earth to discern the eternal essence of Life, Western materialistic culture pressures us to accept its own limited concept of reality. It is a reality which has largely outlawed the presence of the Spirit in all but carefully demarcated areas. It is possible, then, that our beliefs about "that of God in everything" are based less on actual experiences of Nature, and perhaps even of the Spirit, than on intellectualised, "spiritually correct" concepts about each.

Declaring "all life to be sacramental", we Friends proclaim our renunciation of ritual, but offer little clarity on what "sacred" may mean to us. We declare we have eschewed all "meaningless" ritual without perhaps recognising the extent to which ritual full of meaning may not only aid the discipline necessary to sustain a life lived in obedience to the Spirit, but also activate our commitment to the Other.

We speak of our "spiritual journeys", of "seeking", of our "learnings" and "growth" but often seem unaware of where it is we are journeying, what it is we are seeking and learning and what we may be growing into. Yearning to "come close to God", we seem unaware that the destination of our "journey" surrounds us. During his wardenship of the Melbourne Friends' House, John Coe wryly observed this Friendly phenomenon in a poem to celebrate a magnificent Cootamundra wattle tree that once sheltered the Meeting House carpark:

A great shining bushel concealing a dark candle
That illumines and shelters Godhead in its shade,
That offers unconditional balm, solace, aid,
To souls that pause, and flinch from too much light,
That crave the inner, blessed, holy sight.
... this silver, green, gray bower,
Drooping, drawing us in, has more power,
Than all the household shrines and Marian scents,
Where we "do pause and give some reverence".
The Advertisement for Immanence is starkly plain,
But still we pass each time, and time again,
With no more than a perfunctory inward nod,
Then walk inside to look for God.¹⁵¹

In recent years, the original experience of the Inward Light, perhaps under the influence of psychological philosophy, has become more familiar as the concept of the *Inner* Light.¹⁵² The transformation may be significant for, while the first acknowledges and names something we share that does the spiritual work

within us under direct guidance of the Spirit, the second seems to invite us consciously to journey into ourselves towards spiritual individualism. Such a search for an ever deepening spiritual specialness, which sometimes seems the purpose of Quaker spiritual activities, may hinder a greater understanding of how to live in community among diverse others.

At times we seem to have lost the larger vision of which we are but a small, though integral part. This vision sometimes seems replaced by a self-satisfied, personal spirituality, adrift and spiralling like a coracle on the ocean of life. If this is what has become of our Quaker witness to the Spirit, we may find we are unable to communicate with each other if the waters become too troubled. We may find we lack the cohesion to function as a spiritual community in the healing work to which we are called.

I suspect all of us experience the numinous, for it is beyond the monopoly of the mystic or the religious. Whether or not those experiences become part of our consciousness, however, may depend upon whether they are acknowledged by those in our spiritual community. As Janey O'Shea once reminded us:

Rejecting dogmatism... we have also lost the confidence to testify to our spiritual experience and share it gladly. This loss has increasingly individualised our experience of Quakerism.¹⁵³

Today Friends may fall into three broad and overlapping categories of "belief:

- those who cling to the Judeo-Christian world view,
- those who see themselves as having chosen a freer, more personal and eclectic spiritual belief structure, and
- those of a more humanistic, agnostic, even atheistic bent.¹⁵⁴

Language barriers have grown up between the three types of Friend. We have a growing list of taboo words that we tacitly agree not to use in Friendly company; and various other words and phrases may press buttons for us or elicit quite different understandings in different people. For any "spiritual" sharing to occur, a certain amount of tolerant circumspection must be observed, with little expectation of any common religious vision being achieved. Without a common

language, we may be in danger of losing a shared Quaker understanding and may be left in isolation when it comes to those deepest "openings" being acknowledged, tested and affirmed. We may ultimately wonder what being a Quaker among Friends is all about.¹⁵⁵

While we Quakers do not share a theology as we once did, it seems we do implicitly share a scientifically rational view of the world. Not all of us, however, are scientists with the skills to test the latest theories and hypotheses. It has been said that "what science we do know we know at second hand, on authority about which we are usually vague."¹⁵⁶ We may have found it easier to accept current popular knowledge as a given (in much the same way that the church's teachings were once accepted as infallibly true), and confused this with keeping ourselves open to "continuing revelation". The result, as Janey O'Shea has observed, is that we struggle to find and describe a satisfying spirituality... and we are uncertain what to say to others who come to our meetings asking for nourishment.¹⁵⁷

Such spiritual vagueness and loneliness need not be our lot were we to discover a common language in which our differences, rather than being subsumed, could become rich offerings, acknowledged and treasured by all of us.

Browsing from the smorgasbord of spiritual traditions available to us in this New Age may indeed induce a certain credal fuzziness privately scorned by those who quail at the name of the Lord. Encountering disparate belief systems which speak of the enspiritedness of the Earth as parent to us all may seem somewhat self-indulgent to those whose life focus is caring for suffering humanity. Yet the fact remains that however spiritually resilient the Christian, however resourceful the creative human, however advanced the health and education systems, however many aid programmes we set in train, a dying Earth cannot sustain either healthy bodies or healthy souls.

In the knowledge that their forebears deleted Earth Spirituality from the sacred texts, mainstream Christian Churches often struggle with the difficulties of reinstating this heritage into their existing belief structure. Although weakened by centuries of separation from Earth reality it is, nevertheless, religion that now must ask "who are we humans?" and "what is our place in Nature?" These are questions our a-spiritual, scientific and materialistic world cannot frame on its own. Yet they underpin all our contemplation and actions, and are fundamental to our struggles over land rights, justice, reconciliation, ecological responsibility and peace.

A personal and corporate calling

As with most valuable personal challenges, the process of writing this lecture has often been painful for me. It has not only required that I bring under public scrutiny aspects of my whitefella life I would rather not admit to, even in private, but it has also put me on notice that I must change many of my ways. It has forced me to attempt to offer my own vision of a way forward when I would rather have left that job to those better equipped. It has, however, taught me that no one is better fitted than another, that none of us can afford to isolate ourselves from the re-act of Creation and that we are all needed in this vital task of real reconciliation.

At times, I have felt that I was on the very edge of faith, yet I have come to believe that is probably where Quakers always should be. As I sat with the trees and granite rocks where I live and sought their wisdom, something, perhaps absurdly bold yet, at the same time, profoundly humbling, seemed to form. Could it be here - on this uniquely contrary land mass, where the Earth is at its oldest, most stable and most wise, where the More-than-Human world finds its strength to endure in cooperative community rather than practices that are "red in tooth and claw",¹⁵⁸ and where its indigenous peoples have learned their ways of being from close kinship with all that breathes the breath of God¹⁵⁹ - that insights for a new dawning of humanity, a new way of being human, might be found?

Bolder still, perhaps, was the notion that Quakerism could have a unique role to play in this Life-saving process. With its inherent belief in that of God in all, and its fundamental trust in waiting in the welcoming and creative silence for that connection with the divine in all to be made plain, Quakerism historically has had the potential for building bridges, creating justice and making peace. With a Spirit-fired concern reminiscent of those committed anti-slavery days - when the Quaker reputation for boundless compassion, courage and sacrifice was built - could it be that Australian Quakers might be called to this task?

