# Deep Roots and New Growth

Finding out about the roots and history of the Quaker faith and our commitment to ongoing change



This unit invites you to explore the historic beginnings of Quakerism in 17th-century Britain, and how it developed from there to the present day. The Quaker commitment to being open to new inspiration and possibilities means that the Quaker faith has grown and changed over the last 350 years; but the heart of our faith – our belief in 'that of God' in all people and our experience of the power of silent worship to transform our lives – remains unchanged. So the deep roots of Quakerism still nourish our lives today.

#### Deep Roots unit aims

This unit aims to help you:

- find out about the roots and history of the Quaker faith
- understand how the deep roots of Quakerism still nourish Friends today, enabling us to continue to grow
- explore your own response to the roots of the Quaker faith

### Overview

At a time of political and religious turmoil, early Friends as a people felt themselves to be gathered, guided and ordered by God. From their experience of the immediacy of the presence of Christ sprang the form of worship and the way of life which became the distinctive testimonies of Friends, and which were upheld with courage in the face of great persecution.

From the beginning, Quakerism has grown and developed in response to social and religious change and through a commitment to being 'open to new light' (*Advices & queries* 7 in *Quaker faith & practice* 1.02), wherever it may come from. Like a well-rooted tree, the Quaker faith has accepted new directions of growth and weathered many storms.

#### Deep roots

George Fox, widely regarded as the founder of the Quaker movement, was a very serious-minded young man disillusioned by what he saw as the failure of those who professed themselves to be Christians to live up to their Christian standards. In 1643 he left his home seeking a new way.

Fox came to believe that God could speak directly to each person without the need for priests or churches, and he set out to spread his message, hoping to bring believers back to an original and pure form of Christianity.

George Fox's preaching rapidly recruited others seeking a faith which gave coherence and purpose to their lives. This faith is rooted in Christianity, but it was radical, and has remained so, because the early Friends found the basis of their faith was the individual relationship with and experience of God.

Early Friends believed that the Second Coming of Christ was actually happening within their own hearts, minds and spirits: they felt themselves to be in communion with the spirit of Christ and as a result completely transformed. Many felt called to follow Fox's example and began preaching this new way of seeking the presence of God always present within the human heart.

For the first Quakers, this conviction that there is 'that of God' in everyone led them to a radical understanding that all persons are equal before God and that the old social distinctions, reflected in language, conduct and dress, were wrong: this is the source of the Quaker Testimony to Equality. So all titles and forms of deference, such as removing your hat in the presence of social 'superiors', were to be abandoned, and women's participation in Quaker life was accepted alongside that of men. Their commitment to Truth demanded honest, simple speech, and a refusal to acknowledge double standards by taking oaths. For early Friends, it was also clearly wrong to pay tithes (church taxes) to support clergy, buildings and practices which were distortions of the original message of Christ. Such flouting

of the laws and conventions of the day brought heavy punishments upon the first Quakers. George Fox himself spent many years in prison, and Friends had their possessions removed and suffered violence and persecution.

The first Quakers had a vision of the world transformed by Christ, who lives in the hearts of all: they sought to make the vision real by putting emphasis on Christian practice rather than primarily on dogma or beliefs. They recognised the realities of evil and conflict, but found it contrary to the spirit of Christ to use war and violence as means to deal with them. This led to the development of the Quaker 'Peace Testimony' which remains fundamental for Quakers today.

#### New growth

By the 18th century, when it became clear that the whole world would not follow the Quaker way, Friends withdrew into their own communities. But their faith and practice continued and were expressed in new developments such as schools in which girls' intellectual development was valued and the curriculum was closely related to everyday life and work.

The religious upheavals of the late 18th and early 19th centuries led to further changes in the Religious Society of Friends. The prison visiting of Elizabeth Fry and the involvement of Quakers in the abolition of the slave trade were obvious results of a fresh engagement with the world outside their own communities. At the same time, barred from English universities and the professions, Quakers entered into business and were pioneers in banking, science and industry. Their known honesty helped them to flourish in commerce.

#### Long term change-making in the world

From these early times, Quakers have taken a long-term, patient approach to living out our faith in the world, sticking with our testimonies whether it makes us unpopular or leads to a Nobel Prize. The Quaker approach is often to work for long-term goals or sustainable change that is well rooted in local communities: this means being prepared to stick at action for as long as it takes, or to work quietly away from the limelight. The ways that the testimonies are expressed has changed over time, but the fundamental commitment to equality, simplicity, peace and truth remains at the root of Quaker witness in the world.

#### A prophetic community

The wide spectrum of belief and witness among present day Quakers is not incompatible with the faith of the early Friends: direct spiritual experience remains the core of Quaker faith, whether this is understood as experience of God or of a spirituality inherent within humanity itself. Being deeply rooted but open

to new growth enables Quakers to respond with careful discernment to the needs of the time, both spiritual and practical, as a prophetic community that continues to speak Truth to the world:

The Truth is one and the same always, and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation goes and another comes, yet the word and power and spirit of the living God endures for ever, and is the same and never changes.

Margaret Fell *Quaker faith & practice* 19.61

### Quaker distinctives

#### Distinctives 1

#### An overview of Quaker history

There is a brief but detailed overview of Quaker history you might read, in an extract from *A light that is shining* by Harvey Gillman. This extract can be found on pages 70–74.

You could also look at a Quaker timeline, which charts significant events in Quaker history alongside major events in British and world history. The timeline can be found on pages 75–79.

For more detail about early Quaker insights and experiences, you can read chapter 19 of *Quaker faith & practice* or one of the books referred to in Further exploration.

#### Distinctives 2

#### **Meeting early Quakers**

Some of the lives or insights of early Quakers are described in the following extracts from *Quaker faith & practice*:

- George Fox (1624–1691): *Qf&p* 19.01–19.04
- Margaret Fell (1614–1702): *Qf&p* 19.07
- James Nayler (1617?–1660): *Qf&p* 19.09
- Isaac Penington (1616–1679): *Qf&p* 19.14
- William Dewsbury (1621–1688): *Qf&p* 19.05
- Mary Fisher (1623–1698): *Qf&p* 19.27
- Mary Dyer (d.1660): *Qf&p* 19.18
- Thomas Ellwood (1639–1713): *Qf&p* 19.16
- William Penn (1644–1718): *Qf&p* 19.28 and 19.47

You can also find more detailed accounts of some early Quakers' lives:

 in Wikipedia by clicking on their name in the list given at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:English\_Quakers • by asking your meeting librarian for books on Quaker lives

You might also like to read extracts from:

- the Journal of George Fox at: www.strecorsoc.org/gfox/title.html
- the Journal of 18th-century Friend John Woolman at: www.strecorsoc.org/jwoolman/title.html

These journals are also available in most meeting house libraries (or to buy from the Quaker Centre bookshop – see Further exploration for contact details).

#### Distinctives 3

#### Listen to talks about Quaker history

You might like to listen to two talks about Quaker history given by Ben Pink Dandelion, Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre's Tutor in Postgraduate Quaker Studies, called 'Who are the Quakers?' and 'The history of Quakerism'.

These talks can be downloaded from the Woodbrooke website at: www.woodbrooke.org.uk/news.php/6/a-very-short-introduction-to-quakerism

#### Distinctives 4

#### Quakers as a prophetic community

Early Friends felt inspired to speak prophetically (with an understanding transformed by God) to the world of their day; this is still part of the Quaker way. In the following two extracts the speakers urge Quakers to act as a prophetic community. They are separated by 350 years, so the language they use is different, but both are rooted in the same Quaker experience:

- George Fox (1656): *Qf&p* 19.32
- Marion McNaughton (2007): this extract by Marion McNaughton can be found on pages 80–83

Quakers discovered at an early stage that a prophetic community must also be a disciplined community, or it can lead to excessive individualism or impulsive action. So Friends have a long tradition of 'taking the community with you' when being open to new growth; this usually involves a process of waiting and discerning the way forward until the community is ready to act.

