

The Australian Friend

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Equality



Editorial

Regular on-line readers may have found that the *Australian Friend* was temporarily unavailable. It has suffered a near death experience due to technical issues which I do not understand. We are scrambling to get the March issue up in time. Please forgive us if we are a little late!

For this issue I wanted to have articles about equality. It is a core testimony of Quakers, and also an issue which has been in the news lately. What could economic equality look like? How do we achieve racial equality, especially with First Nations people? Will we ever have real gender equality? During the pandemic we sometimes had flashes of hope for equality, but have there been any substantial changes?

The first articles to arrive showed that Friends have been reflecting on many things – how does our use of language unite us, or does it in fact divide us? What do we mean by God? What does it mean to believe or not believe in God? I recall a Uniting Church minister who taught the prayer: ‘Help me to leave behind the God in whom I no longer believe, and to find the God who believes in me.’

There were articles about war, about how Quakers reacted to the Boer war, about how to heal the ongoing trauma of acts of violence committed in the name of nationalism.

And finally we received some very thoughtful articles about equality. The QSA notes tell of the deep thought that goes into designing a program that promotes equality. Evan Gallagher writes of enabling equality for LGBTIQ people. Kenise Neill writes of the struggle to meet Aboriginal people on an equal basis. Helen Webb reflects on the effects of COVID in both bringing people together and keeping them apart. Which brings us back to technology. A great gift, or a real curse?

So finally a reminder that Yearly Meeting will again be by Zoom. A great benefit to the environment, and to isolated Friends. A financial benefit to the society, and an opportunity to those who found Yearly Meeting too expensive. But to many Friends, also a loss. We live in interesting times!

**RAE LITTING
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN FRIEND COMMITTEE**

On being patterns and examples

Jan de Voogd, a Member of NSW Regional Meeting who died recently, left a number of typed reminiscences in his flat. This is one of them.

I want to tell you a story of what happened to me in Sri Lanka some 15 years ago. I was accompanying a Roman Catholic Priest, Father Sarath. Peace Brigades was concerned he would disappear or be abducted if he returned to Sri Lanka. As he was a committed peace and social justice worker I was very happy to accompany him.

As I travelled with him in Sri Lanka I was increasingly concerned at the risks he was taking. How could I protect him if he behaved like that? I shared my concern with Father Aloy where we were staying.

One day Father Aloy said mass for a small group of us.

When he said, ‘this is my body broken for you’ he did not go on to say ‘do this is remembrance of me’, instead he said ‘let this be an example unto you’....

This is my body broken for you. Let this be an example unto you.

While I knew that followers of Gandhi and Christ need to have faith and be fearless, I was not ready to accept that Father Sarath should risk his life while I was responsible for his safety. I know now that I was wrong. He was being led by his love for the oppressed and powerless. As a follower of Christ he had little choice.

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There is New Light...

We need to take a path not chosen before

KENISE NEILL RSJ | SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY REGIONAL MEETING

...There is new light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it.'

Amanda Gordon, The Hill We Climb, read at the Inauguration of President Joe Biden (20 January 2021).

As we remember the brave moment in 2008 when our Prime Minister apologised to the Stolen Generations, we can ask ourselves two questions. How can we stand in truth and continue to pronounce that Australia is not systematically racist? Are we brave enough to stand with and bear witness to the historical and ongoing trauma suffered by Australia's First Nations People?

I believe we are being challenged as a Congregation, as a Church and as a Country to ensure 'Black Lives Matter' in all our actions, and go on a journey to de-colonise our perceptions, our prejudices, our systems and our whole Country.

We are being called as an Earth community to a deeper spirituality – to invoke the capacity of our human heart to hold tenderly the historical and current life experiences of First Nations People across the world. (<https://youtu.be/GKcrL4NxNJM>)

If we take this journey into the 'new light' we will grow in our awareness of our conscious or unconscious complicity in white supremacy.

I am writing this reflection after hearing our Prime Minister describe 'Australia Day as an important marker of Australia's history' and 'that the date should not be changed', despite being seen as a day of mourning by many First Nations People. He explained his position with the words:

You know, when those 12 ships turned up in Sydney, all those years

ago, it wasn't a particularly flash day for the people on those vessels either.'

Scott Morrison, Prime Minister of Australia (January 2021)

This quote is a vivid example of how our whole nation has not heard and learnt from First Nations People. They have experienced and suffered abuse and neglect over generations. It is not a time now to be divisive and judgemental but it is a time for deep contemplative listening (Dadirri) and respectful conversations.

Let's work together with First Nations People to heal the deep, raw and open wound that began for them on the 26 January 1788. Their sovereign country was invaded with the raising of the British flag in Botany Bay. The process of colonisation has been brutal. The trauma they have suffered has been unbearable for them and it is difficult for us to hear and respond to their stories. I pray we can all listen with mercy and compassion and own our history.

We took a more enlightened step in 1969, when all states across Australia repealed legislation allowing for the removal of First Nations children under the policy of 'protection'. In the following years, Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies were set up to contest removal applications and provide alternatives to the removal of First Nations children from their families. I was privileged to work for five years in the South Australian agency

and part of my role was approving the court reports for the Youth Court. I look back now (with humility) as I realise I should not have been in the position to sign off on these documents as a non-indigenous person. I am part of white privilege and as such can never stand in place for an Aboriginal person. Insight is gradual and we can all learn how to move forward more respectfully.

We took a united step forward owning up to our history when we apologised to the Stolen Generations. However, in the 13 years since the apology the numbers of First Nations children being placed in out of home care is increasing each year. In February 2020, there were 17,979 First Nations children living in out of home care and they are now 10.6 times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Indigenous children. If urgent action is not taken, that rate is projected to double in the next 10 years.¹

It is time for all of us to stop another generation of 'Stolen Children' being removed. We can learn from our mistakes. With urgency, effort and intent we can address the underlying causes and factors for abuse and neglect of children, and most significantly, the intergenerational trauma suffered by First Nations People.²

We can have trauma-informed and healing services that acknowledge the grief and trauma caused by invasion, brutality and colonisation. We can acknowledge and address the systemic racism, oppression, marginalisation and

deprivation that First Nations People face every day.

I began working in the field of the care and protection of children when I was 16 years old. For 47 years now I have been aware of many children who are hurting, and many parents and grandparents who have been hurt over generations. I have seen the subsequent suffering and dysfunction in many communities.

In statutory child protection work I witnessed the situation many First Nations families and communities face every day. Whilst investigating notifications of neglect and abuse I was often appalled by the desperate living conditions of families who showed inspirational resilience. They lived in circumstances of extreme poverty, overcrowded and substandard housing and homelessness, family and community violence, high rates of incarceration, deaths in custody and the constant threat and removal of children from kin and country. I often pondered how I (if I was a parent) would manage if I was given the same set of circumstances? I realised that if the roles were reversed I would not cope as well as they did. Their efforts were often heroic. Trauma impacts any person's coping mechanisms.

It doesn't matter who you are, trauma affects the way people think and act and overwhelms their ability to cope and engage. Common symptoms include fear and anxiety, poor relationships, substance abuse and violence.'

Richard Western. SNAICC CE,
Guardian Australia (12 February 2020)

During the 15 years I worked in child protection for the state government I witnessed: a mother working tirelessly to keep her house clean with raw sewerage flowing through her home; homes with dirt floors and no air conditioning; the shame of parents who could not provide fresh and healthy food for their children; the horror and betrayal when we substantiated that seventeen

children had been sexually abused by a 'trusted and white' community administrator; the community anguish when 'a guardianship' teenager (who was removed as a baby) returned home and suicided within two weeks; the terrible separation anxiety of children who wanted desperately to return to their kin and country and the anguish of grandparents who received tearful and confused phone calls from their grandchildren 'in care', thousands of kilometres from home.