"Ask first – that's the Law"

When I wonder about how we might start, it is the Aboriginal voice that I hear every time. Anne Pattel-Gray, reminds us that -

Only through our spiritual connection to the earth can we continue in our identity... the earth is sacred. It is a living entity in which other living entities have origin and

destiny. It is where our stewardship begins. We are bound to the earth in our spirit. By means of our involvement in the natural world we can ensure our well-being.¹⁶⁰

She was initially writing to describe the particularity of Aboriginal relationship with this land, a relationship to which, we incomers must ever remind ourselves, it would be arrogant in the extreme for us to aspire.¹⁶¹ We are, however, continually invited by Aboriginal peoples to acknowledge the customary law of this land and to take the first step of honouring its sacredness by asking permission to be here.

"Just don't think you can walk in here and take over. You must ask first - that's the Law!" is something I often hear Aboriginal people say. "That's right," confirms Uncle Kevin Buzzacott, Arabunna elder, when I check this out with him. He calls this right relationship "coming right way".¹⁶² Even after two hundred years of genocidal policies and practices, then, there is an opportunity for us to "come right way" - to become reconciled and be brought into right relationship with the Earth and its peoples.

How strange that, in spite of our own private property laws, such Law, at first glance, seems to strike at the foundations of everything we whitefellas do in this land. We wonder what will happen if permission is refused and, perhaps unconsciously burdened with guilt for what our people have done over two centuries, we fail to realise that this is not Aboriginal peoples exacting their pound of flesh. Asking permission is Earth Law. It is something that Aboriginal peoples do all the time when moving from place to place. Auntie Nola Kerr, elder of the Jaara people, teaches the children: "Unless you have first asked the Spirits if you may do so, don't you touch that leaf or move that stone."¹⁶³ Asking permission is practical recognition that everything is imbued with Spirit and that the custodians of each place are those with intimate and rightful knowledge of the Spirit of that place. Thus, not asking permission for fear of refusal is a denial - not only of "authority" or "ownership",¹⁶⁴ but of the validity of the Spiritual law of the land we have abused and so carelessly used.

Acknowledging the Law, "coming right way" is something we should consider non-negotiable. Although it may challenge the core of the culture we prize so dearly, it also blesses us with the opportunity to begin to learn what it may mean to be truly human.

In acknowledging the rightful law for this land we shall find that Aboriginal peoples have gone before us and made straight our path. Uncle Kevin,

whose sacred country is violated by the huge Roxby Downs uranium mine as well as by proposed nuclear waste-dumping, attempts to transmute this whitefella madness by ceremonially integrating it into the cosmic design. He explains that he has performed a powerful healing ceremony -

to bridge the gap here, and try understanding these fellas, and what they brought with them, and how it's going to link, and what's going on - and being one again, and making that One People one Country one People... We blackfellas, we've got the key to unlocking this whole thing because we belong.

Our Old Peoples' Spirit, the First People who created fire... this is the real government, this is our real foundation, our history, our heritage, our Spirit; joining with the Old People, that's our Spirit that belongs.

And using that old ancient method of healing... it's not only mine, it's a combination that goes right across the Country. But it's a little bit new one, too, because we can't walk our lands any more -because of farms and regulations and trespass and fences and all that.

We're doing it little bit new way, but the Spirit's still in there coming up through the kids and the young people... The Old Peoples are too strong. That old Spirit, we can't get away from it. And I don't want to get away from it, because it's the only thing that's going to take us Home.¹⁶⁵

Yet again, the heartbreaking generosity of the Aboriginal Spirit! It is vital for both Aboriginal justice and for the continuance of life on Earth to begin to understand the deep meaning of his words.

We shall not have to search far and wide for a common language. The voice that sounds in every cell of our human bodies, sounds as well in the rocks, vegetation, and our fellow animals. It is the mother tongue of us all. It is the breath of God, the song of the Earth. In listening to this song, we shall recognise that we are never alone, but constantly affirmed as an indispensable part of the community of life. Instead of being enslaved to our culture's paralysing fear of dying, we shall welcome the time for us to become part of the Earth's dark fertility and Life's continuing creative energy. In learning this song we shall reclaim a religion and a cosmology which will reteach us how to live and how to die.

Teachers and learners in the School of Christ

My friend Jean Richards once told me she had introduced me in her "visitor's report"¹⁶⁶ as "a humble learner in the School of Christ". As she knew I had no intention of becoming an orthodox "Christian", I pondered the phrase.

Today, if we are to consider what this School of Christ may mean, we shall find our classroom in the More-than-Human world. The process of spiritual evolution is not necessarily "upward" - towards greater theological sophistication; it may appear "downward" - towards less intellectual complexity and a greater humility.¹⁶⁷ We shall discover that Aboriginal elders are the teachers we most need to learn from. Indeed it may be time for a different sort of "Aboriginal mission" - one which teaches the whitefella for the sake of the Earth's soul.¹⁶⁸ If we earnestly seek this tutelage it shall be found.

Although originally describing the spiritual essence of her people Anne Pattel-Gray again has basic teaching for us:

[C]ome literally to love the soil, and... sit or recline on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power... It is good for the skin to touch the earth, to walk with bare feet on the sacred earth... The soil is soothing, strengthening, cleansing and healing... [S]it on the earth instead of propping [yourselves] up and away from its life-giving forces... [T]o sit or lie on the ground is to be enabled to think more deeply and to feel more keenly... to see more clearly into the mysteries of life and come close in kinship to other lives around us.¹⁶⁹

There is only so much we can learn from what others have written - theories, words and second-hand experiences. We must learn to allow the elements of the Earth itself to become our teacher so that, through our fully human senses, we may be able to answer Fox's famous question: "What canst thou say?" Or, as Gagadju elder, Uncle Bill Neidjie, puts it, for this time and this place -

If you got story, heart... then speak yourself, stand for it.¹⁷⁰

In her Backhouse Lecture, *Our Children - Our Partners*,¹⁷¹ Elise Boulding spoke of how much spiritually and emotionally mature Young Friends have to offer the adults of the Society. For years, many Young Friends have said they gained at least as much nurture and wisdom from their gatherings in the Werona bush in Kangaroo Valley as they have from involvement with more formal

Quaker occasions. While they may indeed want us to listen to them, I believe our need to listen to them is even greater.

When young people speak with urgency and passion about the future of the More-than-Human world, I sometimes wonder if we recognise just how powerfully they are answering the George Fox question. They too have ministry and teaching for us if we can suspend our busyness long enough to seek fresh light in this quarter and humbly attend to their Earth-despair.

There is yet another teacher in this School of Christ - the universal Cleverman whose essence many Aboriginal peoples instinctively recognise as part of their own spiritual tradition.¹⁷² Here again are the words of this great Lawman, Healer and Traveller-between-the-worlds:

Till heaven and earth pass away not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law, which is -

That you love God in all Creation with all the energy you have and all other beings as yourself. Observe and listen carefully so that you may learn from the great diversity of Life.