- The 'Nayler incident' in 1656 was a key stage in developing this discipline: *Qf*&p 19.11 and 19.12
- for a fuller account see also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\_Nayler

• A modern Quaker speaks of being 'centred, rooted, practised in waiting on God' when working with conflict, a modern prophetic role: *Qf&p* 20.71

#### Distinctives 5

#### The history of Quaker structures

You may be interested to read about how Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings came into being and how they evolved from the early days of Quakerism to the present day:

- Yearly Meeting: *Qf&p* 6.01
- Meeting for Sufferings: *Qf&p* 7.01

For a history of the advices and queries: *Qf&p* 1.04. See also Advices and Queries unit: Discovery 4 for an activity exploring old versions of *Advices & queries* 

#### Distinctives 6

#### Quaker faith in action - in it for the long run

The following extracts bear witness to the steady, rooted Quaker approach to putting faith into action:

- 'slow but sure' change making in the world: *Qf&p* 23.13
- the long term work of the Quaker United Nations Office in building the institutions of peace and social justice: *Qf&p* 9.03 and 24.49
- see also: www.quno.org
- Education for Peace article at: www.quaker.org.uk/education-peace and pages 84–85

You can find out about Quaker actions in the past, where work still continues today on the modern equivalent of the same causes:

#### **Abolition of slavery**

- *Qf&p* 23.24–23.29
- online Quaker exhibition at www.quaker.org.uk/quakers-and-abolition-slave-trade
- information on the BBC website at: www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/abolitionists\_gallery\_03.shtml

#### Conscientious objection to war

• *Qf&p* 24.14–24.16 and 24.27

#### Keeping children safe from war

#### Kindertransport during World War II:

- read about Quaker work on the Kindertransport in *Quaker News* Winter 2008 edition find a copy of this edition in your meeting house library, or download it from: www.quaker.org.uk/qn
- see an online Quaker exhibition of memories and tributes to Kindertransportees at: www.quaker.org.uk/kinder

#### Recent work with child soldiers in Uganda:

• read about Quaker work with child soldiers on pages 86–87 and at: www.quaker.org.uk/uganda

#### Prison reform & criminal justice

• *Qf&p* 23.94–23.100, and info on the Britain Yearly Meeting website at: www.quaker.org.uk/justice

### Discovery

#### Discovery 1

#### What do our Quaker roots mean to us?

A modern Quaker, Deborah Rowlands, explains what her Quaker roots mean to her in an extract from *Quaker identity and the heart of our faith*.

You'll find this extract on pages 88–89.

If you would like to read the full text of *Quaker identity and the heart of our faith*, see Further exploration for details.

You could also ask your Becoming Friends companion, or another Friend in your meeting who has been a Quaker for a long time, about what their Quaker roots mean to them.

#### Discovery 2

#### **Quaker history through the Quaker Tapestry**

You might like to look at panels from the Quaker Tapestry that deal with events and people from Quaker history, and follow up any that interest you by discussing them with your Becoming Friends companion, or others in your meeting, or by finding books and information about them in your meeting house library or online.

#### You could:

• visit the Quaker Tapestry exhibition at Kendal, or contact them for more details:

Tel: 01539 722975

Email: info@quaker-tapestry.co.uk Website: www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk

• find out if there's a book with pictures from the tapestry in your meeting house library, or you could order a book or postcards from the exhibition

Quaker Tapestry panels about Quaker history include:

- A1 George Fox's convincement
- A2 James Nayler
- A3 James Parnell; Meeting for Sufferings

- A5 The voyage of the Woodhouse
- A6 John Woolman
- A8 Manchester Conference 1895
- B1 Firbank Fell: George Fox preaching
- B2 Mary Fisher
- B3 John Bright
- C1 Swarthmoor Hall
- C2 Margaret Fell
- D1 George Fox; Lichfield, Pendle Hill
- E1 George Fox at Ulverston: healing
- E5-6 Elizabeth Fry

#### Discovery 3

#### **Exploring the Quaker timeline**

Why not find an event or person that interests you or that you know nothing about on the Quaker Timeline (see Distinctives 1), and find out more? You'll find the timeline on pages 75–79.

#### You could:

- ask your Becoming Friends companion or an experienced Friend what they know
- see what it says in Quaker faith & practice
- look online at: www.wikipedia.org for example, see their article on the Valiant Sixty at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valiant\_60
- see if there's a relevant book in your local meeting library
- ask what anyone knows on a Quaker discussion forum:
  - > the Britain Yearly Meeting forum at: www.quakerweb.org.uk/forum
  - www.friendlink.org.uk (aimed mainly at young Quakers)
  - > the Deep Roots unit forum

#### Discovery 4

#### Talking about Quaker stories from the past

You might like to explore some Quaker stories from the past. Look through the Distinctives activities for examples, or you could read about:

- William Penn and his sword: *Qf&p* 19.47
- John Woolman writing a will: *Qf&p* 20.46
- Mary Hughes 'radiant with love': *Qf&p* 18.13

How about asking one or two Friends in your meeting to share with you Quaker stories that speak to them? The introductory questions below may be helpful. You could do this during the coffee time after meeting for worship, or your Becoming Friends companion might help you set up an informal meeting with other Friends.

Or you could consider the introductory questions, then go to the Deep Roots unit forum and post your own thoughts in response. You might like to comment on other posts on this forum too.

#### **Introductory questions:**

- 1. Are there any particular stories from Quaker history that speak to you?
- 2. In what way do they enrich your life as a Quaker now?

#### Discovery 5

#### Take a tour of or a course on Quaker history

Swarthmoor Hall is sometimes called the historic 'birthplace' of Quakerism. For more information you can contact them:

Tel: 01229 583204

Email: info@swarthmoorhall.co.uk Website: www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk

- You can take a mini virtual tour of Swarthmoor Hall at: www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk/360\_view.htm
- or read about the history of the hall and early Quakers at: www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk/history.htm

You can also take a virtual tour of '1652 country' – the places where George Fox and early Quakers met & worshipped – at: www.strecorsoc.org/qkrcntry/qc01.html (click on the photos at the bottom of the page).

Tours of the actual places in the '1652 country' and courses on Quaker history are run by Swarthmoor Hall and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. For details of tours or courses coming up, contact:

• Swarthmoor Hall – contact details as above

 Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre Tel: 0121 472 5171
 Email: enquiries@woodbrooke.org.uk

Website: www.woodbrooke.org.uk

# Deepening

#### Deepening 1

#### How do Quaker stories speak to you?

You might like to reflect on a person or incident from Quaker history that interests or appeals to you in some way. You can find examples in the Distinctives and Discovery sections of this unit, and there are Quaker stories in the *Journeys in the Spirit* series, available from Quaker Life or at: www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschild (issues 27–43). Reflect on why or how this Quaker person or story speaks to you.

You could talk to your Becoming Friends companion, or write in a journal or book of spiritual discipline, perhaps using these questions as a focus:

- Does this person or story resonate with something in your own life?
- How does this person or story show the 'breaking in' of new light, or the importance of rootedness in the spiritual life?
- How do your roots, spiritual or personal, nourish you?
- In what ways are you being invited to undergo change or growth now?

#### Deepening 2

# A prayer reflecting on our Quaker roots, and seeking openness to new growth

Margaret Benefiel, a contemporary American Quaker, has written a prayer which reflects on the depth of the Quaker tradition and our meaningful encounter with it today.

You can find the prayer on page 90–92.

You might like to take some time to reflect deeply on your own response to the prayer; you could write or respond creatively.

You could also reflect on this with your Becoming Friends companion when you next meet.

