

Universalist Friends

The Journal Of The Quaker Universalist Fellowship

In This Issue:

- 3** From the Clerk
- 6** Editor's Note
- 7** *Remembering John Linton*
by Rhoda Gilman
- 10** *The Quaker Way, A Vision For The New Century*
by Harvey Gillman
- 23** *Two Mirrors Facing One Another*
by Maxwell Ketels
- 29** *A Plea For Universal Interfaith Efforts*
by Arvol Looking Horse
- 31** Book Reviews
1688: The First Modern Revolution, by Steven Pincus
Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist, by Stephen Batchelor
- 37** Publications Also Noted



Quaker Universalist Fellowship



Quaker Universalist Fellowship

The Quaker Universalist Fellowship is an informal gathering of persons who cherish the spirit of universality that has always been intrinsic to the Quaker faith. We acknowledge and respect the diverse spiritual experience of those within our own meetings as well as of the human family worldwide; we are enriched by our conversation with all who search sincerely. Our mission includes publishing and providing speakers and opportunities for fellowship at regional and national Quaker gatherings.

Universalist Friends is published twice a year and pamphlets on an irregular schedule. All are free to on-line subscribers. These publications are available as web pages (HTML) for browsing, ebooks (PDF) for on-line reading, and pamphlets (booked PDF) for printing. Visit our website at <http://www.universalistfriends.org> to enter a free on-line subscription.

If you wish to receive printed copies of these publications by regular mail, send an annual subscription fee of \$26.00 to QUF at our mailing address below. Selected past QUF publications are available free to our on-line subscribers. We will send available printed copies of past publications upon request and on payment of a fee.

We trust that all of our subscribers will support our work by sending a tax-deductible contribution to QUF. You can also contribute by sharing your reflections on our publications and on your own experiences. To make a contribution, subscribe to printed versions of our publications, or ask questions, contact:

Larry Spears, Clerk
Quaker Universalist Fellowship
15160 Sundown Drive
Bismarck, North Dakota 58503-9206
Tel: 701-258-1899 Fax: 701-258-9177
Email: spears@btinet.net
website: www.universalistfriends.org

The work of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship expresses Friends' belief that there is a spirit of universal love in every person, and that a compassion-centered life is therefore available to people of all faiths and backgrounds.

Through publications, lectures, and conferences the Quaker Universalist Fellowship seeks to encourage appreciation of the diverse paths to that spirit available in humankind's various spiritual cultures, to overcome discord, and to foster openness and listening among people of different religious faiths. In carrying out this work we cooperate with Friends from every branch of Quakerism.

We seek, or create, opportunities for all Friends to engage in constructive dialogue among Quakers and with representatives of other spiritual traditions, in the hope that religious faith, although diverse, will become a force which unites rather than divides the human family. We seek to nurture that unity through lives of simplicity, humility, justice, mercy, and peace so that it becomes a beacon drawing together the human family in love and service to all earthly life.

QUF Steering Committee, October 2009

SUBMISSIONS

We are seeking articles from 500 to 3,000 words. These may be essays on personal experience of arrival or maturation in Quaker universalism or of worship or they may be scholarly works focused on Quaker universalism, history, biography, sociology, scripture, and theology, both Christian and non-Christian. We also welcome book reviews, poetry, personal essays, and letters. Use inclusive language. Please send your submissions by U.S. mail on diskette or CD in WORD to Rhoda Gilman, 513 Superior St., St. Paul, MN 55102 or as WORD attachments to email to rhodagilman@earthlink.net. Please put UF in the subject line. We do not accept anonymous submissions without very good reason. **Deadline for next issue: December 15.**

Universalist (#85, June, 2010)

This issue of the journal of the Quaker Universalist Group reflects the growing cooperation between our two organizations. Like the present issue of *Universalist Friends*, it includes a memorial to John Linton. It also carries a reprint for British readers of Sallie King's article, "East-West Puzzlements," which appeared in *Universalist Friends* last winter. We look forward to more interchange in future.



Mapping the Quaker Presence

Under the imprint of Troll Press, Sally Rickerman, whose long-time service in various capacities with the QUF is widely known, has produced a set of maps to illustrate the location of unprogrammed Friends meetings throughout the United States and the geographic areas served by yearly meetings associated with the four branches of US Quakerism. The two maps are printed in color on high quality paper and are suitable for posters or even for framing. They are accompanied by a flyer that briefly describes the four branches and gives contact information for major organizations identified with each one.

The set provides information that is current as of 2010 and not widely available. It will be especially useful to meetings, schools, and other Friends organizations that attract newcomers who are curious about the history and distribution of the different kinds of Quakers they have encountered. For prices, ordering, and other questions, contact Troll Press at 121 Watson Mill Road, Landenberg, PA 19350.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CLERK

Timely and Timeless The current US headlines about Muslims, religious terrorism, race, immigration and environmental traumas highlight the importance of the perspective on truth arising out of the Quaker tradition of the Christian tradition of the Jewish tradition of the primordial human tradition. Out of this experience all religious traditions have grown in depth of insight and distortions. Describing the Quaker experience over 350 years within this broader human religious experience, scrutinizing both of them and projecting them forward in our behavior and in the testimony of our daily lives and our community lives is our task. The Quaker Universalist Fellowship (QUF) is on the case in providing forums and publications for the exploration of Quaker experience in its universalist themes.

To date, these universalist themes that the Quaker experience has embraced and evangelized include:

- The insight that there is that of God in every person
- The insight that spiritual truth is available to people of all faiths and backgrounds
- Appreciation of the diverse paths to truth available in humankind's spiritual cultures
- The importance of overcoming discord and fostering a spirit of love and listening among people of different religious faiths
- The importance of direct, personal involvement in living out the Quaker testimonies of simplicity, equality, humility, justice, and compassion

Within these themes it is not easy to identify the implications, and the list of implications for our lives is not complete. These themes are not easy to integrate into our daily behavior. They

are not easy to integrate into our public testimonies as citizens. They are provisional and open to expansion and modification as way opens. In this process, the Quaker Universalist Fellowship provides assistance to us all.

In this conversation, we value your insights, suggestions and admonitions as we grope to understand and publish truth for our time and the future. We are in this together.