I often pondered what would happen if I 'substantiated' abuse or neglect, by naming a government department or a 'failing system' as the 'perpetrator.' I too have perpetrated the process of colonisation and am part of 'failing systems.' While leading a team of child protection and juvenile justice workers in Ceduna in South Australia, a dear friend and an Aboriginal Elder reminded me that I needed to listen to the Aboriginal Community before I made decisions affecting their lives.

He respectfully told me that I had, 'no ears' – *Pina Wiya* – and was not listening to the community. He told me that I tended to make decisions for families and the community in their 'best interest.' I learnt an important lesson and took more time to listen with 'open ears' in my privileged position as a public servant. There were many times in the succeeding years when I remembered this conversation and asked families what their dreams were for their children and how we (the state department) could support them to achieve what they wanted. I have never met a family who didn't want better outcomes for their children.

I also saw the 'wonderous' changes that happened when 'we listened' and provided respectful and strength-based family support, healing services and adequate resources to enable families to care for their own children.

Let's listen to the cry from the heart and respond to the pain, anguish and desperation of Australia's First Nations

People. I am inspired by Amanda Gordon's poem to continue to take a path previously not chosen by those of us who have been privileged:

...one thing is certain: if we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birthright. So let us leave behind a country better than one we were left. With every breath from a bronze, pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.'

Amanda Gordon

Kenise Neill is a Sister of Saint Joseph (and attender at the Eastern Suburbs Worship Group in Adelaide) who has had a life-long passion to make a positive difference in the lives of children.

Since completing a degree in Theology and another in Social Work, Kenise has worked in many roles in statutory child protection. For ten years she was responsible for child protection, youth justice, kinship care and the leadership and supervision of staff in the Ceduna and Coober Pedy areas. These positions involved travelling and working in Aboriginal Communities on the West Coast and the far North of South Australia. From there she moved on to a position as Senior Manager for Therapeutic Services for Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS), where she was responsible for staff training, cultural responses and recommendations for the Youth Court for Aboriginal Youth Court Orders, and for therapeutic program development and service delivery.

This article was first published on the website of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart. Reprinted with permission.

1. Media release – Report highlights Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children increasingly disconnected from family and culture. 16 October 2020.

2. Media release – 26 January: To truly close the gap, we must recognise the trauma our children and families have experienced. 25 January 2021.

AF

COVID effects and technological inequality

HELEN GAEL | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

The most obvious effect of Covid on Friends' Meeting was the initial lockdown – no Meeting at all for some weeks, just phone and email for any contact.

Queensland Regional Meeting, like most other Regional Meetings, fairly quickly offered Zoom as a means for individual Friends to join in Meeting for Worship and small group discussions from their own homes. Later, when Friends began meeting in person once more in the Meeting House, the screen and computer equipment in the Meeting House was updated to allow Friends to see and hear those in the Meeting House so they could worship together and join after Meeting events even if they lived far away or had transport or health difficulties.

The option of Zoom meetings provided some comfort for some people, but not for those without computers, or not adept at setting up Zoom. Technology has its benefits but in many ways can widen the inequality gap, often with regard to age.

In Queensland, it has been remarkable how many of our older members overcame their fear of new technologies to join Zoom meetings and quickly realised its usefulness in connecting with family members in another state or country.

Of course, a Zoom Meeting does

not provide the same feeling of unity as Meeting in person. Clerking a Meeting for Worship for Business with Zoom as well as face-to-face participants provides an added challenge to identifying the 'sense of the Meeting'.

A recent Queensland Baha'i Day of Interfaith Harmony – attended via Zoom by some members of Brisbane Meeting – highlighted issues that were relevant to Quakers as well as others.

Several speakers – from Muslim, Jewish, Baha'i, Sikh, Hindu, Pagan faiths – related ways the pandemic has affected all of us. One mentioned that we focused on people who were previously largely ignored – cleaners, drivers, undertakers, nurses – and gave them more importance and respect. There was also emphasis by all on how much the community came together to help those in need.

In summary, they all said that a crisis brings us together. Certainly, in Brisbane, Friends have rallied to ensure all COVID restrictions are met with Friends rostered to cover all the requisite safety advice: maintaining a record of all who arrive; marking out the spacing for chairs (a joint Premises Committee-Eldering activity); rostering one person for kitchen duties to boil water and offer DIY morning teas with disposable cups for those who do not bring their own. There has been

a sense of 'knuckling down together', both for those tasked with specific COVID-safe responsibilities and those newcomers and old hands who attend. One Friend who lived through wartime Britain drew parallels with that time in the sense of feeling threatened and needing to lockdown for safety, while in no way suggesting that this equates to the level of threat the UK experienced.

With the approval of vaccines for COVID, most Friends in Australia are likely to be vaccinated reasonably early in the rollout thanks to our largely older and mainly European worshipping community. However, some health observers are suggesting that the focus on COVID vaccines may pose a threat to other health programs. The World Health Organization and UNICEF warned In July 2020¹ of an alarming decline in the number of children receiving life-saving vaccines around the world. This is due to disruptions in the delivery and uptake of immunisation services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to new data by WHO and UNICEF, these disruptions threaten to reverse hard-won progress to reach more children and adolescents with a wider range of vaccines.

1. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/immunization-coverage-estimates-data-visualization/>

AF

A second virtual Yearly Meeting

4-10 July 2021



SUE PARRITT | FOR YM21 HOST PLANNING COMMITTEE

Following Standing Committee's acceptance of Victorian Regional Meeting's offer to host a Zoom YM21, the Committee began work in earnest, focusing particularly on the business process and IT. We agreed that Zoom meetings should be limited to 1½ hours and aim to have five Formal Business sessions. The YM21 Clerking team has agreed to meet together in person in Melbourne for the duration of YM 2021, if possible.

There is a need to protect the Clerking Team from exhaustion, so we hope that where there is no decision being made, such as those for Testimonies, Welcomes, State of the Society and Summary of Epistles, etc. can be planned a little differently from normal – creatively, and expeditiously. A proposed timeline for YM business has been prepared and accepted by

Standing Committee.

Share & Tell: Peter Williams has drafted an invitation to go to Regional Meetings and in the Secretary's newsletter for those who may like to run a session. At present, the plan is to have five afternoon sessions of three concurrent S&Ts, and a couple in the morning. Flexibility is needed and we hope the registration form will include a request for Share & Tells.

Friendly School: Arrangements are being made for two Friends to speak for 15 minutes at the beginning, followed by 40 minutes of break-out rooms with facilitators. Questions will be posed in line with the general theme: Quakers' Place in the World. Home Groups to follow Friendly School will be considered with the IT arrangements.

IT Training will be offered to as many Friends as possible, to make sure

of a sizeable safety net for YM21.

Children and JYF activities will be entirely on-line, in keeping with a virtual YM.

Regional Meetings have been asked to nominate Friends to be Elders and Pastoral Carers during YM.

The YM21 Host Planning Committee hope Friends find this information helpful as we move towards a second virtual Yearly Meeting. We appreciate that some Friends are not comfortable with Zoom technology, but we encourage everyone to connect, perhaps by joining with a few others, so that all may benefit from the spiritual nourishment and fellowship of our annual gathering.

AF



A Friendly meditation on gender

EVAN GALLAGHER (HE/HIM) | CANBERRA & REGION QUAKERS

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

When we set out on a spiritual path, many of us hope to become something closer to our true selves. Often this is not a journey of discovery of an unknown inner self but more an unravelling of outer layers; layers of identity taken on (or imposed on us) as we grew from innocence into the complexity of adulthood. A layer could be as superficial as our taste in clothing, our demeanour, and ways of speaking and interacting, or as fundamental as the very ways we perceive, and wish to be perceived by, the world.

In recent years, I have become increasingly aware of the importance of gender identity as part of this process of self-understanding and expression. From the moment of birth, we all bear a gender identity. 'Is it a boy or a girl?' is the first question often asked when a baby is born. Our assumed gender can be the first aspect of our identity made known to the world. Even before we receive a name, we are likely already being called 'she' or 'he'.