### Deepening 3

#### An image for your own rootedness

Consider the image of Quakerism as a well rooted tree, able to grow and even accept grafts, because of its rootedness. What image works for you to express your own rootedness, spiritually or personally?

You could express or reflect on this image of your own rootedness:

- by drawing, painting, or using another creative method
- in music, song or movement
- in writing
- by going online and blogging about the image
- by discussing the image on a Quaker discussion forum:
  - > the Britain Yearly Meeting forum at: www.quakerweb.org.uk/forum
  - www.friendlink.org.uk (aimed mainly at young Quakers)
  - > the Deep Roots unit forum
- by sharing with your Becoming Friends companion when you next meet.

#### Deepening 4

#### **Reflecting with Quaker mystics**

The writings of Quaker mystics from the past continue to inspire and challenge us on our spiritual journeys. The following extracts from *Quaker faith & practice* are by Quaker mystics:

- Isaac Penington: *Qf&p* 26.70 'give over thine own willing'; *Qf&p* 10.01: 'our life is love'
- George Fox: *Qf&p* 2.18 'be still and cool'; *Qf&p* 26.03 'all things were new'
- Margaret Fell: *Qf&p* 19.61 'the Truth is one'
- Francis Howgill: *Qf&p* 26.71 'return home to within'
- James Nayler: *Qf&p* 19.12 'a spirit ... that delights to do no evil'
- John Woolman: *Qf&p* 20.10 'a precious habitation'; *Qf&p* 26.61 'a principle which is pure'
- Thomas Kelly: *Qf&p* 2.22 'an inner, secret turning'; *Qf&p* 26.62 'shining into the darkness'
- Rufus Jones: *Qf&p* 26.32 'beauty breaks through'

Is there one extract, phrase or word that speaks to you in particular? You could incorporate it into your spiritual practice over the next few days or weeks, reading it or repeating it in the way of 'sacred reading' (see page 270 in Appendix 1 – Spiritual Practices for guidance about 'sacred reading'). You could print it or write it out and keep it somewhere that you will be able to see it.

You could also share some of your reflections with your Becoming Friends companion when you next meet.

#### Deepening 5

#### Engaging with the Quaker discipline of waiting for the right time for action or change

Advices & queries 28 (in section 1.02 of Quaker faith & practice) advises that 'every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities', inviting us to 'discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities' and to 'attend to what love requires' of us.

This is a way for an individual to follow the Quaker community discipline of waiting and discerning the right time to act or make changes (see Distinctives 4). You could reflect on your own process of being open to 'fresh opportunities', and how you know it's the right time for change. You could write or respond creatively to the following questions:

- Have there been times in your life when waiting for the right time for action or change has proved fruitful?
- How did you know when it was the right time?
- If you have acted too quickly or without the discipline of waiting, what effect has this had on the change or action you took?
- Would it help to use the question 'what does love require of me?' in your discernment?

You could also share some of your reflections with your Becoming Friends companion when you next meet.

## Further exploration

If you would like to explore the subject of Quaker history and roots further, here are some suggestions for reading, listening or viewing.

A faith to call our own. Quaker tradition in the light of contemporary movements of the *Spirit*, Alex Wildwood, Quaker Home Service, 1999 (Swarthmore Lecture).

'Finding the prophetic voice for our time', Marion McNaughton and Lizz Roe, *Woodbrooke Journal*, Autumn 2007, No 21.

'James Nayler: a pearl of faith', Stephen Sayers, *Woodbrooke Journal*, Autumn 2006, No 19.

*A light that is shining: an introduction to the Quakers,* Harvey Gillman, Quaker Books, 2003.

Living the way: Quaker spirituality and community, Ursula Jane O'Shea, Quaker Books, 2003 (first published by Australia Yearly Meeting, 1993). This is in the Hearts and minds prepared pack.

*Minding the future*, Christine A. M. Davis, Quaker Books, 2008 (Swarthmore Lecture).

Pictorial guide to the Quaker Tapestry, The Quaker Tapestry at Kendal, 1998.

Portrait in grey: a short history of the Quakers, John Punshon, Quaker Home Service, 1984.

*Previous convictions and end of the millennium Quakerism,* Christine Trevett, Quaker Home Service, 1997 (Swarthmore Lecture).

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 18, 'Faithful Lives'.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 19, 'Openings'.

Quaker identity and the heart of our faith, Quaker Life Study Materials, Quaker Life, 2008, including Deborah Rowlands on 'Roots' and Rex Ambler on 'The prophetic message of early Friends'. Available online at: www.quaker.org.uk/sites/default/files/Faith-and-practice-proceeding.pdf or in hard copy by contacting Quaker Life on 020 7663 1140 or email: ql@quaker.org.uk

*Quakerism: a theology for our time*, Patricia Williams, Sessions, 2007.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness pages on the Britain Yearly Meeting website: www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw

Quaker Tapestry website: www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk

*The Quakers: a very short introduction,* Pink Dandelion, Oxford University Press, 2008.

*Quakers in Britain: a century of change 1895–1995*, Alastair Heron, Curlew Graphics, 1995.

Rooted in Christianity, open to new light: Quaker spiritual diversity, Timothy Ashworth and Alex Wildwood, Pronoun Press & Woodbrooke, 2009.

Searching the depths: essays on being a Quaker today, edited by Harvey Gillman and Alastair Heron, Quaker Books, 1996. 'Building on our Traditions' chapter by Rosalind Priestman.

Street Corner Society website pages: www.strecorsoc.org/docs\_qq.html and www.strecorsoc.org/quaker.html with links to a wide selection of online historical Quaker texts including George Fox's and John Woolman's journals.

Swarthmoor Hall's website: www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk

*Testimony and tradition,* John Punshon, Quaker Home Service, 1990 (Swarthmore Lecture).

'Tradition and transition: opening to the sacred yesterday and today', Alex Wildwood, *Woodbrooke Journal*, Winter 2001, No 9. This is in the *Hearts and minds prepared* pack.

Woodbrooke's website or brochure for details of courses about Quaker history: www.woodbrooke.org.uk

Many of these titles are available from the Quaker Centre bookshop:

Friends House 173 Euston Road London NW1 2BJ

Tel: 020 7663 1030 Fax: 020 7663 1001

Website: www.quaker.org.uk/bookshop Email: quakercentre@quaker.org.uk



Many of them will also be in your local meeting house library. You could ask your Becoming Friends companion to help you track down titles that interest you.

## Closing activity

As you finish your exploration of Quaker history and roots, you are invited to reflect on what you have gained through this unit, how your understanding of both yourself and Quakerism has changed, and what areas you would like to explore further.

This closing reflection can be a very good opportunity for sharing with your Becoming Friends companion, or you may prefer to write in a journal or book of spiritual discipline (there's guidance for journalling in Appendix 2 – Guidance on page 282), or to reflect using creative methods such as drawing, collage, modelmaking or working with materials such as textiles or wood.

You might use one or more of the following questions as a focus for your reflection:

- What have you gained from your work on this unit, whether as a result of positive or more challenging experiences?
- In what ways has your understanding changed as a result of your work on this unit?
- Are there areas that you would like to explore further either as part of your own spiritual journey or relating to Quakerism?
- Has anything arisen that you would find it helpful to reflect on, with your Becoming Friends companion?



### 'Origins and development: the growth of the Quaker outlook' from *A light that is shining* by Harvey Gillman

What we at this period of our history find striking about early Quakers in the 1640s and 1650s is their emergence at a time of revolutionary change which was breaking down old ideas of a strictly defined social order. The Roman Catholic Church had long ceased to have any power in Britain, although it was still feared by the political establishment. There was conflict in the Church of England between its Puritan and Catholic wings. There were questions about the role of the bishops; about the role of women (in the Baptist, Quaker and other Separatist communities women had an increasingly important place but it was among Quakers alone that women were fully accepted as having equal status in the worshipping group) and so on. Faction begat faction, as each group tried to establish its own particular truth.