QUF Presence at 2010 FGC Gathering QUF provides forums for Quaker assessment of important perspectives on universalist themes. QUF is delighted again to sponsor the Elizabeth Watson Lecture at the Friends General Conference gathering in Bowling Green, Ohio over the July 4-10 week, 2010. Philip Gulley, a significant Quaker leader with important views about universalism within the Quaker branch of the Christian tradition, will give the lecture. QUF leader Steve Angell will introduce him. We hope you will have an opportunity to hear this lecture. It will be an important presentation of universalist ideas from a pastoral perspective. QUF anticipates publishing the lecture in a future QUF pamphlet.

In addition to the Elizabeth Watson Lecture at the FGC gathering, QUF is sponsoring a number of afternoon discussions and interest groups on universalist themes. QUF steering committee member Anthony Manousos will organize and lead these sessions with assistance from other QUF spokespeople.

Dan Seeger to AFSC QUF leader Dan Seeger has recently resigned from the QUF steering committee to take responsibility for guiding the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) as Interim General Secretary. He will lead the AFSC until a permanent General Secretary is installed. Dan has provided great service to QUF and now is providing great service to us all with AFSC.

Words Quakers are better known for actions that serve truth than for written words. But there is also a need to interpret such service to the wider public by addressing and articulating the conditions of the day. George Fox gave it a try regarding the

PUBLICATIONS ALSO NOTED

Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy, by Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver, with Keith Helmuth, Robert Howell, and Steve Szeghi (2009)

This book is the first publication of the Moral Economy Project, which was launched in 2005 by the Quaker Institute for the Future. As the title implies, it expands on the MEP vision of “right relationship with the commonwealth of life.” The principal authors are both Canadian, and the publisher, Berrett-Koehler, is a San Francisco firm dedicated to a mission of “Creating a World that Works for All.” The main message of the book is the intimate connection between destruction of the environment and the workings of our world economy. Like many recent works, including those of David Korten and others, it “bears witness to a right way of living on our finite, life-giving planet.”



Living from the Center: Mindfulness Meditation and Centering for Friends, by Valerie Brown (2010)

This brief little work is number 407 in the ongoing Pendle Hill Pamphlet series. The author is a Quaker-Buddhist who has taught a number of meditation courses at Pendle Hill and elsewhere. With rare sensitivity, she unfolds the meanings of the word “centering” in Quaker, Buddhist, and Catholic usage, finding more similarities than differences. She shows that mindfulness meditation, which has been widely accepted in medical and other secular circles, and which is derived from the Buddhist Vipassana tradition, can be a powerful supplement to Quaker worship.



willingness to embrace the fundamental bewilderment of a finite, fallible creature as the basis for leading a life that no longer clings to the superficial consolations of certainty.” He sees this humble acceptance of unknowing amid the contingency of all things as fundamental to the way of the Buddha.

Bachelor goes on to place the Buddha within the context of time and history, which is itself a deeply Western concept. Like Christian scholars associated with the Jesus Seminar, he sifts the sketchy evidence of tradition, ancient documents, and archaeology for clues to the life, times, and actual teachings of a man who has become a myth with the stature of a God. The task highlights similarities between East and West. Both Jesus of Nazareth and Siddhatha Gotama began their teaching at about the age of thirty, and little or nothing is known of their lives before that time. Yet it appears that they somehow acquired world views that differed in crucial ways from the traditional milieu into which they were born. Both lived in times of unsettling social change and new lines of communication between distant cultures. Both were regarded with alarm and suspicion by the religious authorities of their time, although Gotama had protection by secular rulers that allowed him to survive as a teacher for fifty years. Jesus was quickly put to death, but his teachings were not so easily killed. They rose from the grave.

The many Quaker universalists who have been drawn to Buddhist philosophy and practice will find Stephen Batchelor a bit of a kindred soul. “Buddhism,” he says, “is like a living organism. If it is to flourish outside self-enclosed ghettos of believers, it will have to meet the challenge of understanding, interacting with, and adapting to an environment that is strikingly different from those in which it has evolved.” The same can be said of Quakerism and its 17th-century roots. If the Society of Friends is to fulfill its destiny of uniting rather than dividing humankind at this moment in history, it will have to speak with the spirit of George Fox, not his limitations.

unmediated teaching relationship with God and the role of silence in the maturation of worship liturgy. Later generations addressed social issues such as slavery and the rights of women and children in words as well as actions.

Today we face challenges of religious pluralism, religious violence, internal management of religious institutions, torture in human relationships and mechanisms for enhancing productive community decision-making throughout the world. QUF can contribute clarifying words on these subjects. QUF can also offer words and thoughts for Quakers in conversations in the public square. With your financial support, QUF can be a voice in the crowd, calling out the truth for us all.

Larry Spears

EDITOR'S NOTES

Universalist Friends on both sides of the Atlantic were saddened last spring at the death of John Linton. He was, of course, far better known in Britain than in the United States. I wish to thank Eleanor Nesbitt, Bill Walley, and other members of the Quaker Universalist Group for their help in putting together my brief memorial piece.

Harvey Gillman needs no introduction to readers of Universalist Friends. He is the author of the pamphlet *What is Spirituality?* published in spring, 2009, by the QUF. His article here is adapted from a talk he gave at the dedication of a restored and rebuilt meetinghouse in Jordans, UK.

Australian Friend Maxwell Ketels includes some words about himself in giving us another view of last year's Parliament of the World's Religions.

The communication from Arvol Looking Horse was given to me recently as a board member of the Pilot Knob Preservation Association, where I serve as a historian and also represent the Twin Cities Friends Meeting. Our meeting has been one of several faith communities that have joined with environmental organizations and Dakota people in saving a river bluff that is sacred to Native Americans. Known locally as Pilot Knob, the bluff overlooks the junction of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. Its open space was threatened with a housing development, but the effort at preservation was successful, and last October members of Twin Cities Friends joined with Dakota and many others in a formal ceremony on Pilot Knob to rededicate it as a sacred site. At the request of local Dakota communities, the religious ceremony was conducted by Arvol Looking Horse, a Lakota holy man from western South Dakota. For more about him and his teaching, see www.wolakota.org.