Often this assumption about

gender is correct. In my case, most people assume I am male and refer to me as 'he' without asking, and it doesn't bother me—though I have serious misgivings about aspects of masculinity in Australian culture. But what happens when the assumption is wrong? Assumption of another's gender identity can be a layer that hides, or even stifles, the real person beneath. In some cases, it can be a cause for enduring and significant distress.

Coming out is a spiritual act

'Coming out' describes a person disclosing their sexual orientation or their gender identity to another. My experience as a gay man is that it is not so much a 'coming out', but a 'letting in'. Until I first came out, I had never revealed or allowed any expression of this one fundamental aspect of my being. I had shut out the world from a part of myself. One day, after many years of distress, I had had enough and chose to let my family, friends and community in, no matter the consequences. I was lucky that I felt reasonably safe doing this, but I have never felt so vulnerable before or since.

While it can involve a new way of presenting to the world, coming out is not about assuming a new identity. It is a laying down of an assumed identity. Coming out is consciously holding your true self in the light, and it can be a

profoundly spiritual act.

I sense that the coming out experience for transgender and non-binary people can be similar. However, the risks can be higher as coming out can be profoundly visible to complete strangers, as well as those we know. It can—in some cases—involve medical treatments such as hormone therapy or gender confirmation surgery, leading to profound physical and emotional changes.

But aren't we all genderless in the Spirit?

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

I have struggled a little with this question. Inwardly, I feel neither male nor female. When I am in silent contemplation, the question of gender does not come up. Alone, or when grounded in Meeting for Worship, I am as spiritually naked as a lily of the field.

But with other people in social settings, my identity is always with me. Different aspects come to the fore at different times, but gender always seems to be there.

I don't see this as incompatible with Paul's advice in Galatians. Humans are social beings and we have evolved

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...even Solomon in all his glory

complex ways of being in community, whether consciously or not. While we live and breathe around others, we cannot completely lay down all aspects of our identity and become pure abstraction—identity is not so much the foundation of our being but an unavoidable consequence of it. Gender is a profound part of that.

'They' is the new 'thou'

So, what of pronouns? Pronouns can be many people's first introduction to questions of gender identity. Increasingly we are being called to question the assumptions we make in the pronouns we use for people. Is it appropriate to assume at all?

Pronouns might seem like a trivial matter, but Quakers and pronouns have a history. For centuries Friends stuck to the obsolescent familiar pronouns 'thou' and 'thee' as part of our testimonies to equality and simplicity. George Fox wrote a whole book about it. Friends only let it go when the witness became meaningless and the old honorific distinction between 'thou' and 'you' forgotten.

But there is a new pronoun emerging or, perhaps I should say, a venerable old pronoun is resurfacing. Using 'they' to refer a specific, known individual can feel strange to those of us whose schooling in grammar was influenced by the pronouncements of stuffy 18th

and 19th century grammarians more concerned with Latin than English. However, the singular 'they' has been around since Middle English at least, and examples can be found in Chaucer and Shakespeare. My favourite historic usage is Virginia Woolf's use of the pronoun for the character Orlando in their moment of transition from male to female—that was in 1928.

I feel strongly that we should, out of respect, always use the pronouns that reflect who a person truly is when we know them, and quickly correct ourselves where we slip up. But there is perhaps a more profound question here; I am beginning to wonder if the use of the singular 'they' for people whose pronoun we do not know could become an expression of Quakers' testimony to equality.

Towards a Quaker view of gender

Friends generally feel called to bear witness to Integrity. It is often listed among our named testimonies. What guidance can our faith and practice offer about the spiritual aspects of coming out as, and simply being, transgender or non-binary? Perhaps not a lot if we restrict ourselves to looking backwards to historic writings, but Friends are well-placed to listen for and discern the unwritten gospel.

When sexual orientation and

sexuality generally were considered as part of the ground-breaking essay 'Towards a Quaker View of Sex' back in 1963, the progressive 'group of Friends' who wrote it did not have the benefit of the nearly 60 years of scholarship and open discussion that has happened since. While the terminology used has been superseded, transgender and non-binary people, as well as intersex people, were considered sympathetically...but not deeply and, by modern standards, not satisfactorily. The Religious Society of Friends has work to do to move towards a Quaker view of gender.

Though small in numbers, the Society is blessed as a spiritual community to have a richness of gender diversity. I hope that the entire community of Quakers in Australia can be open to the ministry offered by the lives and experiences of gender diverse Friends, and that meetings and other gatherings become places where all feel safe to share such ministry. I also hope that the Quaker way can grow to offer full and meaningful spiritual support, comfort and (if desired) guidance to those seeking to transition or come out.

I wish to acknowledge the support of Friends and friends who reviewed drafts of this article and offered their insightful thoughts

AF

Know thy Friend

Rosemary Epps

ROSEMARY EPPS | TASMANIA REGIONAL MEETING



Rosemary in an unusually nice Kabul garden

Born as the Japanese surrendered 75 years ago, I was an unwitting beneficiary of the promise of peace. Eight months later, my father returned from repatriating sick prisoners of war. He settled into general practice in Sydney with a friend from Papua-New Guinea days, and the practice soon became a mecca for the needy in a pre-Medicare world, meaning long work days, nights and week-ends. Dad's partner's wife was Margaret Holmes, a committed peace campaigner who formed the NSW branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 1960. Always needing extras, WILPF protests provided an enlightening education.

As a young adult, a university work camp in the Gulf of Papua challenged my privileged view of the world and was life-changing – especially after our plane home failed to arrive. This meant a very long coastal walk, relying upon the hospitality of local people and aid workers, visiting bush hospitals and joining a CSIRO team surveying wild hinterland and head-hunting country. My final stay was with long time missionary nurse, Sr Paul Fairhall who was running a vocational training centre in a volatile Port Moresby slum. I remember being in awe as she

disappeared into a dark night with her hurricane lamp to mediate an inter-tribal skirmish.

Nursing training followed, then off back-packing around SE Asia. In 1970 travel in Indo-China was hazardous. Sharing Cambodian roads with North Vietnamese convoys and US helicopter gunships was not a comfortable experience. Nor was Vietnam. Nothing made sense: the armed invaders; the western conscripts who didn't want to be there; the corruption; the lack of moral leadership; Vietnamese families supporting members fighting on both sides; senseless destruction and the utter futility of war. I left overwhelmed with compassion and sadness.

This dark shadow took time to process on what had become a spiritual journey. Fortunately teaching English in Japan brought many revelations which included opening a whole new wabi sabi way of looking at the world. With its Buddhist roots, wabi sabi alludes to a Japanese aesthetic sense which helps us to see beauty in imperfection, appreciate simplicity and accept the transient nature of all things.

Back home for Midwifery Training, working as a ship's nurse then off to ANU to finish a science degree in Human Sciences and Psychology, plus some Asian studies. Besotted with Zen,

I 'sat' with a small interfaith meditation group in the Ursuline Catholic college where I was now the resident nurse. The Student Health Centre also kept me busy.

Aid work beckoned me to Torit in Southern Sudan with Save the Children Fund. In the wake of a 17-year civil war, we tried to provide maternal and child health services for about 80,000 returned refugees, in a vast area with almost no infrastructure and an under five child mortality rate over 50 per cent. We worked with Sudanese counterparts to run the children's ward, clinics, vaccination safaris and to address public health. It was a challenging and exhausting 2½ years.

I met my husband Richard, who was working with the Ministry of Agriculture in Juba. Other rural development projects followed – first in a poverty-stricken area of NW Pakistan; a cross-border project (based in Peshawar) to support agriculture and boost food supplies in Afghanistan during the Russian War; working with Kenya's Community Wildlife Service training tribal wildlife poachers to become park rangers; and a similar project in Botswana.