As well as being overtly theological in nature, these conflicts were political and social in the widest sense. The whole question of how society could best be governed for the benefit of everyone was being raised and many of the answers given were radical. As George Fox (1624–1691) travelled up and down the country, he met with others who also had spent time seeking for a more intimate relationship with God. This search was taking them away from the mainstream churches, and was eventually to lead to the founding of what is now known as the Religious Society of Friends.

These men and women who later became Friends brought with them ideas they had found in the varying factions they had come from, and for a period the Quaker movement was a much less coherent movement than it later became. In today's world of rapid change with fewer than one quarter of the members of the Society born of Quaker parents, we can see a parallel. The challenge to modern Quakerism is a similar one: how today to fuse ex-Baptists, ex-Anglicans, exatheists, ex-Buddhists, ex-practising Jews, ex-so many things, into a united society (though not a uniform one).

#### The seventeenth century

In the seventeenth century it was George Fox who put his stamp on this emerging group. It would be a mistake however to equate a movement with one man, charismatic though he may have been. Throughout the north Midlands and the North West, groups had already set themselves apart from the mainstream churches. Many of them met in silence without priest or pastor. Many of them

had already rejected outward sacraments and were waiting for a new spirituality. [...]

It was Fox with his administrative ability and Margaret Fell (1614–1702) who later became his wife, who were able to fuse these groups into a society which has survived, while most other religious groups originating at this time have died away. Yet the Quaker movement was not to be united easily. There were clashes of personality as well as of principles. James Nayler (1617–1660), whose enthusiasm and charisma sometimes led his followers to excess, clashed with Fox on a number of occasions. In the 1660s John Perrott, an Irish Friend from Waterford, protested against the increasing centralising of decision-making among Quakers and condemned the custom of removing hats when a Friend prayed aloud in meeting, and of shaking hands at the end of meetings. This almost led to a schism, but in spite of these differences Quakers spread and grew and met greater persecution. Between 1650 and 1687, it has been estimated that 13,000 Friends were imprisoned, 198 were transported and 338 died in penal institutions or of wounds inflicted upon them while they were attending meeting.

Persecution did not cool the ardour of the men and women who left family and home to become 'publishers of Truth'. It is from this period that the Quaker custom of 'speaking truth to power' arises. In 1657 Mary Fisher (1623–1698), who had sailed to Massachusetts to witness for the truth, travelled to Constantinople to try to convince the Sultan. Others sought audience with the Pope and met with imprisonment or death at the hands of the Inquisition. Mary Dyer was hanged for her beliefs in 1660 on Boston Common by the very Puritans who had left England to find liberty of worship. But it was this revolutionary desire to publish the truth that God was immediately accessible to all human beings that eventually led to the founding in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of Quaker groups in centres throughout Europe, North America and the Caribbean.

#### The eighteenth century

Like most fervent movements, the Quaker movement began to lose something of its impetus as its founding members died. From being a movement to preach a new or regained truth, it took on the characteristics of an inward-looking sect, handing down traditions and regulating the activities of its partisans. From being a revival of the true universal church, Friends now saw themselves as a remnant keeping precious their past insights. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they became a 'peculiar' people, suspicious of the outside world, wearing distinctive clothes, speaking a language full of distinctive jargon, addressing each other as 'thee' and 'thou', and although they still held public meetings now and again, very few newcomers were attracted to them.

But this introspection was not total and Friends were still concerned about conditions in the world around them. John Bellers (1654–1725), for instance, forms a link between the early persecutions and the subsequent period of retrenchment, yet he carried on the social witness of the first generation of Quakers with his schemes for the welfare of destitute children and in his writings he speaks of the 'labour of the poor being the mines of the rich'. His theories

influenced later radicals such as Robert Owen and Karl Marx. Similarly John Woolman (1720–1772) was one of the first of the Society to condemn slavery, urge economic boycotts and care about conditions aboard ships. He also prompted Friends to see the connection between the way they lived, the possessions they owned and the violence and oppression which were part of the economic and political institutions of their day.

The interest some Friends showed in the social conditions of their day was matched by the fascination of other Friends for the natural world. If helping other people was a sign of the Christian life, the exploration of nature was a sign of human appreciation of a divinely inspired universe and the Quaker contribution was considerable. John Fothergill (1712–1780) played a notable role in the medical world; as did Peter Collinson (1694–1768) in botany. Towards the end of the period, John Dalton (1766–1844) and William Allen (1770–1843) made great contributions to chemistry. One of the most important discoveries of the eighteenth century, the smelting of iron by using coke rather than charcoal, was made by Abraham Darby (1678–1717) at Coalbrookdale in Shropshire. This and other inventions at Coalbrookdale had great bearing on the growth of the Industrial Revolution.

#### The nineteenth century

Gradually as the nineteenth century advanced Quakers began to look outwards from the small world of their own denomination as they were more and more open to religious and social insights from other traditions. The outside world had already witnessed the Methodist movement of which Quakers at first were very suspicious and yet this movement went on to influence most of the churches in one way or another. Some Quakers by the end of the eighteenth century believed that their Society had become too complacent, too introspective, and like many in other churches felt the need for greater personal commitment. During this period, often described as the 'quietist' period of Quaker history, the Bible had been read in the home, but there was fear in the Society that too much reliance on it at worship would interfere with the still small voice in the heart. Under the impact of the evangelical movement and the teaching of the Quaker evangelical Joseph John Gurney (1788–1847) these dissatisfied Quakers turned again to the Bible. They felt that without Biblical and doctrinal authority they were powerless to overcome the world of sin and separation and came eventually to place a greater emphasis than did their immediate forebears on personal salvation and the doctrine of atonement.

In this they realised that they were close to Christians of other persuasions and this led them to cross the barriers of distrust and to work with others to improve the society around them. Again William Allen was typical of this movement. His work with the Anti-Slavery Society and with the London poor reveals how Quakers were taking their religious convictions into the public arena and were beginning to co-operate with other churches. Similarly Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838), one of the first advocates of popular education on a national scale, drew other nonconformists into a society that later became the British and Foreign

Schools Society. One of the best known of all Quakers, Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845), belonged to an old Quaker family, the Gurneys. She seems first to have worn her membership of the Society quite lightly, but she was converted to a more evangelical faith and the fervour of this faith led her to prison visiting and then to prison reform.

There was however a backlash in more conservative Quaker circles who were afraid that such worldly activity and evangelical theology would dilute Quakerism. Eventually these conflicts led Quakers in North America to split up into different factions. Some of these divisions still remain, although gatherings are held to broaden mutual understanding of the different Quaker traditions. Even today the conferences are not always easy affairs when theology is discussed, yet there is much greater co-operation than previously.

There has always been a tension among Quakers between, on the one hand, the idea that the leadings of the light within were sufficient for spiritual fulfilment and, on the other hand, a reliance on the Bible and the atonement for sins through the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. This tension was brought to the surface by the evangelical emphasis on scriptural authority and the perceived need for salvation, a position held by many prominent Quakers towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Later in the nineteenth century, the tension grew into conflict as among some Friends the growing belief in the scientific method was leading to a reassessment of the nature of authority and historical accuracy. Texts were being studied and questioned, and Biblical infallibility, a belief close to the hearts of many an evangelical according to which the Bible was literally true, was no longer being taken for granted. This led to three distinct trends among Quakers: the traditionalists or conservatives, who quietly relied upon the Light of Christ within; the evangelicals for whom the Bible was growing in importance as a source of authority; and the new modernists or liberals whose theology was suspect to both the others as it questioned both the distinctiveness of some of the old customs and the literalness of the Bible. Under the impact of the new Biblical criticism and the work of Charles Darwin, the modernists were questioning their faith and were trying to see how the new knowledge fitted in with the old certainties. Whereas in the United States these trends resulted in splits, in Britain there has been no comparable division.