As the sun rises and the rain falls on those creatures you perceive as evil and harmful as well as on those you perceive as good and useful, love those beings whom you see as your enemies so that you may know yourselves all to be true offspring within Creation.

Remember the sacredness of God's Fire that created the Universe and seeks you out to your very souls as if separating pure gold from the dross. You cannot serve God and materialism, Life and those things that destroy Creation, so do not put your energy into amassing material things for your comfort or status in society.

And do not be anxious about your life or afraid there will not be enough to go around. Rather come to re-experience Creation with the wisdom of a child, wondering at its beauty, accepting its integrity, trusting its bounty. If you are in right relation with all Creation, you have but to ask, seek, knock and all will be given and revealed to you. Look at the birds of the air, consider the lilies of the field and reflect on their ease within Creation. Seek first your integrity within Creation just as they do, and all shall be well.

It is that simple. It is Love that makes us human. We need seek no further for "the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."¹⁷³ Rather than requiring us to deny our past, our obedience to such Law will require us to rediscover it.

Yet it is also that shatteringly difficult. Our journey has taken us at least two millennia and sometimes it seems as if we are no nearer our destination of Love. We seem determined to shield ourselves from the challenge of choosing to accept the responsibility of being human within the Earth community. While reminding ourselves that "we are only human", we may be unaware of the subtle licence to remain less than human.¹⁷⁴ Although we have sought diligently for who it is we are, we may have forgotten to wonder who we are to become.¹⁷⁵

Just as we fear the fire in the sclerophyll bush, so too we have feared the furnace of God's love that demands we do what seems impossible. It is time to cease going it alone, time to reach out to the wisdom and love of those we have formerly considered "the least of our brethren".

What, then, are we to do?

Authentic and sustainable Quaker action has only ever sprung from a shared and communal sense of experienced Truth. Without a humbledness under obedience to the Spirit and the discipline of discernment offered by the truly gathered Meeting, our desire to act on all the good causes and for all the best motives will easily slide into ineffectiveness and self-righteous activity, especially when the big challenge of changing our ways suddenly seems too hard, too uncomfortable and, perhaps, too unreasonable.

This is the time when, whether or not we see ourselves as "Christian" Friends, the teachings and example of Jesus and the heritage of our Quaker forebears can give us the courage to ask what we must do to be true to our spiritual calling. "Being present where we are", which Charles Stevenson suggests is where all appropriate Quaker work begins,¹⁷⁶ means opening ourselves to the reality and truth of ourselves as part of our environment - experiencing afresh, with all our senses honed by the Spirit rather than dulled by cultural determination or the habits of individualistic comfort.

Anne Pattel-Gray's words are apposite - that the preconditions of true reconciliation are "repentance, conversion and justice".¹⁷⁷ The call to Earth justice, inseparable from justice for Aboriginal peoples, is indeed, inseparable from the call to Truth itself. Early Quakers were known originally as "Friends of the Truth". They were "grass-roots" people who were not afraid to go to the source of what they saw to be not-of-the-Spirit in what the government, the church and secular society held was right. I believe the Earth today is crying out

for us to rediscover our unique testimony so that, once again, we may become convinced Friends of the Truth.

For consideration:

[I] propose we take up the cause of the environment - not merely as individuals, since many of us are already doing this - but as a group: as the Religious Society of Friends...

[E]ven though we Quakers are few in the world, the three great environmental crises [crisis of carrying capacity, crisis of extinctions and gene pool destruction, threat to our oxygen factories] cannot be solved without our organised help... [W]e have an actual duty to take this step... we are called by the Light within us, by the teachings and example of Jesus, and by the writings and examples of our Quaker predecessors, to work for a solution to these crises, just as we are called to work for an end to war, cruelty and hatred. If we act while remaining faithful to our calling, if we draw upon the wisdom that has accumulated in our sect through three hundred years of seasoning, we need not be anxious about results... After all, we're on the side of the whole. And the whole world hungers to be at peace with nature.

Marshal Massey (1985) ¹⁷⁸

8 CODA

*... some Thing that moves among the stars,
And holds the cosmos in a web of law,
Moves too in me: a hunger, a quick thaw
Of soul that liquifies the ancient bars,
As I, a member of creation, sing
The burning one-ness binding everything.*

*Kenneth Boulding*¹⁷⁹

As we admit our intimate physical and spiritual relationship with the creatures of this planet we touch again the raw heart of our Quakerism - an abandonment to the untameable, chaotic, forces of the Spirit and the foolishness of God - which we once cast aside for the sake of survival. Now, for the sake of survival, our own and of all we hold most dear, we are recalled by the suffering of indigenous peoples and of the More-than-Human world to a life of inclusive love.

At a time when the mainstream churches are struggling out from under the burden of dogma and doctrine to incorporate a sense of the Divine within the More-than-Human world, the freedom of Quakerism holds untapped potential to witness to the Spirit within all Creation. Friends' reputation for "being patterns, being examples" of how to live in this Spirit, is called upon to witness to the truth of that-of-God in Nature.

In this most spiritually powerful of lands - whose forbearance is evidenced by both the endurance of its Aboriginal survivors and the tenacity of its remnant archaic rainforests - we shall receive the guidance and courage we need for our unique task. As we journey into the universal realms of the Spirit to prepare our hearts and minds for worship - heeding the voices and the unseen movements of the Ancestors - we shall begin to live the reality of what Aboriginal peoples have longed for us to know. *All* Creation is sacred and we humans are an integral part of it. Through aligning ourselves once again with the great laws of the Universe, we shall begin "to learn a new song" - the song of the Earth - whose power will begin to repair this planet with its primeval enchantment.

I thank all the Spirits of Creation who are with us, linking our awareness across our perception of time and across the boundaries of what differentiates us and gives us our unique forms of expression:

Our Sun, source of our life's energy and ever-present reminder of the great fireball beginning of matter and of Time, the radiance of whose fires fills our days with Light, our bellies with food and our beings with passion.

Our Moon, whose subtle forces tug simultaneously at our oceans and at the tides in our own watery bodies, changing the patterns of the weather and the patterns of our emotional awareness, and whose changing appearance gives us the opportunity to reflect upon the ageing of our bodies and the dark and mysterious realms of our soul's journey.

The stars, the source of our deep dreams and our wondering contemplation about where we came from and whither we may ultimately return.

Our Earth, the ground not only of *our* being, of everything else in Creation. The waters of this planet of water - the Oceans and Rivers and Lakes with your myriad life-forms, known and unknown to us - from your singing whales, rainbow-hued fish and giant kelps to the microscopic phytoplankton and the thermophilic bacteria deep in the submarine vents in the Earth's crust. We remember you in our deepest dreams for from you we once came.