Rhoda Gilman

Confession of a Buddhist Atheist, by Stephen Batchelor (2010)

Reviewed by Rhoda Gilman

The title of this book carries a certain shock value in a Judeo-Christian culture that is not the same among those who have studied or tried to practice Buddhism. The Buddha deliberately avoided any statements about a supreme being or the origin of the universe. He was a nontheist, or, in the literal meaning of the word, an atheist. He preached only a way of life and an attitude toward what we experience as reality, although later elaborations and interpretations of his teaching have produced a vast complex of beliefs, rituals, and doctrines adapted to a variety of cultures. The new version that has evolved in the West during the past half century has shown a strong tendency to return to the simplicity of the original teachings, much as 17th-century Quakers sought the simplicity of early Christianity.

In this book the British scholar and author Stephen Batchelor follows up on his earlier work in *Buddhism Without Beliefs* (1997). We learn that his own spiritual journey led him through seven years as a monk in the Tibetan tradition, a crisis of faith, and three years as a Zen monk in Korea. Since the end of that time he has rejected both the Tibetan beliefs in reincarnation and karma and the Zen concept of a sudden nonrational enlightenment as to the final nature of existence. He recalls that "the worm of doubt" came to life inside him during a brief, almost accidental course in Vipassana (mindfulness) meditation offered to Tibetan novices by the Indian teacher S. N. Goenka. "Without relying on any deities, mantras, or mandalas, without having to master the intricacies of any doctrine or philosophy, I vividly understood what it meant to be a fragile, impermanent creature in a fragile, impermanent world."

The atheism to which Batchelor lays claim in the book's title is not that of modern materialism or secular scientism, which he thinks might better be called "anti-theism." His own stand more closely resembles what he calls "deep agnosticism," which is "the

were slow to realize that toleration for all religious groups was the best protection for themselves and that royal indulgence for toleration is less secure for the long term than civil rights backed by parliamentary law.

Quakers were split in their loyalties. William Penn was on the side of Catholic James II. He was grateful for James's royal indulgence to stop the oppressive harassment of Quaker meetings, even if it meant reduced civil liberties and government control of free speech. He collaborated with James, but most other Quaker leaders sided with William III, whom Penn was late in supporting.

The 17th century was a time of major change and the rapid growth of a universal standard of religious toleration. Through the events following the Cromwell revolution of 1640-60 and the subsequent persecutions of all dissenters toward the 1688 revolution, Quaker religious ideas changed, as did the Quaker view of the scope of those to be protected. This book is a good and sobering read for Quakers about the important idea and public policy of religious tolerance to the benefit of us all.

REMEMBERING JOHN LINTON

By Rhoda Gilman

John Linton died on March 4, 2010, just short of 100 years of age. Born in England in 1910, he founded the movement toward Quaker universalism as it evolved in the late 20th century. With the help of Ralph Hetherington and several others, he organized the Quaker Universalist Group in the UK in 1978, and his speaking tours to the USA inspired the formation of the Quaker Universalist Fellowship in 1983.

A sense of his personality is conveyed in a tribute by Alec Davison, published in Number 89 of *Universalist* (June 2010):

There was always something of the ancient mariner about John Linton. The jowled face and the glint in the eye commanded attention and he was a man who knew what he knew with no messing. He had a vision that he stood by with great tenacity but it was gilded with a hearty laugh: he was a man of great integrity and good to know.

Linton was not a birthright Friend. Descended from a long line of Anglican priests, he studied for the clergy but never sought ordination. Growing doubts moved him to join a humanist society instead and declare himself an agnostic. During World War II he served with the British army in India then returned to England to work briefly with the India Office and later with the BBC as Indian program organizer.

His growing acquaintance with the wisdom of the East and his admiration for Mohandas Gandhi may have been factors in his conclusion that humanism "had thrown the baby out with the bath water." Continuing spiritual search led him to the Society of Friends in the 1950s, and in 1961 he and his wife became Quaker international affairs representatives for south Asia, living in New Delhi. He also served for a time as an Oxfam volunteer in Bihar and did research at the Gandhian Institute in Benares.

Years of gathering in the silence of Quaker meetings to worship with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Buddhists, as well as Christians,

convinced Linton that Quakerism is a universal path, open to all. On his return to England, however, he found that many Friends did not agree. It was in response to those who saw the Society of Friends as a Christian sect that Linton and his supporters formed the QUG. In a lecture on “Quakerism as Forerunner,” he said:

What I envisage for Quakerism to become is a meeting-place for spiritual seekers of all faiths or none, where they can worship or meditate as they feel drawn. It will be a world-wide religion, without any particular bias, Christian or otherwise, but enshrining the supreme truths of all religions.

Now, when it has become clear that human civilization faces an immediate and planet-wide threat to its very existence, some of his later reflections speak with even greater force. During a lecture tour in India he said:

Today there is the danger of religious fundamentalism growing in Christian and Islamic countries. The yearning for religious certainty and authority must somehow be exposed as a negative and reactionary development. Only the growth of a universalist outlook can counteract these trends.... It is the continuous spiritual search that really matters. We are all fellow human beings, groping after the truth that lies beyond all religions.

In 1994 John Linton’s scattered writings were collected with the help of Eleanor Nesbitt and were published in a small book entitled *Athwart the Storm* (William Sessions Ltd., York, England). In it the following lines of poetry appear:

Rail-Side Thoughts

As we sped on into the European night,
The humble grass – I thought – that grew by the rail-side
Was the grass of homeland for those countless unknown,
Untouched by these transcontinental emotions,

manner that was widely accepted by the population. This view, familiar to all American history students, is a pleasing, agreeable, kindly story of sensible people defending their liberties in the face of Catholic evil in an essentially peaceful regime change, assuring continuity.

According to Pincus, earlier historians were too narrow in framing the story in the reality of both geography and time, and they failed to incorporate English social and economic life into their historic picture. In the Pincus picture, the growth of commerce, particularly Atlantic commerce and industry and new financial institutions, was the engine in the new 17th-century prosperity. The rapid and aggressive social and economic changes prior to the 1688 revolution transformed the political environment.