#### The twentieth century

There was no doubt that for many (often contradictory) reasons, groups of Quakers were confused about the direction their Society was taking. This search for a new direction and revival came to a head in a national conference held in Manchester in 1895. Under the leading of John Wilhelm Rowntree (1868–1905), Quakers saw the need for a greater commitment to an understanding of the origins of their Society, to a new teaching ministry (which eventually led to the creation of Woodbrooke College, the Quaker study centre in Birmingham), and to a new vision of the role of Quakers in the twentieth century.

This was on the whole a triumph for a more liberal, outward-going emphasis but if it was a form of religious liberalism it was a liberalism enhanced by a

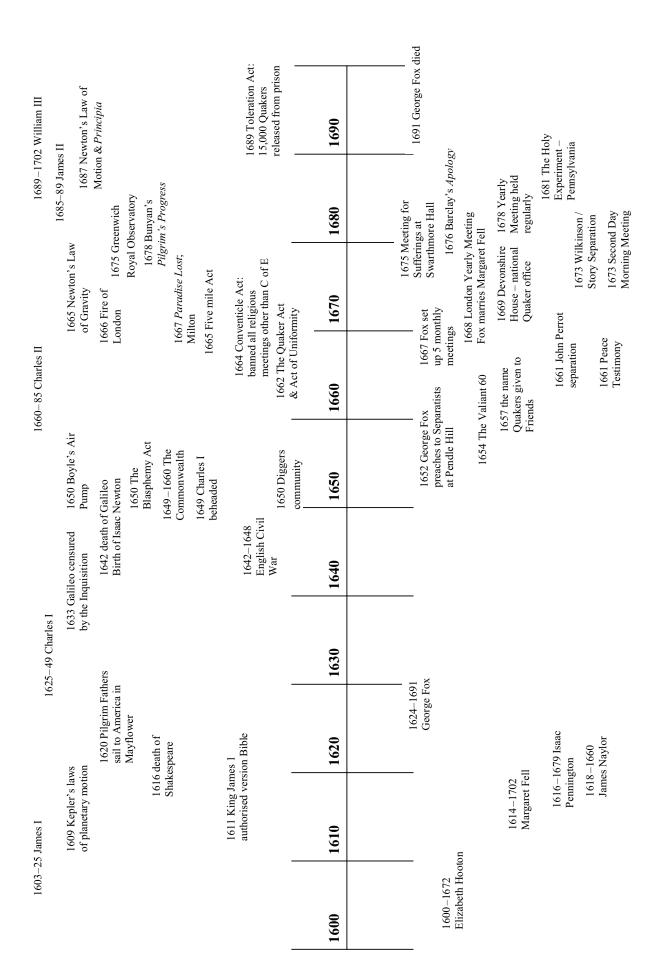
mystical awareness of the presence of God. The notable exponent of this stream of Quakerism was the American, Rufus M. Jones (1863–1948). For him the personal experience of God is a mystical experience. In his *The Flowering of Mysticism*, he describes it thus: 'Mysticism is an immediate, intuitive, experimental knowledge of God, or one might say it is consciousness of a Beyond or of Transcendent Reality or of Divine Presence.' The emphasis in this book is on the light within; less is placed on historical crucifixion.

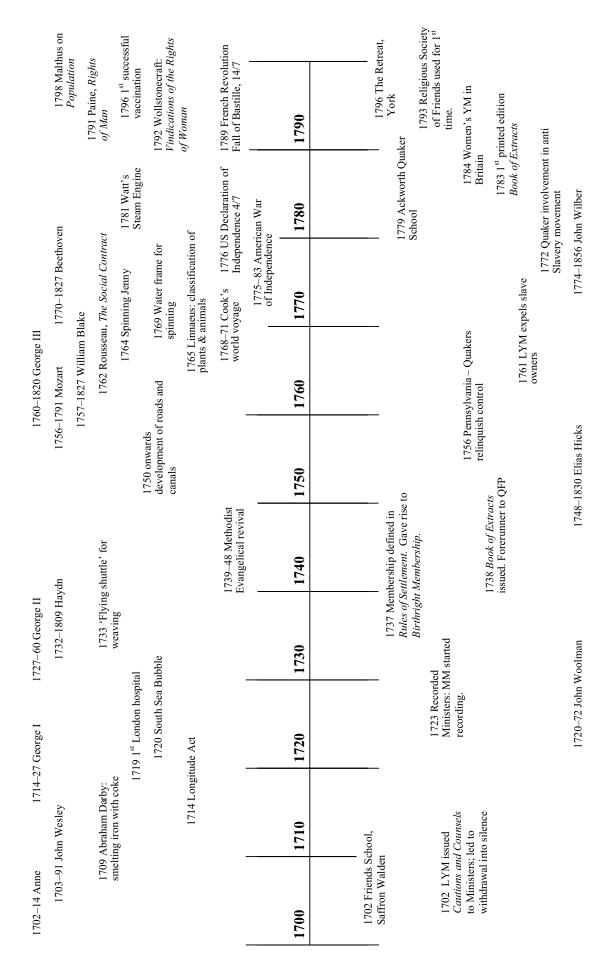
The last quarter of the twentieth century and the beginnings of the twenty-first century have brought about the transformations in the Society which I shall consider in chapter Six. What is important about these different historical emphases in Quakerism is that to a varying extent they are still alive in the Religious Society of Friends. There are still enthusiasts who wish to carry the message of George Fox into the market place; quietists who feel that too much outward activity gets in the way of the Spirit; evangelicals who witness to the effect in their lives of Jesus Christ, their saviour and redeemer; liberals whose gospel is a social one and whose emphasis is on religious humanism; mystics who speak of the Spirit in all things; radicals who try to deconstruct the nature of religious experience, and others who would simply call themselves Christians, for whom no other title quite fits their understanding of religion. Indeed, it is one of the joys, though not unmixed sometimes with anxiety, to have all these Quakers sitting down together in worship. For it is worship which brings Quakers together. And it is out of worship that arises the Quaker idea of service in the world.

from *A light that is shining: an introduction to the Quakers,* Harvey Gillman, Quaker Books, 2003

# for Distinctives 1: Ouaker timeline

1590 1599–1658 Oliver Cromwell 1580 1570 1559 John Knox founded Church of Scotland 1559 Act of Uniformity 1558–1603 Elizabeth I 1560 1553-1558 Mary I 1547-53 Edward VI 1549 Book of Common Prayer 1550 1540 1538 Bible in every church 1534 Henry VIII Defender of Faith. 1530 1520 1509-1547 Henry VIII 1510 1500