In thanking the Rocks and Soil and their consorts, the Winds and Rains, I want also to thank the love-children from their union, the great Forests, both under the skin of the Earth and above it:

Forests as tall as the giant Mountain Ashes of the Kurnai people in East Gippsland;

Forests as compact as the alpine heath in Tasmania's high plains;

Forests as thrifty and spartan as the Kwongan,¹⁸⁰

and Forests as lush and vibrant as those of the mist-swirled uplands of the Kuku-Yalandji people in North Queensland;

Forests as full of conundrums as the tangled mangroves that protect Australia's northern coastline,

and Forests as seemingly simple as the grasslands in Wotchubalak country after good rains;

Forests as ancient as the King's Holly communities in Tasmania's south-west¹⁸¹, and as young as the first turquoise leaves of yellow box seedlings, scattered on the sun-baked soil in the country of the Jaara people, in Central Victoria;

Forests everywhere, you silently purify the air for us land creatures to feed our lungs upon, collect, conserve and distribute the precious clear water whipped up from the spray of the oceans by the wild winds.

Master alchemists, you conjure forth an endless variety of delicious food and powerful medicines for us Earth creatures. It is by your magic that the elements of the Universe course through our veins.

Let us -

Sing unto the Lord a new song...

Let the Heavens rejoice, and let the Earth be glad;

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

let the fields exult, and everything in it!

Then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy¹⁸²

APPENDIX A

Paying the Rent

"Quaker" is a term many Aboriginal people are well acquainted with. In 1837, a South Australian settler called Robert Cock was the first (and possibly for a very long time the last) whitefella to "pay the rent". William Oats tells the story:¹⁸³

"Cock was one of those whom Backhouse met with in his brief visit to South Australia. He had sought Cock's support in the forming of a committee to assist the Protector of the Aborigines. On 15 September a letter appeared in *The South Australian* under the nom-de-plume of A. Tenant. Enclosed with the letter was £3.16.6,

... being the interest at the rate of 10% on one-fifth of the purchase money of the town land, purchased by me on the 27th March 1837. This sum is in accordance with the pledge given by the colonisation commissioners for this province and in accordance with the principle therein signified in their first annual report, wherein it is stated that they were to receive one-fifth of the lands to constitute a permanent fund for the support and advancement of the natives. I beg leave to pay the above sum for that purpose, seeing that the commissioners have neither fulfilled their pledge in this respect to the public, or carried out the moral principle signified. Under these circumstances it is impossible to let the question rest and until that be done I feel it my duty to pay the proper authorities for the use of the natives this yearly rent - the above sum being 1½ years' rent, viz. from 27 March to 27 inst. I disclaim this to be either donation, grant, or gift, but a just claim the natives of this land have on me as occupier of their lands.

"Robert Cock was a lonely example of one settler who recognised the justice of recompensing Aborigines for land that had been taken from them. [Acting-Governor] Stephen clearly sympathised with Cock's views, even if he found them a little embarrassing. He concluded his dispatch [to Lord Glenelg] with the observation:

Mr. Cock, being a member of the Society of Friends, his scrupulous regard for the rights as he conceived them to be of the Aborigines, and the mode of representing the donation will not probably surprise

your Lordship. His liberality has not produced a beneficial effect upon his brother colonists, for unfortunately it remains a solitary instance.

"News of Cock's solitary protest travelled the world and featured in a leader of *The Irish Friend* of 1 July 1839:

In connexion with the subject of emigration, a gratifying circumstance has been communicated to us, with respect to a Friend who has been sometime settled in Australia, and who has become dissatisfied with the tide to his possessions there; although obtained in the usual manner from the Land Company, he has taken measures to remunerate the Aboriginal inhabitants for his location, but in what manner we are not informed. How desirable it would be that all our Friends who emigrate to newly-settled countries, should imitate the Christian example of William Penn - a course consistent at once with justice and sound policy."

At other times and in other places, Friends as a body have been concerned about the immorality of occupying lands stolen from indigenous peoples. The conscience of those Friends moving into the Shenandoah Valley in the early 18th century was deeply troubled. They set up a fund –

for the benefit of the Indians, who were formerly the Native owners of the lands on which we now live, or their descendants if to be found, and if not, for the benefit of other Indians.¹⁸⁴

In 1795, in order that these moneys be administered appropriately, Baltimore Yearly Meeting appointed the Indian Affairs Committee, a "pay-the-rent" concern which continues to the present day.

APPENDIX B

Genocide

Extracted from Colin Tatz (1999) *Genocide in Australia* pp. 3-4:

In the present United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1949), Article II, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group such as:

- (a) killing members of the group;
- (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Even so the physical killing in (a) is seen by most Australians as wholesale killing within a short or definable time frame and in a localised geography, such as death camps. Clearly there has been no Australian Auschwitz... Since 1997... (e) has become the sharp focus.

... Overlooked by everyone is Article III of the Convention: not only is genocide a crime, but so too is "conspiracy to commit genocide, the "attempt to commit genocide" and "complicity in genocide".

In the vocabulary of genocide there are three parties: the perpetrators, the victims, and the bystanders - those without whom the perpetrators cannot effect their purposes... one can be a companion to something even in the act of opposing it... It seems never to occur to those who deny involvement, or legal or moral guilt, or who distance themselves from past events, that they were and are, indeed companions, and therefore in some degree complicit.

APPENDIX C

THE QUAKER SORRY STATEMENT TO THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA

Quakers believe reconciliation between indigenous Australians, the original custodians of the land, and non-indigenous Australians, to be the cornerstone of a non-violent inclusive Australian society.

Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) acknowledges the injustices suffered by the indigenous people of Australia since 1788. We are ashamed that we have failed to recognise the extent of dispossession, deprivation and trauma over the past 200 years. We have been and are part of a culture that has dominated, dehumanised and devalued Aboriginal religious, cultural and family life.

For this we are deeply sorry and express our heartfelt apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. We commit ourselves to working towards a reconciled Australia.

Perth, Western Australia, January 1998

ENDNOTES

- ¹ By my use of the term "Aboriginal peoples" in this text, I am referring to people belonging to the multitudinous Aboriginal tribes, or nadons, that occupy the Australian continent and its islands. For Aboriginal peoples to communicate with non-Aboriginal people, it usually means that not only must they use the English language, but they must set aside any reference to their own distinctive identity as peoples of unique cultures and traditions. I am sensible of the huge inequity in forcing Aboriginal writers to speak of Aboriginal peoples as a homogeneous group when distinguishing them from non-indigenous Australians.
- ² "Clever - spiritually powerful... The powers referred to encompass those of healing, sorcery (including the power over life and death), being able to communicate with non-human living things, being able to fly from one place to another while in a spiritual state, and interacting with the physical world, especially regarding rainmaking)... Not all cleverpeople will have those powers..." Arthur (1996), *Aboriginal English*, p. 21.
- ³ The Tibetan legend of Shambhala points to a time when Life itself is saved by the rigorous spiritual preparedness of those who are in harmony with the rest of creation. See Curie (1983), "Fire in the Peat", pp. 189-191.
- ⁴ From the words of a hymn by A.C. Ainger. The "Peaceable Kingdom" (see Isaiah 11:6-9) has, at times, been an inspirational motif for Quakers, perhaps most notably in the "primitive" paintings of Edwards Hicks (1780-1849) and later in the startling woodcuts of Fritz Eichendorf (1901-1990) in America.
- ⁵ O'Shea (1993), *Living the way*, pp. 62 and 65.
- ⁶ *Pteropus* genus.
- ⁷ This somewhat awkward phrase was suggested by the sub-title of David Abram's *The spell of the sensuous: perceptions and language in a more-than-human world*. Its freshness of approach startled me into realising how the negative form of the more common alternative - "non-human" - continued the devaluing of all that was not human in Nature. "Other-than-human" failed to challenge the status quo and seemed just as clumsy. In my use of "more-than-human" I do not wish to devalue humanity but rather affirm the infinity beyond the human perception. My use of capitals is simply to help imprint the More-than-Human in the reader's awareness.