With an American husband and

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First AVP facilitators' training course, Afghanistan 2010

step-children now in high school, in 1987 we moved to Maryland for 3 years. Encouraged by a Quaker friend, Advices No.1 posted next to the door, and a sense of 'coming home', I began worshipping with the Sandy Spring Friends Meeting. A time of rich spiritual nurture followed as I packed in spiritual formation courses; Pat Loring's workshops; Lee Stern's Alternatives to Violence (AVP) training; teaching First Day school; cooking for Quaker kids at summer camp; Friendly Eights dinners (ie. with 4 families); and attending Friends General Conferences.

It was hard to leave this loving community to return to strife-ridden Peshawar. Gulf War One was about to erupt slowing progress, death threats were circulating and it was a great relief to move to Islamabad. Whilst Richard's project continued to support the Afghan Agricultural Department in exile, I was working at an international school as school nurse and counsellor. Fortunately, the discovery of five other Friends across northern Pakistan meant occasional week-ends together and a wonderful boost to collective morale.

Another inspiring interlude was leave taken in the British Lake District where we explored 1652 country and the history of early Friends.

In Kenya, we became sojourners

at the small unprogrammed Nairobi Meeting which shared a building with the large, programmed Meeting and ensured joyous hymn singing wafted through our silence.

In 1996 we moved to Hobart, hoping to provide some stability for our two youngest daughters. I transferred membership to Hobart Meeting and studied Social Work while we were occasionally able to visit Richard on assignments.

By 2010, I had joined Richard in Kabul and was working with Judge Najla Ayubi, to raise awareness of women's rights – a task for which she daily ran the risk of being shot. Despite women having legal and Islamic rights, these were routinely ignored, with women generally regarded as the property of fathers and husbands, or under the control of male relatives. Many women languished in prison having run afoul of the men in their life.

Attitudinal changes take time – particularly for a barely literate population that have spent a lifetime living in fear, been traumatised by war, and lost any sense of trust. Not only were education campaigns needed, the more difficult challenge was to change deeply held beliefs and attitudes. This meant engaging the gatekeepers: Afghan men, no easy task! Remembering

Lee Stern's faith in Alternatives to Violence (AVP) training, and with support from Katherine and Malcolm Smith, we decided to trial workshops to see how they would be received. Our female colleagues loved them but overwhelmingly concluded that 'this was what the men needed to do!' So our next workshops brought unrelated men and women together to listen deeply to one another. As they shared deep fears and harrowing life experiences, slowly perceptions of one another changed. No longer could they perceive of the other as a stereotypical male or stereotypical female, but rather as another human being, simply coping as best they could.

These were the first of a series of workshops with Julei Korner from Sydney AVP bringing her expertise for later training. And what amazing workshops they were – with participants declaring time and again: 'we need these workshops to spread all over Afghanistan...' I hope that one day they can!

The gift writing this article has given me is to be humbled by how many OTHER people have shaped my life and made me who I am.

AF

On the Labyrinth* of Life

On the labyrinth of life
 There are no dead ends
 Just keep going
 Into the centre
 Then out to the edge
 Into the centre
 For silence, stillness, grace
 Then out to the edge
 With the voice you've heard
 And the courage you've been given
 On the labyrinth of life
 You can't change tracks
 You can only be on
 The one you're on
 Heading in the direction
 You're heading in
 Into the centre or
 Out to the edge
 Into the centre, *then*
 Out to the edge
 On the labyrinth of life
 There are twists and turns
 Each path beckons anew
 Each step a new one
 So take your time
 Slow down
 Feel the path
 Beneath your feet
 Feel your feet
 Bear your weight
 Feel your shape
 Moving through space
 Through time and space



Into eternity
 Into your sacred centre, *then*
 Out to your sacred edge
 On the labyrinth of life
 Life goes on
 You may think
 It is you
 Who is doing the walking
 But really
 Each day comes
 Whether you are ready or not
 Each step calls
 Ready or not
 Your only choice
 Is when and how
 To answer
 Or not.
 On the labyrinth of life
 There is One who waits
 At your centre
 Waits to hold you
 Longs to hold you
 If you will allow
 'Lie down
 Take your rest
 In me
 Don't you know?
 Haven't you heard?
 I make all things new
 Again and again
 Including you.'

Noel Giblett, Queensland Regional Meeting

For those unfamiliar with *labyrinths, it is vital to note that they are not the same thing as mazes.

Mazes are arguably a cruel trick designed to baffle and defeat you—full of dead ends and blind alleys.

Labyrinths are the opposite. They are an invitation to let go and experience contemplative-mind by means of a walking meditation—you cannot get lost (although you may feel temporarily so). You enter in silence and reverence and all you have to do is stay on the path, into the centre and then back out to the edge (your beginning point), hopefully knowing the place as if for the first time (TS Eliot). With practice you learn to walk slowly and purposefully, perhaps holding a question or an issue,

pausing in the centre and listening for Spirit, before heading back out to the edge (your edge, your outer world).

Many of the old European cathedrals had a labyrinth in the crypt and the priest/s would walk the labyrinth before conducting the service. A contemplative mindset was seen as vital preparation for authentic worship, if not for all of life.

So, walking a labyrinth can be a means of entering into a state of surrender and deep receptivity. Like all practices, the more you surrender to the practice itself the deeper the experience. But, rest assured, it is entirely possible to walk a labyrinth without being in the slightest bit touched or affected! Labyrinths vary in design but ultimately it's not the design that matters as much

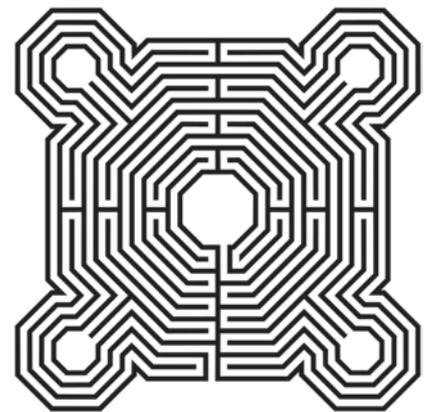
as the spirit in which the pilgrim enters and walks the path.

As David Whyte says, translating Antonio Machado:

Path-maker, there is no path.

You make the path by walking.

By walking you make the path.



AF

The power of witness

KAYE WRIGHT | VICTORIA REGIONAL MEETING



It was about twelve years ago when I heard an interview on the radio by Margaret Throsby which changed my life. I can't remember the details but the spirit of the interview is still clear and still with me.

The interviewee was an elderly woman in her eighties and the story concerned her younger life as a psychiatrist, working in her twenties. I can't remember her name. She qualified just at the end of the second world war and she lived in America. As the stories started to trickle through about the survivors of the concentration camps in Germany, she started to feel a pull. She knew she must go and work there with the survivors. It was not a choice, she had to go.

The interviewer asked if she believed she was being called by God. The woman said 'no'. She did not believe in a higher power. She could not explain what it was that drove her to do the work she 'had' to do.

We listened with fascination and horror to some of the stories which came from the survivors she helped. The trauma was profound. You couldn't actually imagine anything worse. It was the ultimate in human cruelty.

After a time, the interviewer asked the question we all wanted to know

the answer to. How on earth do you assist in the healing of a person who has experienced psychic and physical injuries as deep and intentional as these? We listened intently for the woman's answer.

She said that trauma as deep and as profound as this can be healed with much time. And listening. And companionship. Over the course of her practice she saw many hundreds of survivors and the process was always the same.

She would see the survivor three or four times a week and just listen to them, maintaining eye contact, as they related their story. She would nod sometimes or say a word or two but it was mainly the listening she provided.

Then, in each person's story, there would come a time when the person would start to keel. She knew when this time was approaching. She asked the survivor to sit on the floor, cross legged if they could. She sat opposite them, also cross legged. She would hold out her hands to the survivor and the survivor always took them. Slowly, rhythmically, they would rock backwards and forwards together as the survivor keened. Sometimes, she would join in with the keening. This was a natural response for her (the

psychiatrist) and helped with her healing. They would do this together as many times as it took. Gradually, this would diminish.