1820-30 George IV

1837-1902 Victoria 1830-37 William IV

1895 Marconi, wireless and detelegraph

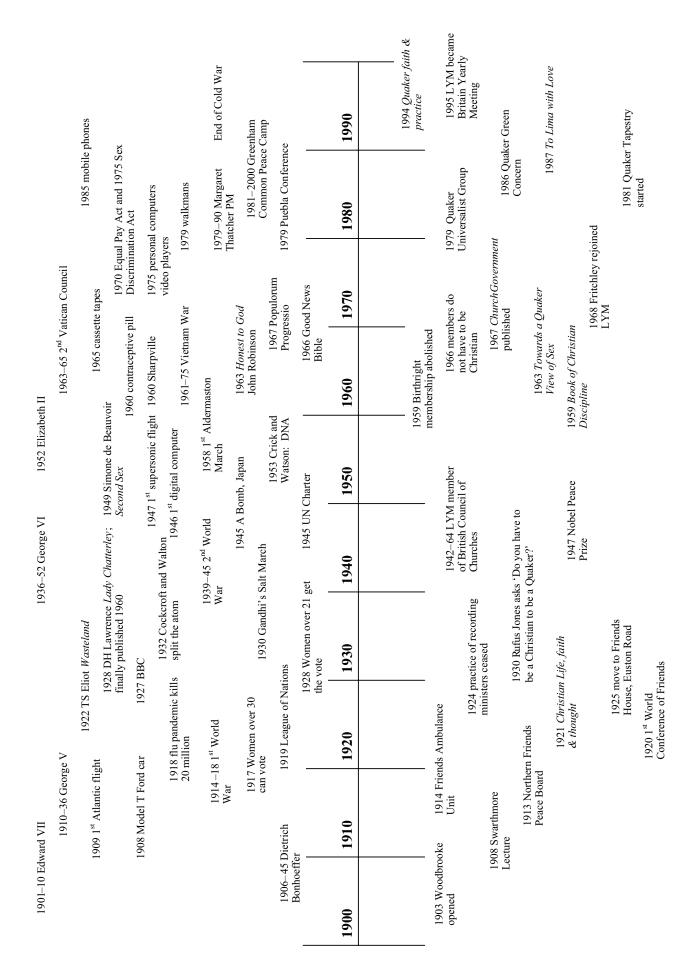
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1897 Freud
begins analysis

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Cooperative Guild 1897 Scarborough Summer School 1885 Women's Co-operative Guild 1892 Kier Hardie MP 1887 Richmond Declaration (US) Gurneyite. 1896 YM open to women 1886 The Gospel of Divine Help Edward Wordsell 1890 1st London tube 1884 A Reasonable Faith critical Conference of dogmatic evangelicalism 1885 Pasteur, inoculation 1885 electric lighting 1890 1882 Married women's property Act 1884 Fabian Society 1878 Women admitted to London university 1875 Booth and Salvation 1879–1955 Einstein 1876 Bell, telephone 18801868 Friends Foreign Mission Association founded 1871 Descent of Man, 1866 Non conformists admitted to Oxford and Cambridge 1869 Fritchley schism Army 1869 JS Mill The Subjection of Women 1865 Lister, antiseptics in surgery 1861 Revision of Book of .866 Mendel, Laws of 1870 1860 Peculiarities of dress and speech optional 1861-65 American Civil Darwin 1857 YM open to all Friends 1859 marriage to non members without penalty 1859 Quakerism Past & Present, JS Rowntree Hereditary 1859 Origin of the Species, Darwin Discipline 1854-56 Crimean War 1860 War Temperance Union 1848 Communist Manifesto 1845 Adult School Movement 1846 Lister, 1st use of anaesthetic 1845 Wilbur/Gurney split 1852 Friends 1833 Friends admitted to Parliament. Joseph 1850 1839-1922 George Cadbury 1840 Voyage of Beagle, Darwin 1842 Sibford School 1836-1925 Joseph Rowntree Pease 1st Quaker elected 1833-41 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act 1831 Faraday, electricity 1840 1833 Factory Act 1829 Stephenson's Rocket 1823 Bootham 1831 The Mount School School 1825 Darlington Stockton Railway 1827 Hicksite Separation US 1824 Advices & Queries LYM in present form 1830 824 Trade Unions 1819 Atlantic crossing ecognised 1813 Davey's safety lamp 1811-16 Luddite Riots 1813 Elizabeth Fry at 1820 steam ship 1811–89 John Bright, Quaker Cabinet Minister Newgate Prison 1807 Anti Slave Trade Act 1808 Sidcot School 1810 1800



# Extract for Distinctives 4: Quakers as a prophetic community

# from 'An orientation to prophecy' by Marion McNaughton

#### Quakers as a prophetic community

As Quakers today we have inherited, from Judaism and then Christianity, a long prophetic tradition of richness and complexity and it is ours to use. So how are we choosing to respond to it? Today in the Quaker family we interpret prophecy in different ways, yet I believe there is an underlying unity in our practice, and if we understand our tradition as a whole, we can make this diversity a gift not a stumbling block. Here are some key elements:

- Quaker prophecy is the experience of the word of God, alive among us, directly
  felt and recognised. It can come out of silence, speech, scripture, song, however
  we worship, however we minister.
- There is always a message of some kind: enlightening, clarifying, demanding.
- The message is intended for us and for others. Who they are can be familiar, those in our meetings, or still unknown, those we reach out to. These are the tasks of teaching and mission.
- There can be both individual Quaker prophets and also prophetic Quaker communities. Both have their strengths and their limitations. Both can exist together.
- George Fox never felt he needed to verify his leadings, but noted that
  whenever he consulted scripture, he found them confirmed. After the fall of
  James Nayler, Friends came to understand that prophecy must be tested, and
  we do this today. Some of us confirm leadings by reference to scripture, others
  by reference to the collective discernment of the gathered meeting. But the
  leading from God always remains primary.
- Quaker prophecy today, as in the Hebrew tradition, has the same dual purpose, the same triangular relationship with God. To enlighten, nurture and extend the spiritual community. And also to speak truth to those in power, to take prophetic action, to press for change in the world.
- We can do both! We must do both! Both are holy. Abraham Heschel, a Jew, marched from Selma to Montgomery with Martin Luther King in 1965. It was a bloody, confrontational event, but it was for him a deeply spiritual occasion. When he returned, he told his daughter, 'I felt as if my legs were praying'.

There is a whole spectrum of prophetic possibility open to us, calling for our attention. Do we practise it all? Or do we settle for just a part, just one place on the spectrum? What does the Lord require of us? I see our diversity as an uncomfortable challenge that we hold out to each other, for all of us to be more than we are being at present. Some of us concentrate on silent waiting, some on proclamation, some on mission, some on social action. All of these things are part of the prophetic tradition, and none of us fulfils them all. So we serve as uncomfortable reminders and loving prompts to each other – Friend, is there something you are neglecting?

#### What kind of voice?

So what kind of Quaker prophetic voice is needed today? What will enable people to hear the voice of God? What will bring the changes we long to see?

Let us go back to Jeremiah\* for a moment, prophesying for twenty three years without anyone listening to him. His name has been immortalised for this. The dictionary says:

Jeremiah: someone who is pessimistic about the present and foresees a calamitous future; a person given to woeful lamentation and complaining.

Well, I don't know about you, but I find it incredibly hard to listen to someone filled with woeful lamentations and complaining, for twenty three minutes, let alone twenty three years. The Hebrew prophets were always ready to blame the people for refusing to hear the word of God. But I have to wonder, could it have been something to do with the way the word of God was being preached? Did the prophets fall into the trap of expressing their own frustration and anger? Did their own despairing voices sometimes speak louder than God's?

I was recently at a conference when a Friend who was deeply concerned about a matter of great spiritual importance, stood up and lectured us for a long time about how urgent this was, how we must all stop what we were doing and turn our energies to this one problem. We listened with sinking hearts. When he finished and sat down, the person next to me leaned across and whispered, 'This nagging has to stop!' This was not the response he had been hoping for.

How can we help each other from falling into this trap? Let us think for a moment of those self-appointed prophets we all turn away from. They are well-intentioned. But they drown us in their urgency and their fear. They make us feel guilty and inadequate. They blame us. They depress and immobilise us. They are doing their best but they are having no effect. This nagging has to stop.

If we want to bring the Kingdom of Heaven we must have insight, skills, compassion, abounding love, and methods that work. We must be people that

<sup>\*</sup> Jeremiah 25:3 'For twenty three years...the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened.'

fill other people with hope, not despair. It is no good being right for twenty three years if no-one is listening to us.