- 8 A reference to George Fox's words: "Be patterns, be examples... then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one". See London Yearly Meeting (1988), *Christian faith and practice*, ext. 376.
- 9 Some Friends may find this adjectival term racist and offensive to multiculturalism. Each Aboriginal language had its own term for the invader; some such as "gub" (in the south east), "goonya" (in South Australia), "wadjila" (in Western Australia), "balanda" (in Arnhem Land), "migloo" (in north Queensland) have not only survived, but have come to be known by non-Aboriginal society. I have chosen to use "whitefella", rather than "non-Aboriginal", because - along with "blackfella" - it is often used by Aboriginal peoples who cannot so readily forget the "bad old days". Frequently Aboriginal peoples use these terms to indicate life attitudes rather than colour of skin. Thus it is possible to be of Aboriginal origin and yet be considered a "whitefella", and to be apparently European, but be "a blackfella on the inside". I am assuming that few Friends would today object to the use of the word "invasion" to refer to the way in which this country was occupied by non-Indigenous peoples.
- 10 January, 1998. See Appendix C.
- 11 Brown (1998), "The development of the Quaker 'Sorry' statement", p. 5.
- 12 "Mob - a group of Aboriginal people, linked by relationship and culture". Arthur (1996), *Aboriginal English*, p. 186.
- 13 Walker (3/10/1836), *Journal*.
- 14 Situated on the southern bank of the Kangaroo River, "Werona" is a property jointly owned by some Quaker Regional Meetings, individual Friends and non-Friends, and has been a retreat site for various Quaker and community activities since the early 1970s. It is regarded as a nature reserve where humans should not reside permanently. Some Young Friends see it as the place where they first became aware of the Spirit in Nature.
- 15 Walker (3/10/1836), *Journal*.
- 16 Backhouse (1843), *Narrative*, p. 372.
- 17 Backhouse (1843), *Narrative*, pp. 87-8.
- 18 Tatz (1999), *Genocide in Australia*, (p. 4) notes that Christian Pross (in Aly Götz, Peter Chroust and C. Pross, *Cleansing the fatherland: Nazi medicine and racial hygiene*, John Hopkins University Press, 1994, p. 1) claims "Nineteenth century

race theory led to genocide by providing the ideological tools for a biological solution to a social (or political) problem".

19 Backhouse (1843), *Narrative*, p. cxxxiv.

20 Backhouse, in Pittock (1969), *Toward a multi-racial society*, pp. 6-7.

21 Pittock (1969), *Toward a multi-racial society*, p. 8.

22 Pittock (1969), *Toward a multi-racial society*, p. 33.

23 The Savings Bank of Tasmania.

24 How Aboriginal peoples were captured and forced to render their unpaid services - as bush guides, labourers, stockmen, mineral prospectors, nursemaids, domestic drudges, and sex-providers - to "develop" Australia as a significantly wealthy nation is documented by Henry Reynolds (1990), *With the white people*; see Chapter 5 especially. Wilson and Dodson (1997), *Bringing them home*, (p. 42) cites a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly as having declared the Aborigines Amending Act of 1915 was "tantamount to the reintroduction of slavery in NSW".

25 See Appendix A.

26 Walker (4/11/1838), *Journal*.

27 "Country - the tract of land where an Aboriginal person or community belongs, to which they have a responsibility, and from which they can draw spiritual strength." Arthur (1996), *Aboriginal English*, pp. 119-120.

28 Backhouse (1843), *Narrative*, p. 174.

29 Woolman in London Yearly Meeting (1988), *Christian faith and practice*, ext. 50.

30 Reynolds (1990), *With the white people*, is prefaced by the words of a Lower Murray corroboree song which mourns the loss of all that gives meaning to life - a loss caused by "living with the White people".

To commemorate the crash of US aeroplane, "Little Eva" at Moonlight Creek in Gungalidda country in 1942 and the survival of one of its crew members, who walked to Borroloola in Yanyuwa/Garrwa country, a new song cycle was created. See Duwell & Dixon (1994), *Little Eva*. See also Rose (1995), *Nourishing terrains*, pp. 35-36.

In February, 1999, Arabunna elder, Uncle Kevin Buzzacott ceremonially speared an ash-covered Australian flag and explained: "If we don't destroy the evil before it destroys us, our spirituality and connectedness to land is doomed. The ceremony is our way of dealing with the evil that is being committed under the banner of the blue, white and red." See Gilbert (1969), *Fire-creator for justice*, p. 6.

31 Approximately three hundred Aboriginal people were slaughtered here on 26 January, 1838. See full account in Milliss (1994), *Waterloo Creek*.

32 See the words of Mussolini Harvey on page 49. See also Rose (1995), *Nourishing terrains*, pp. 46-47.

33 Asked by YM in 1990 (Minute 20 C (iii)) to report if they were "active in any way in relation to *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*", Friends replied that, although they were involved in many areas of peace and social justice, none of this activity was inspired by JPIC or involved the More-than-Human world. (See Summary of Quaker JPIC activity in Australia, March 1990.)

34 A report of this series of conferences is given by de Boer (1998-1999), "World religions and ecology", p. 26. Further information on the ongoing "Forum on world religions & ecology" may be found at internet website <http://divweb.harvard.edu/cswr/ecology>.

35 See Appendix A. "Paying the Rent" for the privilege of living on Aboriginal land was more recently encouraged by Australia Yearly Meeting in 1988. See Minutes 21 and 56.

36 See minutes of Australia Yearly Meeting, 1999, Minute 22.

37 Adams (1998), "Early Friends and their witness to creation", pp. 145-152.

38 See Section 116 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia preventing legislation to restrict the freedom of religious practices.

39 See Appendix B, especially section (b) of Article III.

40 See *Nulyarimma and others v. Phillip R. Thomson*, an application for a writ of mandamus, ACT Supreme Court, 1998. In his judgement (18/12/1998), Crispin J. stated, "I have concluded that no offence of genocide is known to the domestic law of Australia."

41 Tatz (1999), *Genocide in Australia* states not only that Australians commonly think of genocidal killings as being within a definable time-frame and a localised geography (eg. Nazi death camps), but that, while since 1997 a stark example of

Article 11(e) of the Genocide Convention (ie. the stolen generation) has been the focus of close attention, Article III - dealing with crimes including "complicity in genocide" - has been universally overlooked.

Anne Pattel-Gray gives us an Aboriginal perspective: "We often see that our claims of genocide are summarily discarded by the Australian Government not only in the courts but also as part of a political ploy illegally to gain rights to our land, which has a strategic value to their 'national security' and an economic value to the Gross National Product through the profits gained from its exploitation." See Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, p. 45.