The fundamental, successful modernizing of the English government under William III contrasted with James II’s efforts to replicate the rationally centralized and bureaucratic state model of Louis XIV in France. William III was broadly tolerant of religious faiths within the Protestant tradition, respected constitutional controls, established public works, supported industry and new financial institutions over the landed aristocracy and supported navies over armies.

However, this revolution was far from benign. It was full of bloody conflict, changing factions, riots and property destruction comparable to the terror in France in 1789. It was messy and dangerous for all. The big picture was a new state-building program, radical for its time, revolutionary and with huge consequences for future centuries of English and American world dominance. According to Pincus, old regimes fall not because they are incapable of adjusting to changed circumstances, but because they commit to modernization, and this modernization process creates conflict between groups of modernizers.

Pincus does not describe an elevated or distinctive role for Quakers in this revolutionary time. They are recognized as only one of many dissenting sects that were groping for security for themselves at the expense of others. Quakers and others

Mary II and William III as a moderate, conservative and peaceful transition, a regime change with a velvet glove.

The book places England solidly in the context of events in Europe and global history. It expands the range of major events during the 1600s and places them in larger continental and world settings. Local stories are turned into national stories. National stories become regional stories. Regional stories become global stories. The overall effect is to bring populations previously assumed to have a sideline role into the center of history. Everything is connected. The fringe is at the center. The pan-European perspective is at the heart of the book.

There are nearly 500 pages of text, so the read is a long one. Pincus extends the text beyond general reading necessity because he is out to prove something. The endnotes consist of 130 pages for scholars. They reflect the author's preoccupation with documentation of his new interpretation, so there is substantial repetition and some redundancy.

In chapter 1, he gives an overview of his thesis and how it differs from former historical interpretations of England in the 17th century. If you want to reflect on revolutions in general, of which 1688 is but one, start with Chapter 2. The overview narrative of events of the 17th century is set out in Chapter 3.

The older, conventional view of 17th-century England is simple and reflects 19th-century historical perspectives. In it anti-papal Catholic James II, who inherited the crown in 1685, was an aggressive Catholic, a tyrant and a judicial murderer following suppression of the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion. James inserted Catholics into all offices and institutions, imposed toleration for Catholicism, and ignored Parliament. The distressed Protestant establishment opposed this autocrat and invited Protestant Dutch prince William III to England to restore traditional English liberties. William III did so. He defeated James II in a small war and was crowned king in 1689. William prevented the Catholic takeover of England and allowed Protestant dissenters (including Quakers) to worship freely in a bloodless, consensual, aristocratic, sensible

Grass not different from that of my Oxfordshire lanes,
Growing straight up to heaven by the power within it.

Everywhere are the souls of men growing straight up,
Untrammelled with thoughts of vying with the unknown,
Untrammelled and therefore perfect as God ordained –
Until they learn they are God's peculiar people,
Whether in force of arms, or culture, or beauty,
Or pride of soul, or past, or new, ideal.

Then they foregather, possessed by this strange force
Of conscious superiority, and strive no more
Toward the heights, but only to grow higher
Than their less fortunate fellows, for so they deem them –
Forgetting their fellows' no less ironical claim,
No less passionate, no less blind, of excellence.

Meanwhile the grass grows by the railway track
In every superior, self-proclaiming state,
Not realizing at all, poor ignorant grass,
That it's the other side of those damning customs,
And therefore out of bounds, outside the pale,
Altogether inferior, second-rate grass!

THE QUAKER WAY, A VISION FOR THE NEW CENTURY

By Harvey Gillman

That all people may have a direct awareness of the divine at any time and at any place; that this relationship may be deepened through a communal quiet listening to the divine within and between; that any awareness of the divine has practical consequences in how we live our lives; that the words in which this is expressed are secondary; it is the experience which is primary.

Everything else is commentary.

Tonight my commentary is about restoration and enhancement; the vibrancy of the Quaker vision in its worship, its witness, what it has to say to the world, and how it affirms the spiritual path of each of those who worship after the manner of Friends. For almost twenty years I was outreach secretary for Britain Yearly Meeting. In that period I met many Friends, seekers, explorers, many people who were hurt by previous encounters with religious institutions or simply baffled with the whole religious business. It was indeed a pilgrimage on which we told each other our stories, as pilgrims do.

The stories came in many shapes and sizes, in many different languages of the spirit. I have been a member of Friends now for about thirty years, but for long before that I was a pilgrim, even in my atheist days. I have journeyed through my childhood orthodox Jewishness, my fascination with Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, and forms of psychology. I see myself in some way on the path of the mystics, still I hope a dreamer, still trying to understand what it means to “answer that of God in everyone,” which was the dream of George Fox, the great early prophet of the Quaker movement.

I am by nature an optimist. I prefer to be more of an Isaiah than a Jeremiah. I believe that one of the main gifts that a religious community has to offer the world is hope, so I am not going to ask the question as to whether the Religious Society of Friends will

BOOK REVIEWS

1688: The First Modern Revolution, by Steven Pincus

Reviewed by Larry Spears

Steven Pincus has written an excellent book. It provides the historical context for the struggle of all religious factions, including Quakers, to recognize the merit of religious toleration – an insight that was not easy in coming.

The title is somewhat misleading, for the book is about the whole of the 17th century, not just 1688. In the revolution of 1688, however, the author sees the monumental event of the century in the departure of James II and the crowning of William III. Pincus provides a new, broader continental and global perspective on that event, which he considers the “first modern revolution.”

At the beginning of the 17th century in England the various religious communities saw their future protection as win-lose in the struggle of their particular truth over the error and evil of those who differed with them theologically. During the 17th century, Quakers, like Catholics, Anglicans and other Protestant sects, came to recognize the need to separate sectarian commitments from civil commitments. They came to recognize the benefit of broad tolerance of religious diversity. Quaker leaders increasingly recognized that “we are all in this together,” even though some groups held religious convictions that they abhorred.

It was the Quaker founding time. Pincus has expanded the stage and shows Quakers in the middle of the 17th-century turmoil. Friends were not leaders in the development of the new idea of religious toleration. In the evolution of the public thought process, William Penn was among the last to support this broad idea. Penn supported Catholic James II until William III triumphed in 1688.