Effective prophecy energises and encourages people. It acknowledges their failures and inadequacies, but it doesn't blame – it comforts and consoles. It believes in people. It is an invitation to return to God. And because it is deeply rooted in God, it can bring others to God;s presence. Open Isaiah at chapter 40 and hear the unknown prophet we call Second Isaiah pour out love and consolation:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.

This is a prophetic voice we can respond to. It lifts our hearts, it renews our strength, we can 'mount up with wings like eagles'.

So what do we need in prophecy that will enable people to hear the voice of God? It is very simple. Jean Leclerq, a Benedictine, has said:

We must love the age we live in. From the point of view of faith, the best age for each of us is the one God has placed us in, the one he has given us, and which we must give back to him.

We must love the age we live in.

Sometimes this is very hard to do, but it is our task.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 13

Effective prophets work from a place of love. They nurture us, they inspire us to engage with our faith in deeper and deeper ways. We are inspired, we lead committed lives which return us always to our spiritual core. It is circular. Our outward lives are shaped from within, our actions bring us closer to God, and we live God's truth in the world.

Because whatever form it takes, prophecy is essentially mystical. God breaks through. The world is imperfect, but it is still wholly of God, wholly divine. The prophets are those who enable us to see that God is always available to us, the kingdom is always about us. Rosa Parks, one of my inspirations, one of the enablers of the American Civil Rights Movement, sat down in the middle of a bus and simply enacted the kingdom of heaven, a world of justice and equality. And God's voice was heard. One of the people sitting at the back, unable to move, said later, It was holy in that bus.

When we can prophesy with this kind of love, this kind of clarity, this kind of holiness, God's voice will be heard.

We have come a long way as a people of God. We have grown and changed. We have found new ways and held on to old ways. We are still gathered, waiting to hear God's voice, waiting for prophecy to flourish amongst us. We will hear God's voice again and again ...saying familiar and comforting things, saying challenging and uncomfortable things. In love, let us listen with open hearts.

from 'Finding the prophetic voice for our time', Marion McNaughton and Lizz Roe, *The Woodbrooke Journal*, Autumn 2007, No 21

# Extract for Distinctives 6: Ouaker faith in action – in it for the long run

#### Peace is not a dirty word

There has been a tendency for those of us in the peace education field to shy away from referring to it as such. In an effort to sell education for peace, we have packaged it to fit with the PSHE [Personal, Social and Health Education] and Citizenship agenda, calling it human rights, conflict resolution, anti-bullying... anything to make it less problematic for schools. Each of these is an element of educating children and young people to be peaceable, to appreciate the potential of conflict when handled creatively, and to celebrate difference. But, as we concluded at the last Peace Education Network (PEN) meeting, 'peace is not a dirty word'. I can't imagine that many would disagree with this. And yet, providing education for peace to schools can be so controversial.

Herein lies a quandary. Why is it that the concept of peace is so applauded, but working in a non-violent way to achieve it is suspect? Should we present our work in a way that will cause least offence and get us through the door of schools, or does this reinforce the reticence and infer that working for peace is somehow distasteful or, worse still, tantamount to indoctrination? Should we be upfront about our message even if this presents schools with a challenge and may reduce the direct work we are able to do?

I personally believe that education for peace is greater than the sum of its parts. It is not just about teaching children about their rights or putting on an Africa day where children learn that the continent exists and that they eat different food there. I believe that this pragmatic response to getting into schools actually compromises the tenets of what we are trying to achieve. I figure it's the approach taken that makes the difference between providing peace education and educating for peace.

I don't think it is possible to teach students that child-on-child bullying is wrong, without challenging bullying behaviour between teachers, parents and on the international stage. To try undermines our credibility and makes nonsense of what we are teaching. Equally, citizenship education must be about more than turning out young people who will vote every four years and won't speed or drop litter. It is about encouraging young people to look at the community and world they live in and question what they see.

I guess this is where the controversy comes in. But I work for the Religious Society of Friends, and Quakers generally don't have a problem with being viewed as controversial. Because of their involvement in, and position on, activities such as non-violent direct action, they have, collectively and individually, regularly been viewed as subversive over the years. *Quaker faith & practice* 24.11 advises, 'we

should not automatically accept the categories, definitions and priorities of the world'.

Although not a Quaker myself, I chose to work for them because I am in sympathy with the beliefs and values they aspire to; values of truth, integrity and peace, which I believe are integral to education for peace. Quakers acknowledge the realities of conflict and of evil, but contend that war and violence are not effective means of dealing with them. Instead, they determine that we must 'wage peace', using tools which include 'speaking truth to power', and living and working as a 'witness' to these values. According to the Quaker way, how each individual undertakes this is for personal discernment.

So how do I relate all this to getting peace education into schools? To witness means not only telling, but demonstrating to children that truth and integrity are important in working for a more just society. And whilst 'speaking truth to power' usually refers to engaging with those who are central to political, economic and military decision-making to present an alternate worldview, I believe the concept can be similarly applied to the 'gatekeepers' in schools and LEAs.

The current fact-driven education system, with its emphasis on testing, creates an environment where structural violence is almost inevitable. This academic violence undermines our educational system and creates a generation of passive learners. Education should not inhibit children, it must teach them to think for themselves and empower them to learn for learning's sake, not simply to pass exams. Affecting the way in which children are educated is an integral part of educating for peace.

Education for peace is about identifying that young people have the power to change things they see as wrong in their community and more widely, as well as developing in them the imagination to find alternative responses to conflict. I believe that the means we employ to provide education for peace are indistinguishable from the content of the lessons. We must be uncompromising in presenting what we provide for school otherwise we compromise what we offer young people.

Jaci Smith, Peace Education Advisor

This article was previously published in *DEA* (*Development Education Association*) *Journal*, October 2006.



#### Uganda

Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) has been undertaking work and partnerships in Uganda since October 2000.

#### **QPSW** in Uganda

Based in Gulu District, the home of the Acholi people, QPSW's Uganda programme is committed to building a peace that will last.

Since 1986 the conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan Government has continued to destroy the lives of the two million people living in the north of Uganda.

The majority of the population live in camps for displaced people, dependent on food aid and subject to the violent attacks of the LRA, including the regular abduction of children who are forced to join its ranks.

#### Peace but not peace

Since 2006 the Juba Peace talks have achieved an unprecedented series of agreements between the rebels and the Government of Uganda that set out steps for peace and development. While a 'final peace agreement' has not been achieved, the LRA is not currently active in Uganda and people are starting to move tentatively back to their village homes. The LRA remains unchecked, however, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where it continues to threaten the region's stability. Many abducted Ugandans remain within its ranks.

#### Our work

Coordinated from Friends House in London, a small team of QPSW staff supports local groups who are working towards a peaceful resolution of the brutal conflict. A current focus is the reintegration of the many formerly abducted children who have been able to escape from the LRA, and are returning to their communities. Part of this process involves seeking reconciliation between communities and those who have harmed them, in order that society might move into a well-founded future.

#### **Empowering Hands**

To contribute to this need, QPSW is working with Empowering Hands, a group of 30 girls who had been abducted or otherwise affected by the conflict, to help them explore their place in society, and encourage their peers through sharing their experiences on radio and through drama. EH's network of peer support groups is currently developing its work to reach those who are now moving away from

the camps of displaced people. Their focus remains enabling those caught up in the conflict to develop trust in each other in a way that assists society to function better.

#### Justice and reconciliation project

In 2008 QPSW has published two pieces of research in partnership with the Justice and Reconciliation Projects, a local research-based group in Gulu. The findings of *With or Without Peace* and *Sharing the Burden* are helping to direct our own work and that of others in the field of re-integration.

#### Reflecting on peace

Working with the Mennonite Central Committee, QPSW is supporting a handful of key local peacebuilders to come together on a regular basis to reflect on their own approach to peace and its effectiveness. This group seeks to offer moral support at this difficult time in Uganda, as well as enabling new ideas and insights to be shared.