I sat there with tears streaming down my face, as I imagine every other listener was doing. For a few, long moments there was silence. This is called 'dead air' on the radio and is a big taboo, especially for a professional ABC broadcasting station. But we all knew the reason. Margaret was sitting there opposite the interviewee with tears streaming down her face, too.

After a little while, the woman started to talk about something else a little lighter and then Margaret came back on air. To her great credit, she said she had needed some time to regather herself as she was weeping. If we didn't respect Margaret before, we certainly did now.

What this unexpected interview taught me was the value of listening, just listening. Also, the value of companionship. Sometimes, the greatest gift we can offer is simply to be present and to be a witness to another soul's suffering.

AF



QSA Notes

Equality in society, aid and development

AI LEEN QUAH | QSA PROJECT MANAGER

For those of us whose motivation in aid and development stems from notions of social justice, the concept of equality is a central focus. Upon inspecting the root causes of the poverty or food insecurity that our projects aim to address, you will often find that many of the issues – access to water, markets, credit, household and community decision-making, opportunities for quality education, income generation, leadership – are the result of some form of unequal power dynamics or status quo in the first place, and that social and economic inequalities are often closely correlated.

The journey of achieving ideals of equality is a long one and a continual work in progress. It is encouraging that every step towards it is a success in its own right. A degree of equality is also integral for sustainable solutions to poverty and food security, let alone for peace and stability.

Gender is perhaps one of the most obvious and universal dimensions of inequality that we continue to chip away at within our own society and workplaces as well as in the world and work of our project partners. Themes

of women's rights and empowerment, access and participation, and protection and safety for women and children, are key considerations in project designs as well as being woven through activities and discussions as part of community meetings, planning, training days and informal counselling.

QSA partner Vasandham Society in Tamil Nadu, India, presents a good example. Having set up the Vaigai Women's Federation (VWF), a strong grassroots network for women and run by women, the two organisations now continue to support a number of initiatives aimed at improving gender equality and women's and girls' rights. In the past year, their work has enabled over 6,000 women to access appropriate and affordable financial services including credit, loans, and financial and animal insurance. The scheme stands out in that it boasts an incredible 98 per cent return rate, with an evaluation attributing a part of the success to the social support that comes with membership. Apart from informal peer support, women-led anti-violence committees run awareness campaigns and provide locally-accessible

mediation and counselling support for cases of domestic disputes. The most common cases dealt with by these committees relate to domestic violence, child marriage and girls' education.

Despite being banned by Indian law in 1948, negative discrimination on the basis of caste is another enormous challenge that Vasandham (and in fact all of QSA's project partners in India) continue to fight every day. The nuances of this region-specific power dynamic remain ever-so sensitive, and even with the incremental pace, whether spurred by society or within project contexts, the commitment pays off. Vasandham manager Guna Kunasekaran reflects that it took 10 long years of inter-caste group facilitation before VWF members would accept to enter the houses of members of different castes, let alone invite each other into their own homes. Back on our own turf, in Australia we are often viewed as one of the more successful stories of multiculturalism, but according to who, and whose version of history? Australia remains the only country colonised by the British that has not signed a treaty with its Indigenous people¹, and we are

Across all of QSA's projects in 2019-20:

- 308 women were supported with training and/or opportunities towards leadership roles
- 1,036 people (61 percent women) were actively engaged in discussions on gender equality and women's equal rights
- Over 541 girls received a better and culturally-sensitive, quality education



Vaigai Women's Federation group grading in process. Credit: Vasandham Society



What does it mean to be Australian, and do we all really get a fair go?

also the only ‘first world’ nation with a colonial history that has not recognised its first people in its constitution². We have yet to reconcile with and embrace our factual history and identity: we know that geographically we are located in the Asia-Pacific, but the Australian psyche has not quite arrived there yet. We pride ourselves on supposedly giving everybody a ‘fair go’, but not everyone is equally treated or valued as such.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission³, despite comprising 24 per cent of the population, non-European and Indigenous people are severely underrepresented at just 5 per cent of senior leadership in Australian business, politics, government and universities. Whether intentional or not, subconscious or not, this is a reflection of those whose power and privilege dominate the structures and systems of Australian society, and the bias of a certain set of assumptions, ways of thinking and working.

It is these minute dynamics that ultimately amount to social and structural inequality; some of it reflects disadvantage, and some of

it is discrimination. For those lucky enough not to be well-acquainted with issues of race and discrimination, perhaps it feels as men initially did before understanding that women had reason to feel angry about the status quo. Without the experience or understanding, it is either considered unimportant or uncomfortable enough not to discuss – as questions of power often are – and the privilege of being able to choose whether to engage with the issue or not often goes unrecognised. For the unlucky, it is an everyday matter around which there is little choice but to become overly familiar with, because it shapes one’s life experiences so profoundly.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on some of the ingrained social and economic inequalities within various disadvantaged communities and across countries, and is expected to continue exacerbating these cracks in society. But COVID-19 has also brought us to a crux in that we are facing the need to rethink, reconstruct, and to ‘build back better’. Perhaps it is time to bring these necessary conversations to the fore?

In internationally-focused sectors

such as aid and development, is it not important that representation, participation and access to decision-making should reflect the cultural and ethnic composition of Australian society and the overseas communities that our work seeks to serve? What impact might this be having in our work and our cross-cultural relationships? If our sector’s work centres around addressing inequalities and disadvantage, is it not important that we seek to address and reflect this in our own practice? To reflect on our unconscious biases and internalised norms, we must understand and challenge ourselves, our well-established systems and society. This takes courage, it requires patience, and a willingness to reflect on our own place in the structures of power.

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-40024622>
2. Linda Burney, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-10-10/fact-check3a-is-australia-the-only-first-world-nation-with-a-c/11583706>
3. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/leading-change-blueprint-cultural-diversity-and-0>

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

Find us on Facebook for more photos and stories: facebook.com/quakerserviceaustralia.

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Quakers and the South African War

PETER D. JONES | TASMANIA REGIONAL MEETING

The South African (Boer) War – an introduction

Europeans – the Portuguese – first reached the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 but the Dutch laid their claim to the region in 1652 as a supply station on the way to the East Indies, and the first settlers – a mix of mostly Dutch families but with some French Huguenots and Germans – became known as the Boers or ‘farmers’ while their language evolved into Afrikaans.

When the British took over after the Napoleonic wars, the Boers moved up country to what became the Orange Free State and the Transvaal while British settlers arrived in the Cape Colony and Natal. In the late nineteenth century, diamonds and then gold was discovered so thousands of ‘Uitlanders’ (‘foreigners’) poured in to disrupt the lives of the Boer settlers in the Transvaal. Cecil Rhodes, who had become Prime Minister in the Cape Colony, cast envious eyes on this new source of wealth. He lent his support to Dr Lender Starr Jameson in his raid on the Transvaal in 1895 with the hope of provoking a rising of the Uitlanders in what became known as the Jameson Raid.

The raid was a failure but tensions between the British and the Boer republics continued to rise as the Uitlanders resented their status in the Transvaal, and the situation was further complicated by the support given by Germany to the Boer cause and their President, Paul Kruger. Humanitarians were also alienated by Boer treatment of ‘the native races’ in their republics.

When war finally broke out in October 1899, there was great enthusiasm for the cause in Britain and throughout the Empire, including the Australian colonies, where volunteers soon enlisted to head for South Africa.

One of the books that I got for Christmas, was a new book on Breaker Morant and the Boer War (1899-1902)¹. This reminded me of another armed conflict where Quaker opposition to an imperialist war made them very unpopular at home. It’s also interesting to note that the Boer War has now been added to the list of wars we have recently started to ‘commemorate’ here in Hobart, with the focus on the Boer War statue on the edge of the Domain – despite the fact that the war started before Australia became an independent nation state. The Boer War memorial in Bellerive reminds us of what the war was really about, ‘Not for self but Empire,’ but the war has been drummed up to promote the military myths about the creation of the Australian nation and its support for ‘our great and powerful friends.’