Steven Pincus is a professor of history at Yale University and one of the new iconoclasts in English historiography. In this book he takes on the traditional view, which blandly and smugly called 1688 the “Glorious Revolution” and described the coming of

live in harmony, as we make the choice to change the destructive path we are on.

As we pray, we will fully understand that we are all connected. And that what we create can have lasting effects on all life.

So let us unite spiritually. All Nations. All Faiths. One Prayer. Along with this immediate effort, I also ask to please remember June 21st, World Peace and Prayer Day/Honoring Sacred Sites day. Whether it is a natural site, a temple, a church, a synagogue or just your own sacred space, let us make a prayer for all life, for good decision making by our Nations, for our children's future and well-being, and the generations to come.

Onipike (that we shall live)

Chief Arvol Looking Horse

19th generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe

have died out by 2030, which is the forecast of some. I actually believe that the guiding S/spirit (with both a capital and small S) is more important than an institution and that if we did die out in one form, the principles for which we stand would be resurrected in another.

The spiritual life is not about what we believe or how successful we are. It is about how we trust. Faith as knowledge so often takes the place of faith as trust. The real question is: to what do we give our hearts? And the question that follows is: after the deep and immediate encounter with Spirit which is at the core of the Quaker movement, do we have trust for ourselves and therefore hope to offer the world? The interplay of seeking and finding are really questions of trust and hope. We need a wider perspective than that of church history or politics or sociology however useful it is to engage with these. We need to consider the world in which we find ourselves, the language we use to express our deepest longings, the needs of the world itself. The church, however we define it, does not exist for itself. We are not here simply to prop up old foundations. We are here to explore the past and examine the present in order to discern the signs of the future. I believe the basic truths are eternal; how we live them out day by day requires the worshiping discernment of the community. Past, present, and future are all part of the continuing revelation. If I say I am optimistic and speak of hope, this is not a form of facile optimism. The great image of George Fox after a period of depression stays with me: "I saw (also) that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God: and I had great openings."

On the one hand we have this vision of George Fox and the early Friends, and we have the great song of Paul of Tarsus in Corinthians – the celebration of trust, hope, and love in the early church with its vision of a transformed world. On the other we have the ocean of darkness. It is out of the flow of these two vast

oceans that my vision springs. Let us consider first of all something of the darkness. In the latest edition of its magazine, Amnesty International states that according to the UN refugee agency 11.4 million people across the world are refugees, up from 9.9 million last year. Another 26 million are internally displaced. And in an article in a different journal, published in Sept./Oct.2006, I read that more than 40,000 Indian farmers had committed suicide since 1997 in despair at their inability to earn enough income to repay their debts for high-tech input; that six million people die every year as a result of hunger; that according to the World Health Organisation, 5,000 children die each day due to consuming water and food polluted with bacteria; that according to UNESCO, more than a billion people lack access to clean water and 2.4 billion lack access to basic sanitation services.

With the credit crunch at the moment, with increasing food scarcity, with ethnic conflicts in so many parts of the world, what have we, a tiny, generally unheard-of group of people to say to the world? With the worldwide churches, including Quakers and other religions, split on how to understand sacred texts however inspired, and arguing over church constitutions and who has power, where is the voice of the Spirit that affirms the human soul, that has something to say to refugees who are very unwilling pilgrims in lands totally foreign to them?

And then we might consider the land in which we find ourselves with the growth of so much despair and loss of a sense of purpose; with the old political narratives in decay; with growing fearfulness about members of different communities; with the growth of fundamentalism and the decline of religious liberalism; with many regarding all religion as irrelevant, and with some religions obsessed with sexuality and gender as if that alone was of divine concern. Religion in Britain has suffered an immense decline since the 1950s, and all indicators show a continued secularisation of British society in line with other European countries. Where religion is growing it is among newcomers to these shores, especially their children, for whom religion is an antidote to alienation and provides a community in a fragmented land.

A PLEA FOR UNIVERSAL INTERFAITH EFFORTS

By Arvol Looking Horse

To All World Religious and Spiritual Leaders,
My Relatives,

Time has come to speak to the hearts of our Nations and their Leaders. I ask you this from the bottom of my heart, to come together from the Spirit of your Nations in prayer.

We, from the heart of Turtle Island, have a great message for the World. We are guided to speak from all the White Animals showing their sacred color, which have been signs for us to pray for the sacred life of all things. As I am sending this message to you many Animal Nations are being threatened, those that swim, those that crawl, those that fly, and the plant Nations, eventually all will be [affected by] the oil disaster in the Gulf.

The dangers we are faced with at this time are not of spirit. The catastrophe that has happened with the oil spill which looks like the bleeding of Grandmother Earth, is made by human mistakes, mistakes that we cannot afford to continue to make.

I ask, as Spiritual Leaders, that we join together, united in prayer with the whole of our Global Communities. My concern is these serious issues will continue to worsen, as a domino effect that our Ancestors have warned us of in their Prophecies.

I know in my heart there are millions of people that feel our united prayers for the sake of our Grandmother Earth are long overdue. I believe we as Spiritual people must gather ourselves and focus our thoughts and prayers to allow the healing of the many wounds that have been inflicted on the Earth. As we honor the Cycle of Life, let us call for Prayer circles globally to assist in healing Grandmother Earth (our *Unc I Maka*).

We ask for prayers that the oil spill, this bleeding, will stop. That the winds stay calm to assist in the work. Pray for the people to be guided in repairing this mistake, and that we may also seek to

A new Axial Age

Karen Armstrong is an historian of religions. She wrote the book with the fabulous and accurate title, *A History of God*. She regards the time in which we live as a vastly new “Axial Age” – a pivotal period, with its roots in the Enlightenment. By this she means a specific period in time around which spirituality – and a whole lot more – is shaken up and evolves onwards in a fresh way. She sees our time as crucial, as was the first Axial Age, from approximately 800 BCE to 100 CE, when the great prophets and sages appeared and ushered in the historic faiths and Greek philosophy. People were – and most certainly are now – rediscovering their inner life and re-forming the ways in which they think about the world.