42 "Biocide" - the killing of life; "geocide" - the killing of the Earth.

43 See the Quaker "sorry statement", 1998, in Appendix C. To the time of writing, the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, has refused to apologise on behalf of previous governments.

44 Australia Yearly Meeting set up the Donald Groom Fellowship in 1974 to encourage and support training and experience in non-violent social change.

45 Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, pp. 152 and 229.

46 See Friends of the Earth (1997), *Gathering in solidarity* and Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, especially the chapter on the role the Churches have played in Aboriginal genocide.

47 Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, p. 219.

48 Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, p. 227.

49 Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, p. 205.

50 Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, p. 63.

51 Britain Yearly Meeting (1994), *Quaker faith and practice*, ext. 25.14.

52 Adams and Hardy (1996), *The creation was open*, ext. 8.04, p. 36.

53 Australia Yearly Meeting (1993), *Handbook of practice and procedure*, Advice 13.3.2.

54 Jones (1976), *The Journal of George Fox*, p. 150. George Fox (1624-1691), is known as the founder of the Religious Society of Friends. The vision referred to here occurred around 1652. From the top of Pendle Hill in Lancashire, England, he

wrote in his *Journal*, that "the Lord let me see in what places he had a great people to be gathered".

55 Huber (1998), "George F. is not here", p. 10.

56 Jones (1976), *The Journal of George Fox*, p. 97.

57 Kelly (1979), *Testament of devotion*, pp. 97-8.

58 A more recent example appeared in *The Australian Friend* (May 1999, p.18). Pondering the issues of awareness of God and divine caring, the author concludes that "The only way any of this awareness and caring can reach us is through people." While the argument is for an immanent rather than traditionally transcendent deity, the language used reflects (perhaps unintentionally) an exclusive anthropocentrism still prevalent in our Society. (Because they were part of a profound experience for her during Meeting for Worship, I am grateful to the author for permission to use her words in this context.)

59 Australia Yearly Meeting (1993), *Handbook of practice and procedure*, Advice, 12.3.3.

60 Australia Yearly Meeting (1993), *Handbook of practice and procedure*, Query, 12.4.19. This ambiguous query seems to imply that our "increasing power over nature" should not be "used irresponsibly" but rather with "reverence" and that (our perception of?) creation's "splendour" be the determining factor of our actions.

61 "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." *Genesis* 1:26.

62 Rather than calling "the exclusive, pugnacious glorification of our own species" anthropocentrism, the moral philosopher, Midgley (1996), *Utopias, dolphins and computers* (pp. 104-5) prefers to name it "simple human chauvinism, narrowness of sympathy, comparable to national or race- or gender-chauvinism". "In general, in the kind of major emergency we have at present, the interests of different species coincide so widely that really enlightened self-interest would not dictate seriously different policies from species-altruism."

63 "Paganism sees reverence for nature as the first requirement, and all pollution of nature as blasphemous. It also offers the adherent direct access to the Spirit and sees manifestations of the Spirit everywhere. It holds the whole of life and the whole of existence to be sacramental, to be approached and handled with awe in the known sight of the Spirit." Guy Raglan Phillips in Adams and Hardy (1996),

The creation was open, ext. 8.05, p. 37. Although the word "pagan" is today overlaid with centuries of connotations of reputed devil-worship, it originally signified "a country dweller" and, later, one who was not "a militant for Christ".

64 A member of the Kooma Aboriginal nation.

65 Reay in McGregor and Reay (1984), *Radical religion*, p. 144. Reay later draws attention to the fact that Winstanley told Edward Burrough that he saw the Quakers as "sent to perfect" the Diggers' mission, (see footnote, p. 149). Today, Winstanley is perhaps better known to International Socialists than to Australian Friends.

Opinions are divided as to whether Winstanley could actually be identified as a Friend. It seems, however, that his association with Quakers was close. It is possible that he became a Friend on the occasion of his second marriage. Jayes (1979), *Winstanley the Digger* p. 219, records that in 1665 the birth of one of Winstanley's sons was registered by Westminster Monthly Meeting. Boulton (*The Friend*, 30/4/1999) writes that upon Winstanley's death in 1676, his second wife Elizabeth (whose later marriage to a Giles Tutchbury was registered under the care of Aldersgate Friends) requested a Quaker funeral for her late husband.

66 Sabine (1965), *Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, p. 565.

67 Hill (1978), *The world turned upside down*, p. 139.

68 Hill (1978), *The world turned upside down*, p. 139.

69 Sabine (1965), *Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, p. 105.

70 Sabine (1965), *Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, pp. 114 and 117; also Hill (1978), *The world turned upside down*, p. 179.

71 Sabine (1965), *Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, p. 170. The association of Christ with aspects of Creation was not new. During one of those many "save the Australian rainforest campaigns" when the brutality of widespread felling of ancient trees began to rouse human sympathy for the integrity of rainforest, I was put in mind of that most beautiful of Anglo-Saxon poems, *The dream of the rood* (c. 700 A.D.). Here the Holy Cross becomes a speaking, living Tree, offering itself as a sacrifice to serve the same divine end as its young Master.

Nor is the concept confined only to the past. In her poem "My Mother the Earth", Yuin elder, Aunty Mary Duroux likens the crucified Mother Earth to the crucified Jesus:

My mother, my Mother what have they done?
Crucified you like the Only Son.

Murder committed by mortal hand.
I weep, my mother, my mother the land.

(Duroux (1991), *Dirge for hidden art*, p. 20.)

72 Sabine (1965), *Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, p. 49.

73 The printer was Giles Calvert (Hill (1978), *The world turned upside down*, p. 373).

74 Jones (1976), *The Journal of George Fox*, p. 97.

75 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (1988), *Faith and practice*, p. 115.

76 William Penn in Hill (1978), *The world turned upside down*, p. 231.

77 Adams and Hardy (1996), *The creation was open*, ext. 14.03, p. 87.

78 George Fox's now infamous letter to the Governor of Barbados, for example, dissociated Friends from anything as unchristian as opposition to slavery upon which practice the economy of the country was totally founded. See Ingle (1994), *First among Friends*, pp. 232-234.

79 *Panentheism* - the belief that God is in all things and all things are in God. Thomas (1995), *Only fellow-voyagers*, scrupulously distinguishes between "pantheism" and "panentheism": "Pantheism [is] the belief that God and the universe are identical... Panentheism does not deify Nature. God is not identical with the universe, for the universe is dependent on God in a way that God is not dependent upon the universe." p. 105.

80 See Merchant (1980), *Death of nature*, Chapter 11.

81 John Woolman (1720-1772), a Quaker orchardist and tailor of Mount Holly, New Jersey. His inspired commitment to the abolition of slavery, his integrity in refusing the personal comforts that slavery brought to every facet of daily life, and his patience and humility have become a benchmark for the Quakerly witness to peace and justice ever since.