There were a few Quakers in South Africa at the time of the Boer War, mostly of course from the British community in the Cape Colony, although Friends’ House in London has two letters dated 1728 written by a British Friend from York Monthly Meeting who was in touch with Dutch

Quakers there. We are not sure when the first Quakers arrived at the Cape though we know that Backhouse and Walker visited there (1838–40) and held Meetings for Worship in Cape Town as well as travelling inland. There were also visits by the Quaker Nantucket whaling ships and the crew apparently held Meetings for Worship as they used the Cape as a base for operations in the South Atlantic. Apparently local Methodists used a Friends’ Meeting House to worship there as well.

British settlement in South Africa began after 1820 and one early Quaker – originally a Wesleyan Methodist – was Richard Gush who settled near Grahamstown, and was known locally as Quaker Gush, and there is a plaque in his memory at Salem where he lived. London YM was in a dilemma as tensions developed in the late nineteenth century, as the Anti-Slavery Society disapproved of the way that the Boers treated ‘the natives’ in their territories, but on the other hand, they sympathised with the Boers suffering injustice at the hands of Imperial Britain. We know too that Mahatma Gandhi had contact with Friends

while he lived in Natal (1893–1914), particularly Michael Hunter Coates from Lancaster, but Quakers living in South Africa were few and scattered, though visiting Friends often came through on their way to and from the Australian colonies.

The Manchester Conference was held at the same time as the Jameson Raid (November 1895) and there was a lot of correspondence in *The Friend* about what was happening in South Africa as tensions rose. London YM recorded around 60 or 70 Friends in South Africa in 1898, mainly in the Cape Colony and Natal, so few in the Boer republics of the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal. When war finally broke out in 1899, Friends were very divided and confused, as this was a new kind of war, ‘Christian White races’ fighting each other and using new destructive weapons, while the press was whipping up a patriotic fervour for the war so that any doubters were immediately labelled ‘Pro-Boer’. Friends did become active in the South African Conciliation Committee

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NSW Bushmen in South Africa, 1901

but the Peace Society, chaired by the Quaker, Edward Pease, was divided, and so was the Liberal Party which many Friends traditionally supported. *Reynolds Weekly News* recorded in March 1900 that the 'sect is on longer to be regarded as a strenuous and united peace organisation'. George Cadbury got into hot water with a letter in *The Friend* (2nd March 1900) when he wrote that he was now convinced that the war was caused by the self-interested motives of the great financial companies and not by the behaviour of the Boers. He was supported by Joseph Rowntree whose family was later to suffer from mob violence at public meetings in Yorkshire when the crowds also smashed the windows of Rowntree family homes.

As the war deteriorated with Kitchener setting up 'concentration camps' for Boer families after the Boers had resorted to guerrilla warfare, Friends set up the South African War Victims Fund, receiving reports from South Africa about conditions in the camps. In all, 43 camps were set up, housing 116,500 white people, of whom 26,000 died, with 20,000 of them being children under 16. African camps were set up for the farmworkers where over 13,000 died while captured Boer male

prisoners were sent into exile on islands like St Helena and Ceylon. Joshua and Isabella Rowntree visited South Africa for three months in 1901 to see for themselves and met Mahatma Gandhi there, though they were unable to visit the Boer republics. The situation was complicated by a patriotic outpouring when Queen Victoria died in January 1901, but on a personal note, I was cheered to read that A.E. Theobald of Bath Meeting (where I first attend Meeting and joined the Society) had sent a letter to the City Fathers criticising the honours heaped on Lord Roberts (of Kandahar) when he returned to England after handing over command of the war to Lord Kitchener. George Cadbury got into further trouble for refusing to tender for orders of chocolate and cocoa for the troops, but when commanded by the Queen to supply chocolate for her Christmas present to the troops, he obeyed, but on terms which eliminated personal profit for himself. Many Friends worked with Emily Hobbouse whose reports of the appalling conditions in the camps caused great distress in Britain although they infuriated the military. These reports were publicised by *The Friend* which kept Meetings informed around the country, though Friends got

into some rather divisive and unsavoury arguments over interpreting the mortality statistics.

It was certainly an interesting period in Quaker history with the theological debates in the aftermath of the Manchester conference and subsequent gatherings, the emergence of new young leaders, and then the rising tensions in the lead up to the Great War. Many of the issues faced by Friends 120 years ago resonate today, and I still recall the jingoism unleashed by the tabloid press in England when I was spending a term at Woodbrooke after Margaret Thatcher decided to go to war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands. Hardly anyone knew where they were and the only reason I did was because I was a stamp collector and stamps from the Falkland Islands and Dependencies were much sought after. Nonetheless the parallels with the Boer War were much the same, with Friends caught in a cleft stick over opposing the war but not supporting the Right Wing military junta in Argentina.

First published in the Tasmania Regional Meeting newsletter.

1. Fitzsimons, Peter: *Breaker Morant*. Hachette, 2020

AF



A non-theist puts a case for God

KERRY O'REGAN | SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY REGIONAL MEETING

In the final year at our Catholic school, we learnt the (was it seven?) Proofs for the Existence of God. I remember the Proof from First Cause. (Everything is caused by something, and if you keep tracking back you'll have to stop somewhere; must be God.) And there was one, I don't remember what it was called, that said that the orderly complexity of the universe couldn't just happen by random chance. (Was that the one about the monkeys and the typewriters?) As for the others ...

I must say, that as 'proofs', they weren't all that convincing. They were also dry as dust and totally lacking the intellect, so you'll be pleased to know that's not where I'm going here.

Not for the first time, it was Richard Rohr¹ who led me to an Aha! moment. It was him saying, 'The only possible language of religion is metaphor'. This, after years of me struggling with the thought *I don't know what they're talking about*, when the talk was of God (let alone the Trinity), the Will of God, the Love of God, and so on. These were not things I 'knew experimentally'. Perhaps I lacked some faculty, like being colour blind or tone deaf or having no sense of direction. Maybe I just didn't have a capacity to perceive God. But, with Richard Rohr's help, I finally got it. It's

all metaphor. (And problems can arise, Rohr suggests, when we try to take those metaphors literally.)

Around the same time as the Rohr encounter, I was also reading Bede Griffiths². He too was a Catholic monk, though he had spent most of his life in an ashram in India seeking the common ground between various religious traditions. He said much the same thing. 'The essential truth of every religion is the sacred Mystery, the presence in this world of a hidden Wisdom, which cannot be expressed in words ... If I try to find words to express that transcendent Reality, I have to use images and metaphors.'

What I had experienced in my own life was a sense of the Holy, of the numinous. I felt awe and reverence, though not directed towards a personal entity. I had no experience of that. I had no sense of a Being with whom I could have an I/Thou relationship, and that was something I could neither fake nor manufacture. My reverence was directed more towards Being, the verb. (And there's an article by Rabbi Arthur Green in Richard Rohr's book, saying that 'God [YHWH] is a verb', but perhaps that's an exploration for another time.)

Richard Rohr's statement about

metaphor made me think of something Baruch Spinoza³ had written. He was reflecting on the ascribing of human attributes to God, and said, 'If a triangle could speak, it would say, in like manner, that God is eminently triangular, while a circle would say that the divine nature is eminently circular'. (Though Spinoza did get excommunicated from his Jewish community, so perhaps I'm treading on dangerous ground here.)

In trying to articulate what we know experimentally, we use language that makes sense to us. We crystallise our experience into metaphors, into myths, and even into doctrines and rituals, that are meaningful for us, culturally and personally. They give us a language, a framework, into which we can fit our spiritual experience. They allow us to communicate that experience to others, using a mutually accepted language, so we are not isolated in the silence of inarticulate muteness. Thomas Kenelly⁴ said, 'The thing about myths is not that they are true, or that they should be true, but there is something about them that is truer than true'. That is the kind of truth that matters here.