Every last one of us is a meaning-seeking creature. We are driven to make sense of life. Religious boundaries are in fact permeable in a host of ways. I am thrilled with the tangible contributions of interfaith consciousness and initiatives in this broken – and whole – world.

There has been vast ignorance of religion on the part of younger generations for some time. When my pupils thirty years ago discovered that I had become a Friend, one boy asked what it was that I could no longer do, as I had become religious. To become religious meant to him giving up the good things of life. In Post-Christendom, Stuart Morris recounts two anecdotes. The first is of a teenager in a London school who hears the Christmas story for the first time. He is amazed and captivated by it, and at the end of the lesson asks his teacher, “Why did they give the baby a swear word for his name?” The second is of a man visiting a church in Oxford one Sunday to collect something for his partner who runs an art workshop in the multi-use building during the week. He arrives as the congregation is leaving and says to the minister, “What are all these people doing? I didn’t know churches were open on Sundays.”

And yet... and yet... There is the growth of religion as an oasis in an uncertain world; there is a growth of witches and shamans; there is the growth of the need for therapies of all sorts, serious and amazing. The longing of the human heart for meaning and for community is not in decline. The need for belief runs deep, but its flow may take many diverse forms. This is part of the challenge to Friends in the new century.

Although the word does not go down well with many people, in my *Blackbird* book (p. 56) I describe this context as a sort of postmodern condition and I describe some of its characteristics as transitional. There is a movement

FROM organic community based on family ties
TO communities based on work or friendship...

FROM a sense that there is a universal Truth
TO a multiplicity of truths...

FROM doctrine
TO experience...

FROM deference in the face of authority
TO listening to the inner voice...

FROM reverence for particular sacred texts
TO the idea that the whole of reality is a text to be explored...

FROM the norm of the white upper-class male
TO respect for the multiplicity and diversity of human experience...

So there is the need, the discontent, the desire to relate, the struggle to make sense of a reality that often seems overwhelming. There is curse and blessing of the human being, who realises that one day all she or he knows will come to an end. This is the challenge of the Spirit to the seeker of today.

How then do we deal with this paradox of light and darkness? How do we balance threats of global disaster with transformation into a new sort of society with new, more inclusive values? Can we look upon the ocean of darkness itself as part of this creativity? How do we answer the dark places? How do we say with the Psalmist in Psalm 139, "When I make my bed in hell, there you are also?" Perhaps visions need to contain aspects of the ocean of darkness, in order, as Fox said, that we may have a sense of all conditions, so that we can speak to all conditions. Any visionary must be able to see the darkness within as well as the darkness outside – but then he or she must carry some of the light within to make sense of that darkness.

At this point I want to look at what Friends may have to offer. I am aware that not everyone will find my use of language straightforward. I use theological language to point to a dimension of depth which the language of scientific rationalism does not illuminate for me. Reason and the scientific enterprise are essential ingredients in any discussion of spirituality, but they are not the

did not receive the governmental grants and support which the PWR received. A neutral letter writer pointed out that the PWR was not supporting a specific religion, but was interfaith and could be expected to deliver valuable social outcomes. Another letter writer said that folk are more interested in what people affirm than in what they reject. One writer asked that following its deliberations the Parliament make a statement about which religion was the correct one. I suppose I would reply humorously, and quite seriously: "All – or none of them!"

I mainly worked in a volunteering capacity during the Parliament, and I had to miss the sessions of Laurence Freeman, director of the comparatively recently established and delightfully interfaith World Community for Christian Meditation. I attended sessions that were solid and intelligent on the survival of indigenous cultures and world view, Orthodoxy in Australia, and proselytising and apostasy. I also attended a performance of the music of Hildegard von Bingen. I was most pleased to be able to witness one of the modern theological giants in the person of Hans Kung, who has written extensively on faiths other than his own. Associated with previous Parliaments, Kung was instrumental in the drafting of Towards a Global Ethic, and in Melbourne he spoke in flawless English with humanity and humour at a session entitled "Towards a Global Business Ethic." I spontaneously found myself at an unforgettable performance art presentation by a Jamaican Rastafarian, in which he said that he was proud to be the first rasta to be invited to a modern Parliament. The nightly plenary sessions were a balance of exquisite music, song, dance, ritual and spoken presentation. (You may google the Melbourne PWR to view the scope of the presentations.)

Four local Friends facilitated a session on Quakerism, involving presentation, discussion and silence. At the PWR communities night, many locals welcomed the local and international Quaker delegates, including Anthony Manousos. The conversation that night in our meetinghouse, where our devotional practice has always been unprogrammed, was deafening!

Christian universalism

The incident of Jeshua (Jesus) and the Samaritan woman at the well is an interfaith encounter that records a successful bridging across boundaries, since the Samaritans were so despised for, among other things, their heterodox beliefs. Inclusive liberalism is an enduring and profound stream within Christianity and was very influential before – and after – the construction of a state religion, with Nicene as its creed, under the emperors Constantine (272-337 CE) and Justinian (483-565 CE). Justinian switched the theological allegiance of the Roman Empire from the famous, strongly universalistic Alexandrian Catechetical School (founded in 190 CE and still in existence among the Copts), and also away from the free and diverse interpretation of the way of the Galilean that prevailed eastward from the Levant to the Ganges. The centre of theological gravity moved westward toward the Latin world where such severe “notions” as original sin and a binary and shocking afterlife were theologised and developed. (Wikipedia on “Christian Universalism” makes very interesting reading!)

Social cohesion

Maintaining social cohesion was a major concern of the Parliament, along with the critical world issues we face together as a species. Indigenous peoples from all continents, including 16 elders and traditional healers, were represented. We urban sophisticates witnessed their culture-specific and combined rituals before us all, and we were soberly silent as they spoke, often with fiery urgency, of their ancient reciprocal contact with land and water and air. President Obama sent a representative to observe and report on the Parliament. His identity was made public in the press only on the day after the conclusion of the Parliament.

Attended by 6,500 people, the Parliament received publicity in the form of letters in the press from atheists who were unhappy that their major international Atheist Conference in Melbourne

last word. My favourite Catalan theologian Maria Corbi wrote: “The mythic gave content to our moral lives; science has taken over from myth but cannot provide a moral basis for our lives.” The disappearance for many people of the old mythic religious story, and the inadequacy of the scientific quest as a source for daily living have led them to seek in what I call the domain of spirituality new living myths. I am trying to use language here not to define but to explore, more in the nature of poetry than of theology.