82 Woolman (1961), *Journal*, p. 233.

83 Woolman (1961), *Journal*, p. 211.

84 Woolman (1961), *Journal*, pp. 204-205.

85 Woolman (1961), *Journal*, pp. 211-212.

- 86 Woolman (1961), *Journal*, pp. 8-9.
- 87 Woolman (1961), *Journal*, footnote, pp. 207-209.
- 88 What is known of Parkinson's story is told in Carr (1983), *Sydney Parkinson*.
- 89 Beaglehole (1962), *The Endeavour Journal*, p. 123.
- 90 See Raistrick (1950), *Quakers in science and industry*, and Waldrin (1997), *Quakers: money and morals*.
- 91 Adams & Hardy (1996), *The creation was open*, ext. 5.01, p. 23.
- 92 Neidjie (1989), *Story about feeling*, pp. 166, 168, 170 and 171.
- 93 "Non-Aboriginal Australia has developed on the racist assumption of an ingrained sense of superiority that it knows best what is good for Aboriginal people." (Johnston (1991), *Royal Commission*, ext. 1.4.10, p. 9.)
- 94 The insidiously racist notion that Aboriginal peoples have benefited from better western medicine and better western education is widespread, as recent public debate has revealed. I was struck by the story Boori Pryor tells of a German woman insisting that literacy has been something "good" Western culture has brought to Aboriginal peoples. See Pryor (1998), *Maybe tomorrow*, p. 200.
- 95 If it were not capitalised here, such a little word, along with its vast significance for everything we do in Australia, might be overlooked. Anne Pattel-Gray calls this invasion and theft the "original sin" with which the Australian Churches are going to have to begin to deal if they are to relate meaningfully with Aboriginal peoples. See Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, pp. 238-239.
- 96 Integrative shame is one of the fundamental principles and processes of restorative justice, which involves self-confessed perpetrators learning, at first hand, the extent of the harm their wrong-doing has caused others. See McDonald et al (1995), *Real justice*, pp. 4-12.
- 97 Grass-roots indigenous people all over the continent maintain that such structures are genocidal because they come from the mindset of the invaders' government and - no matter what their intent - have the effect of restricting rather than protecting Aboriginal access to the lands which give them economic, cultural, and spiritual identity. See, for example, Pattel Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, pp. 46-

- 98 See Devereaux (1997), "Looking at country", p. 77 and Tatz (1999), *Aboriginal suicide is different*, pp. 10-11.
- 99 "Footprint" is also a term used by eco-scientists to describe the impact of cities (and their populations) on their surrounding region's resources.
- 100 Newman and Kenworthy (1999), *Sustainability and cities*.
- 101 Helmuth (1997), "Will there be any toads in heaven?" pp. 18-19.
- 102 Hopkins (1937), "Binsey Poplars" p. 39, Is. 12-13 and 16-17.
- 103 Tyler (1997), *Action plan for Australian frogs*, p. 1.
- 104 State of the Environment (1996). See Fig. 6-10, p. 6-18.
- 105 I am indebted to Aila Keto for this understanding of the rainforests.
- 106 State of the Environment (1996) pp. 4-27. See, also Rose (1995), *Nourishing terrains*, pp. 77-78.
- 107 See Pattel-Gray (1998), *The Great white flood*, for example: "In February and March, 1989, Ranger [Uranium Mine, in Kakadu, Northern Territory] released radio-active contaminated water into the Djokmarra billabong next to a 'creek' used by Aboriginal People." p. 61.
- 108 See Blake (1991), *Australian Languages*, pp. vii and 4-5. As I write, I hear that the government has decided to cut funding to the indigenous languages-teaching programme.
- 109 See Devereaux (1997), "Looking at country", p. 76. Also, the words of Paddy Fordharh Wainburranga in Rose (1995), *Nourishing terrains*, pp. 14-15 and Marika (1995), *Wandjuk Marika*, p. 169.
- 110 Our response to this threat has led to a grave decline in many plant and animal species. See Ealey (1998), "To burn or not to burn", p. 18.
- 111 See Bradley (1995), "Fire, emotion and politics": "[T]he burning of country by people who are not Yanyuwa is seen to be wrong. The country may be burnt, but the people who are burning it are seen to lack the sensibilities required to do it in a manner which will not offend the spirits which inhabit the landscape and the living people responsible for the country. There is an almost implicit belief that living people, too, will become 'weak' if the country is not burnt in a proper manner." p. 28.

- 112 See "Advices" - Australia Yearly Meeting (1993), *Handbook of practice and procedure*, 12.3.4: "Think it possible you may be mistaken."
- 113 In 1998, as compensation for taking their sacred lands, Energy Resources of Australia, the proprietary company controlling the Jabiluka Mine site in the Northern Territory, offered \$210 million to the Mirrar people to help increase their standard of living. It was not accepted. Even a million dollars for every year of "balanda" occupancy could not convince the Mirrar that whitefella education, housing, food and health could compensate them for losing their holistic dependence on the Spirit of their land.
- 114 In 1999 a few Australian Friends established an informal network of those interested "to find a place in their lives and communities to open to our inherent connection with the earth". This followed over a decade of committed work by Lloyd Williams to have the spiritual aspects of Nature and what is happening to the Earth recognised by Quakers as a concern of the highest priority.
- 115 Berry (1985), "Reinventing the human": "The historic mission of our time is to reinvent the human at the species level within the community of life systems, with critical reflection, in a time-developmental context, by means of stories and shared dream experiences." Berry's seminal work continues to inspire eco-philosophers to the present day.
- 116 Pittock (1989), "Thoughts on the environment".
- 117 Midgley (1996), *Utopias, dolphins and computers*, pp. 117 and 120.
- 118 Jones (1976), "Friends and change".
- 119 Benfey (1980), *Friends and the world of nature*, pp. 27-28.
- 120 See Australian Friend March, 1976, p. 2.
- 121 Bell (1998), *Ngarrindjeri wurruwarrin*, shows how the Ngarrindjeri women's conversations are filled with such ponderings. See Ch. 6, in particular.
- 122 Woolman (1961), *Journal*, p. 212. Indeed, Thomas (1997), *The slave trade*, (p. 499) maintains that both William Penn and George Fox kept slaves in Pennsylvania!

- 123 Bill Neidjie: "If you feel sore... headache, sore body, that mean somebody killing tree or earth." Neidjie, Davis and Fox (1985), *Kakadu man*, p. 82. See also Rose (1996), *Indigenous customary law*, p. 9.
- 124 Aboriginal peoples returning to their ancestral lands, even for a short time and where traditional food has been limited by pastoralism and general land degradation, are in touch with the dignity and responsibility of observing spiritual law and can shed formerly life-threatening illnesses with stunning rapidity. See Bradley (1995), "Fire, emotions and politics", p. 28 and Rose (1996), *Indigenous customary law*, p. 7.
- 125 Many personal communications, but see also Boori Pryor's aunty's story in Pryor (1998), *Maybe tomorrow*, pp. 56-7.
- 126 "Suicide is suicide, but Aboriginal suicide is different... There is a crisis in many Aboriginal communities... a legacy of past violations by a hostile and even genocide settler society. Ironically much of the 'new violence' has its origins in the attempts... to eliminate discrimination, stop segregation and bestow or gain civil rights." Tatz (1999), *Aboriginal suicide is different*, pp. 10-11.
- 127 Vallentine and Jones (1990), *Quakers and politics*, pp. 47-8.
- 128 I do not wish to imply that those who physically stood by the Mirrar people in their struggle to stop the Jabiluka uranium mine holidayed in a tropical paradise! It is, however, true that significant opposition to the mine was mobilised because of its situation in the World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park.
- 129 Australia Yearly Meeting Epistle, 1995. See *Australian Friend*, March, 1995, p. 2.
- 130 Sansom (1962), "Flowers". Clive Sansom (1910-1981) was a Tasmanian Quaker, poet and environmental activist.
- 131 I was working as a nurse at the time and one of those in my care was infected.
- 132 Aunty Wadjularbinna (personal communication, July, 1998). See also Dodson (1999), *Until the chains are broken*.
- 133 Thomas Berry speaks of a sacrificial universe in which things have their being because of the "sacrifice" of the first generation stars. (Berry (1992), *Befriending the Earth*, pp. 134-135.)
- 134 Leunig (*The Age* - "Saturday Extra", 25/7/1998).
- 135 Sansom (1965), *The shaping Spirit*, p. 17.