So I've learned to chill out, to stop interrogating the metaphors. How

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A well known metaphor

many generations of children have had any love of poetry destroyed through being made to pull it apart and analyse the metaphors? That's not what metaphors are for. Better to just let them be. As Judith Wright says in one of her poems, 'Some things ... ought to inhabit nowhere but the reverence of the heart'⁵. My epiphany came from that insight into the metaphorical nature of religious language. I don't have to 'get' the metaphors. I can just let them be, let them reside within 'the reverence of the heart'.

There is, though, something to be gained by reifying 'God', by engaging with the myth and the metaphor. Jean Shinoda Bolen⁶ is a Jungian therapist who uses ancient Greek Goddesses as archetypes in her clinical practice. She writes of 'activating' these deities using the metaphors of that early religious tradition. She says that 'The ancient Greeks knew something we can learn: goddesses can be imagined and then invoked'. One may identify an archetypal goddess with qualities or behaviours lacking within oneself. 'It is possible to 'invoke' that goddess, by consciously making an effort to see, feel, or sense her presence ... and then ask for her particular strength.' Bolen gives examples of possible invocations,

including, 'Athena, help me to think clearly in this situation', 'Persephene, help me to stay open and receptive', and 'Hestia, honor me with your presence, bring me peace and serenity'.

From my own Catholic background, we had a whole assembly of Patron Saints we could call on to assist in every conceivable aspect of our lives. Even today, if I drive to the shops with my sister Ann and any of her sister nuns, they are likely to invoke the aid of: first, St Christopher to keep us safe along the way, St Patrick to provide us with green lights, and St Joseph to find us a parking spot. I'm not totally convinced of the efficacy of calling on saints, but who am I to naysay?

There is a danger though with an *It's all in God's hands* approach in that we can let the total responsibility reside there, no action being required of us other than prayer and devotion. Not that my nun friends are guilty of that. I myself rather like Guardian Angels, though, I must say, mine has been caught napping on occasion.

But to return to how we live our lives: if we use the metaphors of our own religious tradition, and are able to draw on a Source of Love and Wisdom that far exceeds our own puny capabilities, that can only be a good thing. Surely.

1 Richard Rohr, 'Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation', Franciscan Media, Cincinnati, 2014

2 Bede Griffiths, 'Return to the Centre', Templegate, Illinois, 1977

3 Baruch Spinoza, Letter to Hugo Boxel, The Hague, 1674 <https://www.sacred-texts.com/phi/spinoza/corr/corr58.ht>

4 Thomas Keneally, ? (Sorry. I wrote down this quote a few years ago and I haven't been able to locate the source. I know he was referring to the ANZAC myth.)

5 Judith Wright, Lyrebirds, <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/lyrebirds/>

6 Jean Shinoda Bolen, 'Goddesses in Everywoman: Powerful Archetypes in Women's Lives', Harper, 2004



Baruch Spinoza

AF



One non-theist's tale

DAVID SWAIN | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING

Let's start with my history. I came from a nominally Anglican family. We didn't go to church often, partly because we lived on a farm some distance from town. Services at our local village church were only once a month. Nevertheless, if they were asked, which they weren't, and if they had thought about it, which I don't think they often did, I'm sure my parents would have professed orthodox Anglican beliefs.

When I came to Sydney to go to university, I thought that as an Anglican I should join the local Anglican Church. Being theologically naïve, I didn't realise this meant joining a nest of evangelicals. Members of the church youth group were expected to 'witness' regularly. This usually took the form of describing your Road-to-Damascus conversion experience. In your day-to-day life you were supposed to attempt to convert anyone you had contact with. When this annoyed them and they abused you, this was 'being persecuted for Christ', and was a wonderful thing.

I was finally saved by being introduced to the Student Christian Movement. Here I learnt that there were other flavours of Christianity, and was introduced to theologians such as Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich, some of whom I read, and some of whose ideas I absorbed by osmosis. I was therefore well primed for John Robinson's *Honest to God*¹ in 1963, just after I left university.

On these bases I worked for some years to define an acceptable God, mainly by defining the things God

wasn't. The traditional 'Old Man in the Sky' was easily dispensed with. But, as a scientist, I wasn't comfortable with an interventionist God who interfered with the physical world. What would be the point of carrying out an experiment if the result could possibly be influenced by divine intervention? I was delighted to hear Jocelyn Bell Burnell express similar conclusions in her 2013 Backhouse Lecture².

The question of God acting in history is similar. There is no doubt that people in history have acted in a certain way because of their belief in God, but that doesn't show that God has directly influenced history, either by physical intervention, or by actively inspiring, guiding or controlling those involved.

Rudolph Bultmann³, starting from the premise 'The whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the preaching of Jesus as in the New Testament generally is mythological', then had to answer, How does God act in the world? His conclusion: 'The action of God is hidden from every eye except the eye of faith.' In other words, we could say: things happen, and it's up to us to decide whether we want to see them as God's action.

Now, I'm a simple chap, not greatly given to philosophical abstractions or to the supernatural. It was with some relief that I applied Occam's razor ('entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity') and concluded, as Laplace supposedly said to Napoleon⁴ 'Sire, I have no need of that hypothesis.' The world worked quite well for me without God.

So what now?

So now I agree with David Boulton⁵: 'If God is no more (but, gloriously, no less) than a projection of our highest and deepest values, and if these must be human values (because no other form of life has created and articulated them), God-centredness just becomes one way, a religious way, of talking about being human.'

As you can see, I've reached this point rationally and as far as possible without emotion, but I sometimes wonder if I'm missing something. Can it be true, as someone has suggested, that 'I feel, therefore I am'? I am regularly inspired by some of my theist 'spiritual' friends and Friends. I hope people who think my way are welcome in Quakers, but I'm sure Quakers would be poorer if all members thought like this.

As Richard Holloway says: 'I don't any longer *believe* in religion, but I want it around: weakened, bruised and bemused, less sure of itself and purged of everything except the miracle of pity. I know that the people who will keep it going will have to believe in it more than I do. Anyway, I no longer want to persuade anyone to believe anything – except that cruelty, especially theological cruelty, has to be opposed, if necessary to the death.'⁶

And what of our language? I'm happy to use 'God' as a shorthand term as defined by David Boulton above, but what does 'the Spirit' mean in a non-theist context? Is it just *esprit de corps*, or perhaps like the 'school spirit' we were always told we needed? I don't think so; 'school

spirit' was an exhortation to think the same as everyone else, certainly not in the tradition of George Fox. But does 'spiritual' mean any more than 'emotional'? Or perhaps 'poetic'? And what does 'religion' mean in terms like Boulton's⁷ 'religious humanist' or Don Cupitt's⁸ 'religious imperative'? Certainly not the same as in Bonhoeffer's⁹ 'religionless Christianity'.

The best word I can suggest is that the spirit, the Inner Light, is the conscience – but the conscience sensitised by an empathetic and compassionate (post-Christian?) environment. And I have felt what I can only describe as the spiritual in the music of Beethoven and Mozart, for example, and in some art works and great buildings like Salisbury Cathedral. I can also, along with many people, feel a sense of the spiritual in natural scenery and sunsets. It all seems to be tied in with aesthetics, but it's beyond me to go further.

And speaking of George Fox, what is my relationship with him, Margaret Fell, and the other early Quakers? I applaud the early Quakers for their wisdom, their fortitude in the face of persecution, and perhaps largely for their common sense. But my view of God and of the world is very different to theirs because of the very different intellectual environment we live in. Fox's most enduring statement was 'What canst thou say?', encouraging us to adjust our beliefs to our times and conditions.

Similarly, because of my sense of history, when I attend an Anglican service, I prefer a High Church service,

the King James Bible and the 1662 order of service. I appreciate the poetry and theatricality, and the fact that I am saying the same words that have been said by congregations back to 1662, back further to the ill-fated Archbishop Cranmer, and in another language, back perhaps a thousand years more. But my beliefs are certainly very different from 16th and 17th Century Christians, and to most modern Anglicans in the pews, to the extent that I find many of the statements in the liturgy ridiculous – but often at the same time poetically beautiful.