So back to the Quaker message. We have no monopoly on trust, hope, and love. Neither do we have the answer to life’s great questions. But there are lives; there are patterns and examples of truthful living. When I became a Friend, it was not because I thought, “At last here is the meaning of the universe,” but because my questions had changed. I came to Friends after a deep experience that fundamentally there was both diversity and unity, and they were not a contradiction; indeed that natural diversity is part of divine creativity. I experienced also that within the human was a seed of the divine and that I did not have to go from one temple to another, from one book to another, from one guru to another, to find the key, because the door was not locked anyway. My whole spiritual development has been a rejection of the exclusive way, which I think is profoundly cruel and destructive.

I see the Quaker way as an internalisation and spiritualisation of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It has learned to sit lightly with the old metaphors of divinity and may be open to new ones. There has been a shadow side to this in terms of the rejection of the physical world and the arts in Quaker history, but I think we are getting over that nowadays. And above all I found Friends who offered a sense of community to the pilgrim I was who needed affirmation on his journey. They were the sort of people whose lives could teach me. They did not offer creeds but valued experience. They did not offer their theories; they offered themselves.

I was asked recently how I would put the Quaker path in a nutshell. I began this talk with a considered reflection of the response I gave. Quakers hold that a direct relationship with the

divine, however defined, is possible for all people, not just the chosen few. This relationship is deepened through quiet communal waiting. The relationship is expressed in how we live out our daily lives with other people and with the planet on which we live. None of these is unique to Quakers in themselves, but together they form a basis for a spiritual and religious path. They involve trust, worship, community, and testimony.

The Quaker movement was a revolt against the Calvinist view that salvation was for the few only – that as the old prayer book has it, “there is no health in us.” Listen to the great opening words of *Advices and Queries*: “Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts.” For all that they sometimes sound like a Quaker cliché, they are revolutionary. There is health within the human. We are to nurture it both in others and in ourselves.

The Quaker way offers possibility of change. We are not condemned by the sins of our ancestors in a mythical garden. It is true that early Friends had a much more dualistic understanding of the world than we have. Their writings do suggest that they often see it as a fallen place. They did try to bring the world to Christ, even if this Christ spoke to them more directly in the heart than at the pulpit or the altar. Today in Britain and in other places in the Quaker world we tend to talk more in terms of the Light within. It is a Light that not only shows up the darkness and the pain of the world around us, but is a lantern to guide our footsteps. With this light we can move forward to make the world a better place; we can help bring about the divine commonwealth. We are still confronting Calvinists; still encountering those who in the name of a punitive God are condemning millions to eternal flames. There are still those who believe they so know the will of God that they are willing to carry out divine punishment on God’s enemies. But if there is that of God in everyone, there cannot be enemies.

Chris Lawson, who used to be a tutor at Woodbrooke, the Quaker study centre in Birmingham, talked of the characteristics of Friends worldwide: the centrality of personal spiritual experience; the collective experience of the worshipping group; our insistence on

tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.

Vivekananda reported a remarkable phenomenon that occurred while he was in Chicago. Extremely fatigued by having to lecture constantly (he was dead within ten years) he fell into a type of slumber:

... and in that same state I heard as if somebody standing by me was lecturing, many new ideas and new veins of thought, which I had scarcely heard or thought of in my life. On awakening I remembered them and reproduced them in my lecture. I cannot enumerate how often this phenomenon took place. Many, many days did I hear such lectures while lying in bed. Sometimes the lecture would be delivered in such a loud voice that the inmates of adjacent rooms would hear the sound and ask me the next day: “With whom, Swamiji, were you talking so loudly last night?” I used to avoid the question somehow. Ah, it was a wonderful phenomenon.

What colossal, benign influences are we dealing with here! Ubiquitous forces that do in fact sometimes manifest in our little lives in BIG ways!

Although the Latin etymology of the word “religion,” like “yoga,” means “to bind back to or unite with something,” I had problems with the institutional sense of the term “Religion” in the PWR title. Of some three hundred large and tiny groups represented in Melbourne, as well as the legion of individuals without any affiliation, the identification of many attendees would be primarily as indigenous spiritual, mystical, esoteric, metaphysical, pagan, New Age, a-theist or humanistic. But I got over that, and I was glad that I also got over wanting to know the faith orientation of the many wonderful Melbournian, Chicagoan and international staff and volunteers I worked with for more than two years.

existence was alive and well, and what curiosity sought to kill was bigotry, uninformed assumptions, and the preciousness of one's particular world view.

The seminal 1893 Chicago PWR provided a seismic boost to ecumenism, interfaith activity and the academic study of comparative religion. At that time the Sultan of Turkey, for instance, was cool on this interfaith idea, and the Archbishop of Canterbury refused to attend, because it placed Christianity in a position of parity with other faiths. In the late 1980s, in a kitchen, members of the Chicago Vedanta Society hatched the idea for a modest, retrospective, centenary PWR commemoration. However the zeitgeist had changed. Our societies were now as diverse as the initial Chicago PWR, and huge numbers attended the 1993 PWR. In 2009 Melbourne was privileged to host the fourth modern PWR.

Double or multiple faith belonging

Now in my sixties, I find that three favoured paths have coalesced for me. As a retired person, I have recently taken up positions as secretary and librarian of the Carl Jung Society of Melbourne; and I generally practice Buddhist meditation at my Quaker meeting. Looking at other faith traditions and practices can highlight, define, and enrich one's core faith position.