- 136 Eliot (1958), *Four quartets*, "Burnt Norton" III, line 124.
- 137 Jones (1976), *The Journal of George Fox*, p. 87.
- 138 Bill McKibben suggests it is in the permanence and totality of the universe that humanity may discover the sense of purpose and immortality it yearns for. (McKibben (1990), *End of nature*, pp. 67-68.)
- 139 Bradley, (1988), *Yanyuwa country*, pp. x-xi.
- 140 See Kenneth Boulding (1964), *The evolutionary potential of Quakerism*
- 141 *Job* 12:1-10.
- 142 Britain Yearly Meeting (1994), *Quaker faith and practice* ext. 25.14.
- 143 Gilbert (1994), "Until You Learn", p. 34.
- 144 I am indebted to Aunty Wadjularbinna, spokesperson for the Gungalidda and Waanyi nations, for clarity on this vast subject.
- 145 Ida Ninganaga in Bradley (1997), *Li-anthawirriyarra*, p. 6.
- 146 Davidson (1993), *Endangered people*, pp. 189-190.
- 147 Davidson (1993), *Endangered people*, p. 190.
- 148 In prison I have met Aboriginal men separated from their people and culture for most of their lives. In spite of institutionalism, this enspiritedness of the natural world is still real for them.
- 149 Davidson (1993), *Endangered people*, p. 193.
- 150 Tucker and Grim (website; no date).
- 151 Coe (1993), "Contemplating the wattle".
- 152 The phrase "Inner Light" does not appear in any of George Fox's writings. See Pickvance (1989), *Reader's Companion to Fox's Journal*, p. 83.
- 153 O'Shea (1993), *Living the way*, p. 1.
- 154 I am indebted to Ray Brindle for helping to clarify this point.

- 155 I refer here to an increasing confusion between Quaker discipleship and witness - that Friends are *Friends of the Truth* and that this Friendship is enacted when we seek to discern this Truth under the corporate discipline of the gathered Meeting - and enlightened, secular society's understanding of "friendliness" and "community". (See Raws (1999))
- 156 Midgley (1992), *Science as salvation*, p. 3.
- 157 O'Shea (1993), *Living the way*, p. 57.
- 158 Flannery (1994), *The future eaters*, p. 84.
- 159 Consider Rose (1995), *Nourishing terrains*: "The living world can be divided up into portions or countries, each of which is a unit or living system. Each country is independent; this means that it is its own boss. But no country is self-sufficient. Each one is surrounded by other countries, so that across the continent and on into the sea, there is a network of countries. No country is ruled by any other, and no country can live without others. It follows that no country is the centre towards which countries must orient themselves, and, equally, that each country is its own centre." p. 38.
- 160 Pattel-Gray (1991), *Through Aboriginal eyes*, p. 2.
- 161 Consider Rose (1995), *Nourishing terrains*: "Aboriginal people are situated within their own country, psychologically and metaphysically. When the country is well, the people are likely to be well too, and thus to experience a sense of satisfaction and order in their own place." pp. 38-39.
- 162 Personal communications, January and April, 1999.
- 163 Personal communication, 1997.
- 164 These two terms are often understood very differently by Aboriginal peoples and whitefellas.
- 165 Gilbert (1999), "Fire-creator for justice", pp. 3-4.
- 166 Due to the distance I lived from my Regional Meeting I was never visited for membership.
- 167 This was understandably reflected in early Friends' disapproval of academic "notions" - as characteristic a Quaker trait as the broad-rimmed hat and the plain language.

168 The concept of an Aboriginal "mission" to whitefella society came to Ray Brindle after visiting Moonlight Creek in Gungalidda country, September, 1998.

169 Pattel-Gray (1991), *Through Aboriginal eyes*, pp. 2-3.

170 Neidjie (1989), *Story about feeling*, p. vi.

171 Boulding (1996), *Our children - our partners*, p. 21.

172 In Gilbert (1977), *Living Black*, Alice Briggs affirms, "[O]ur people's way of life was based on Christianity. They knew Christ long before white people ever come to Australia." pp. 53-54. Hers is by no means an isolated testimony.

173 Eliot (1958), *Four quartets*, "Little Gidding" V, lines 239-242.

174 cf. "While seeking to interpret our Christian faith in the language of today, we must remember there is one thing worse than failure to practise what we profess, and that is to water down our professions to match our practice... We believe mat responsibility is laid upon each individual Friend... to make a new 'holy experiment' in practical living." (London Yearly Meeting (1988), *Christian faith and practice*, ext. 397).

175 Helen Gould introduced me to this Jewish concept. It is found in the words of her beautiful song:

I feel the earth beneath me, ground of my being.
I taste the running water, living water,
I feel the air around me, the breath of God.
I hear the hum of insects, song of creation.
I see the campfire burning, the holy spirit.
I smell the food that's cooking, our daily bread.
I taste my lover's kisses, the love of Goddess.
As darkness falls around me,
I know thy presence.
Walking and praying in the bush,
Walking, my soul is lifted up,
Walking and praying in the bush,
I am who I am, I am who I will become.

(Gould (1989) "Walking and praying in the bush".)

- 176 Stevenson (1998) *Embraced by other selves*, p. 42.
- 177 Pattel-Gray (1998), *The great white flood*, pp. 219-220.
- 178 Adams & Hardy (1996), *The creation was open*, ext. 13.02, pp. 77-78.
- 179 Boulding (1992), *There is a Spirit*, I, p. 10.
- 180 Sand-plain heathland in south-west Western Australia.
- 181 King's Holly, or King's Lomatia (*Lomatia tasmanica*) communities are estimated to be at least 43,000 years old. Thought to be the oldest known plant clone on Earth, this flowering triploid species, being sterile, must reproduce itself by means of suckering and natural coppicing. (Source: Park and Wildlife Service, Tasmania).
- 182 Psalm 96:1, 11-12.
- 183 Oats (1985), *A question of survival*, pp. 113-114.
- 184 See letter (12/10/1998) from Baltimore Yearly Meeting Indian Affairs Committee to Australia Yearly Meeting (*Yearly Meeting Secretary's Newsletter*, 16th November, 1998)

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