And if we are to appreciate the beauty that the Christian church has inspired, we need to understand the deep beliefs of the artists, the cathedral builders and composers from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and forward.

What is man (and woman) that thou art mindful of him (or her)?

Quaker (and other) environmentalists tell us that humans are part of nature. True, we are products of the same processes that have formed our environment since the formation of the Earth. We share evolution with all living things – a quick Google search suggests we share about 95 percent of our genes with a chimpanzee, 80 percent with a cow, 75 percent with a mouse, 60 percent with a fruitfly, and 50 percent with a banana.

But somewhere in the later stages of evolution something world-changing happened. The human central nervous system developed a capacity for abstract

thought, imagination, and the ability to conceive of concepts such as right and wrong – we had eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That sets us apart from the rest of the environment.

This mental ability, combined with the advances in agricultural production that allowed the development of a leisure class, led to the gradual development of ethical codes. It also led to a curiosity about how the world worked, which in turn, in the absence of scientific information, led to the postulation of a range of supernatural beings.

The modern non-theist has rejected the supernatural and is left with physical, historical humanity. This means doing without the ever-benevolent and omnipotent God. It would be good as a humanist to believe in the goodness of people (that of God in all people), but at times this almost takes more faith than I can muster. We are left with having to deal as best we can with a rather messy and greatly flawed humanity.

So, if it's any comfort to the theists, there are times when I would like to be able to fly to the bosom of the Lord and take comfort in the ever-lasting arms, but I can't do it any more.

As Richard Holloway says:

... it is still possible at Christmas for the godless to sing with sincerity the carols and celebrate the coming of God in human form. For them, God has indeed come down from heaven

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

The great turning or the great unraveling: *It's our choice*

JOANNA MACY | AUTHOR AND ACTIVIST

To Friends Everywhere

Living in the Spirit amidst the unprecedented global angst of the pandemic, ecological disaster, racial injustice, wars, and insurrection, Friends Peace Teams chooses to be part of the Great Turning toward a transformed, regenerative society. Along with many Quaker institutions, Friends Peace Teams is challenging the organization's systemic racism and the colonialist legacy of wealthy, mostly white North American and Australian Quakers "helping" people with less privilege. The question of "who is the 'we' of Friends Peace Teams?" has kept us focused on the life-giving, people-to-people relationships that are the foundation of grassroots, Spirit-led change for peace and justice.

The Friends Peace Teams Coordinating Council, composed

of representatives from 15 Quaker Yearly Meetings in North America and Australia, nurtures a minimal organizational structure offering maximum support for individuals and groups engaged in peace and justice ministries.

Friends Peace Teams Programs...

Empower and heal through Alternatives to Violence Project, Cultures of Peace, Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities, and Trauma Resiliency Workshops

Educate and liberate through Peace Libraries, Schools, & Gardens, Literacy for Peace & Justice, and the Power of Goodness Story Collection

Act in solidarity for justice through Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples, and local peoples movements and advocacy

Join Friends Peace Teams in this journey. The **Fall 2020 PeaceWays** contains stories of struggle and insight around racial justice and colonialism. We encourage you to read and share it as an aid to your local efforts to become anti-racists. Read at friendspeaceteams.org/stories/peaceways or send a donation of any amount and you will receive a copy in the mail.

Thank you for your abiding concern and your continued financial support that sustains the Spirit of the Great Turning around the world. Please donate online (friendspeaceteams.org/donate) or with the enclosed return envelope.

*On behalf of Friends Peace Teams
Jonathan Vogel-Borne, co-clerk*

AF

ONE NON-THEIST'S TALE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

— which heaven itself is now empty.
Knowing that can pierce even the
confidently godless with occasional
regret ... The godless may no longer
believe in God, but they can go on
missing him when he leaves.¹⁰

So, I can just seek comfort and wisdom from my fellow imperfect humans. And Quakers are some of the best of them.

1 Robinson, JAT. 1963. *Honest to God*. SCM Press, London.

2 Bell Burnell, J 2013. *A Quaker astronomer reflects: Can a*

scientist also be religious? Backhouse lecture. Available from <http://www.https://www.quakersaustralia.info/sites/aym-members/files/pages/files/2013%20Lecture.pdf>

3 Bultmann R 1958. *Jesus Christ and Mythology*. SCM Press, London

4 Although Stephen Jay Gould in his *Dinosaur in a Haystack* (1996) points out that it is unlikely that Laplace ever said this to Napoleon.

5 Cited from Cupitt D 2009?. *Friends, faith and humanism*. Sea of Faith UK magazine, summer. Available

at <http://www.sofn.org.uk/reviews/quakhum.html> Accessed 22 May 2010.

6 Holloway, R 2012. *Leaving Alexandria* Text Publishing, Melbourne.

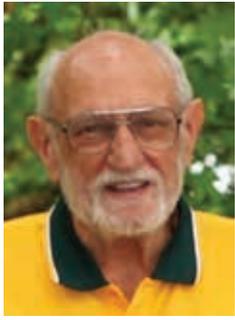
7 Boulton, D. 2005. *The trouble with God*. O Books.

8 Cupitt, D. 1980. *Taking leave of God*. SCM Press.

9 Bonhoeffer, D 1953. *Letters and papers from prison*. Fontana Books.

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The art of plain speech

DAVID EVANS | SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY REGIONAL MEETING

I love listening to whoever in the wider world says Quakerly things.

Triple champion international debater Julia Dhar in her TED talk¹ *How to disagree productively and find common ground*, is inspiring in this regard. Julia says it starts with finding common ground; separating ideas from identity; engaging directly and respectfully face to face; and being genuinely open to persuasion. The common ground is where you agree, spoken in plain speech; speech that everybody understands.

From the common ground one can proceed to different pathways exploring the options.

Being genuinely open to persuasion reflects we have a lot to learn in whatever is – the issue at hand. Being ready to debate, not knowing which side of the argument you will be representing also promotes opening the mind. Starting with Jargon terms is like preaching to the converted, prejudicing outcomes.

However we do need Professional Jargon. Let's say you mention Artificial Intelligence (AI). Those who have worked with it perhaps understand better than most. Those who have

heard of it might think talking about AI shows you are 'with it'. Some can see the results without pretending to understand. Those who have no knowledge can only guess. And for all there is still so much in the future yet to be discovered.

My real difficulty is Religious Jargon, talking with those who 'know' about their religion. Exhortations may initiate conversation as you are invited to join with them in a 'spiritual' encounter. The common ground has not been agreed. References to 'Christian' and 'being saved', and even 'God', are fraught with difficulty in relationships.

Our first Advice is illuminating.

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.

The challenge is to express the reality simply, perhaps; 'I had a strong feeling I should come and see you'; or, 'a little dickie bird told me to come'; or, 'it felt like a body blow that I had to make a change'. It is my concept of a spiritual aspect of everybody's life.

'God whose Light' in the Advice might be a problem to some Quakers, and is perhaps best avoided in general conversation. The problem is socialising

positively with those who use these phrases in their everyday manner of speaking. My own policy is to go along as far as I can, even, as has happened recently when my friend says, 'Shall we pray', or, 'Can we say grace?' I feel the aim is to co-operate as far as possible in the positive aspects of the social encounter.

Deep Silence is an in-house Quaker term. It is wonderful to experience. Perhaps too personal to describe. But we feel at one with other people in a spiritual sense; and are left wondering. It also happens in the wider world. One example is in music concerts where you could 'hear a pin drop' and the audience is so enthralled they are late to applaud.

Continuing silence, or, a sharing glance may be the plainest speech.



Julia Dhar

1. <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/TED/>

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- 1 May for the June edition
- 1 August for the September edition
- 1 November for the December edition.

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