#### **Civil society leaders**

As a member of the Northern Uganda Advocacy Partnership for Peace (NUAPP) QPSW has supported a recent visit of civil society leaders from northern Uganda to the UK. The aim of the visit was to allow these local leaders to meet policy-makers and parliamentarians to bolster international support for the conflict's peaceful resolution. This visit included valuable time in Northern Ireland where the leaders met community representatives whose experience they see as comparable to their own.

#### **Partnerships**

Relationships are the bedrock of QPSW's approach in Uganda. Our work in northern Uganda is developed through ongoing communications with local groups and individuals seeking to build peace.

In the UK we are a member of NUAPP, a coalition of UK-based NGOs (NUAPP's current members are Christian Aid, Conciliation Resources, QPSW, Tearfund and World Vision). NUAPP exists to connect UK-based policy-makers with information and opinion from peacebuilders in northern Uganda in order to build UK and international support for a permanent peaceful resolution to the LRA conflict.

from Quaker Peace & Social Witness Uganda pages at: www.quaker.org.uk



# 'What does Quakerism mean to me?' by Deborah Rowlands

#### 1. Roots

I was asked to take part in this presentation as 'a traditional Quaker'. I expect most of you know the quote from Samuel Bownas, a Quaker of the seventeenth century who was told:

'A traditional Quaker; thou comest to meeting as thou went from it, and goes from it as thou came to it but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?' I saw by experience wherein my shortness had been in being contented and easy with a form of truth and religion, which I had only by education . . . but all this though very good in its place, did not make me a true Christian; I was but a traditional Quaker.  $(Qf\&p\ 19.60, part)$ 

Like Samuel, I got the Quaker habit early in life. Both my parents come from families whose Quaker roots go back to the seventeenth century – and then I married into the Rowlands family, which gave my children another different pile of Quaker antecedents to live down – or up – to.

My Quaker forbears didn't always have an easy time of it – more than one on both sides of the family were disowned for 'walking disorderly' in some way including fox hunting and teenage pregnancy. They were plain country Friends – grocers, weavers and manufacturers – not the great names of Quaker history. Doubtless, each in their turn struggled over their faith and how to live by it. This faithfulness, and the testing of it over the last three hundred and fifty years, is part of the experience the Society has to build on.

The picture is my grandmother, Laura Jane Moore – I think she has an even more worried look than me! She grew up in the 1880s when the Society was still strongly evangelical:



Heaven and Hell were ever present realities and entered into all the details of our lives. This made it extremely difficult for me, with my always thoughtful and logical mind. I might see a bird fly across the sky or a dog running along the road, and would wish I were that bird or dog so that I need not believe what seemed impossible.

Whilst still at school, she was reading *A reasonable faith*, one of the books that led up to the Manchester Conference of 1895, which is one of the turning points towards the liberal phase, which characterised the twentieth century.

The Quakerism that I grew up with saw itself as a natural part of the Christian Church. I have served Friends on national ecumenical bodies, but also, for the past ten years I have belonged to a local ecumenical fellowship that meets every month to read the Bible together, pray and share ideas about our faith. We have experienced times of deep sharing, despite very real differences of faith, and I have grown immeasurably through the gentle challenge of their strong convictions. It is natural for me to use the imagery and language of the Bible, and Quaker writing based on it, to express my understanding of the Spirit.

Like my grandmother, I have found Quakerism is a reasonable faith. I can bring into it my scientific and mathematical training, and my aesthetic, moral and emotional senses too; it accepts and uses all of me. Religion and Life are one, or neither is anything, said John Wilhelm Rowntree. The Spiritual Life is first of all a life, said Thomas Merton. Jesus calls us, not to a new religion but to Life, said Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Quakerism gives me a path for an integrated life, one that has wholeness; a spirituality that links inextricably the individual, how we are together as a Society, and what we do with our lives.

from Quaker identity and the heart of our faith, Quaker Life, 2008

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#### Extract for Deepening 2: A prayer reflecting on our Quaker roots and seeking openness to new growth

### Prayer by Margaret Benefiel

Oh God, we thank you for the great depth of the Quaker tradition. ...You have met us throughout our history, very deeply, both as individuals and corporately.

As Sarah Jones admonished in 1650: 'Seek not the manifestations but that which manifests.' We see how when we seek you, the source of the manifestations, you meet us in a very deep place, and you transform us. You transform us as individuals. You transform our families. You transform our meetings.

And God, as we allow you to do your transforming work in us, and as we rely totally on you, not focusing on the manifestations, you strip away what is not essential.

Sanctify us to be your vessels.

You also give us eyes to see through the manifestations in the ocean of darkness so that we can unmask the powers, speak truth to power, and allow you to do your powerful work in transforming society.

And God, as we seek to know what Quaker spirituality is, we know that it is revealed in the lives of those who came before us, and in our own lives.

We know that as we hear the stories of other Friends' walks with you, as we let our stories be drawn out of us by Friends who listen deeply to us as we steep ourselves deeply in the stories, we meet you.

And so, God, we give you thanks for people like Sarah Jones, one of the earliest Quaker writers, for George Fox, for Margaret Fell, for John Woolman, for Catherine Phillips, for John Wilbur, for Lucretia Mott,

for Marjorie Sykes,
for Thomas Kelly,
for Simeon Shitemi,
for Elise Boulding,
for David Niyonzima,
all of whom at different times and places
have lived into what it means not to seek the manifestations,
but to seek that which manifests,
and to allow you to shape them and transform them
and work through them in the gathered community,
and in the world at large.

And God, when we ask the question,
'Is it important that there be a Quaker spirituality?'
we can only lay that one at your feet,
acknowledging that you have worked powerfully in the past,
you continue to work powerfully in the present,
and that if you want to continue to work through the Society of Friends,
you will show us that.
You will keep us alive in the ways that you want us to be alive.

You will keep us alive in the ways that you want us to be alive.

Please forgive us when we make idols of our forms, when we make idols of our traditions.

Help us to continue to seek you anew, each day, in each time and place in which we find ourselves, in each culture, in each transformation which goes on in our society.

We know that Quaker spirituality is only worth something when it is the continual new life breathed by your Spirit.

Help us let go of forms and structures that have served us well in the past when they no longer serve us now,

when they no longer serve your purposes. Help us come to you with that radical trust

Help us come to you with that radical trust that you will lead us into what we need for our time, for our place, for the future.

We confess that we too often get into ruts and we focus on the manifestations instead of that which manifests. We think that the particular committee structure we have at our meeting, the particular way that our worship flows, is the only way or the best way.

Soften our hearts to be aware of your nudges as you breathe life into some of the forms that we have and as you invite us to let go of other forms we've been using and move into something new.

God, as we seek to be faithful Quakers, to learn from our own tradition and to learn from other traditions, we pray that you will help us to go deeply into our own tradition and to courageously encounter ourselves and one another at those deep places.

As we read journals and letters and epistles, and listen for that place where words come from, as we go deeply into our own tradition and encounter other Friends' relationships with you; The more deeply we go there, the more deeply we will be able to receive what other traditions have to offer us.

We will be able to connect with the deep stories of those traditions as well.

So give us the courage not to stay on the surface and sample just a little bit of everything, but to plunge into the depth of our particular path, and then experience the deep connections that will lead us to [friendship] with other traditions.

We know, God, that we're at a time in the history of our world when the transformative power that early Friends experienced and that Friends throughout the centuries have experienced, is greatly needed.

And God, we offer ourselves to you,

to be available for you to work in us in those ways, in those same ways that you have worked in Friends of old.

We want to be vessels who are completely available to you. So please give us the courage and openness to give ourselves completely to you, and to see what will happen when we let your power work through us. Thank you, God. Amen

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