I volunteered early and received training to be a PWR representative to local Quakers. In presentations to meetings I used YouTube downloads of remarkable, archaic audio recordings of the influential Swami Vivekananda from Chicago, 1893. (Take a listen yourself!) In his opening speech, he spoke of "universal acceptance" and quoted from the Hindi scriptures words that he had often recited in his boyhood days:

As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their waters in the sea – so, O Lord, the different paths which people take through different

the inseparability of faith and practice; our belief in the sacredness of life. We must remember, of course, that the silent liberal Quakers, those of our tradition, constitute only nine percent of world Quakers, and we might add to Chris Lawson's list, that for us the collective experience when tested out by the group is a form of revelation. The experience of worship is one of listening through expectant stillness; spirituality only makes sense to us as a form of lived-out ethical demand; and the sacredness of life has political, economic, ecological and psychological consequences as well as narrowly religious ones. This is the core. Preaching and sacrament become part of daily living. Let your life preach, said Fox. Our relationships are our sacraments where the divine is made manifest in the flesh and the physicality of everyday encounter.

Encounter is a key word here. For me the spiritual process is one of deepening relationships with the self, with the neighbour who shares the planet, with the planet itself, all enfolded in the sacredness of reality, which some call God or Spirit. This deepening is done through listening, sharing, being attentive, caring, admitting to our limitations, and loving. Indeed this would be my definition of spirituality.

Duncan Fair, a Quaker whom I met in the 1980s, echoed this when he wrote of the five elements of Quakerism as being the mystical, the evangelical, the rational, the social, and the ethical. My list would include the contemplative, and the prophetic. Any vision of Quakerism today should, I think, cover these elements. But visions are not mission statements nor blueprints. They are not detailed calls for action. They are dreams which spring out of reflection on experience and perhaps contain elements which some people might consider wishful thinking. I am aware also of the great challenge of the spiritual life to transcend ego. Visionaries in particular need to be conscious of this. I have taken the task with me to meeting for worship, and I hope what I am about to say will be the result of years of reflection with many seekers.

My vision for Quakers is of a community that is open to the possibility of transforming encounter with Spirit. The community affirms, offers stillness and reflection, offers space and understanding, hospitality, and the prophetic voice that challenges. This is another way of stating the old adage: God loves us as we are, and wants us to be what we might become. My premise is that we become our full selves in communion with others. I find, however, the stress in some aspects of religion on personal salvation or even the redemption of the tribe distressing and limiting. What I bring from my Jewish background is the concept of the redemption of the world. We know that in no way can we achieve this, but we can walk towards it. What I bring from my days of exploring Buddhism is the insight that we are all part of each other and that no light is for the self alone. Earlier this year in the columns of *The Friend* there was a debate about the meaning of the word “answer” in the phrase “answer that of God in everyone.” One synonym was “elicit” or “evoke,” as if there were a dormant seed in everyone and that we were called to help that seed to germinate. In the words of Eckhart, the German mystic, we are thus called to be midwives to the divine in each other. And in this process the seed in ourselves grows stronger. Spirituality is a mutual process. This is at the heart of any vision of a vigorous Quakerism for the new century.

I cherish a community that values its time together in worship, that is not afraid of exploring the meaning and the reality of prayer, uniting contemplation with action, self-awareness with the need for social reform.

My vision is of a community that does not confuse spirituality with culture. Coming myself from an immigrant working-class family, I realise how terribly offputting the assumption can be that to be a Quaker means being a white middle-class educated English person.

My vision is of a community that respects the need for quiet discernment but which is truly experimental and adventurous and is not afraid of passion. In a wonderful book on desert spirituality,

TWO MIRRORS FACING ONE ANOTHER

On Interfaith Dialogue at the Parliament of the World Religions

By Maxwell Ketels

Authentic dialogue has been described as two facing mirrors reflecting each other in an endless deepening of meaning. Along with many of us, in the early 1970s I fell in love with the spirituality and culture of the gorgeous Orient. I read the French Abbe Dechenet on yoga, and the Benedictine Bede Griffiths on his Hinduism/Christian reconciliatory vocation, and bought and used an Orthodox Jesus Prayer mantra woolen rosary. Then there was Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*, Alan Watts and the Zen-Christian literature by the Irish Jesuit William Johnson. I was especially interested in the "Buddhistic" aspects of the writings of the Spanish St John of the Cross, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Master Eckhart and the Rhineland mystics, and so forth.

Such syntheses calmed my anguish and hesitations about straying away from a former strongly held Western derived belief system. I adopted the concept of the huge Mountain with the different spiritual paths ascending it and drawing closer together in practice and expression at the level of the rarefied, contemplative, mystic heights. Having commenced teaching yoga, in 1974 I visited and practiced at a Zen Catholic community in Japan, where I was given the bishop's room for my private use!

Curiosity

Curiosity killed the cat, despite its nine lives. Catlike inquisitiveness and inquisitiveness in unnecessary matters can lead one into dangerous situations! In his *Confessions* (397 CE), Augustine wrote: God "fashioned hell for the inquisitive"; and the poet, Lord Byron, called curiosity "that low vice." At the Parliament of World Religions, however, eager curiosity about how others see and respond to this grand mystery of improbable

gist of what he says. Visionaries need the humility to sit down with others, to try to understand what inspires them and what frightens them – to have a sense of all conditions, even of those who reject the vision. And what do we say to those who maintain our dreams are just day-dreams, that we are impractical idealists? We wish to be useful, but when it comes down to it, our vocation is to be witnesses, to point to another way, to cherish the fragility of the world around, to reverence the sacredness of all people and the planet, and to share what we have seen. Above all we must let our lives be the message – that is the greatest risk of all. I still dare to think that we have a revolutionary message.

In a materialistic society that message is countercultural. It challenges commonly held values and assumptions about human beings and society. It dares to base its understanding of truth on an act of worship which is not about targets, or quotas, or agendas, or a long list of petitions, but on the worshipper opening him or herself to the sacredness at the heart of reality and trusting that sufficiently without the help of definitions or theories. It dares to seek the image of the divine in each person and in the planet. It dares to believe that things can be better if each person follows his or her leadings. In a world which is also seeking more spiritually and which is characterised by an emphasis on inwardness and authenticity of experience, there are many ways open to us. However as I have said, we are not an empty space or a lowest common denominator nor a mind-free zone. Although we are limited and often frail, we may still be a community of prophets, mystics, contemplatives, activists, and people who would deny any of these labels, and simply open themselves up to the quiet and possibly devastating promptings of love and truth in their hearts.

The Solace of Fierce Landscapes, Sheldon Lane, a Presbyterian minister wrote:

The spiritual life extolled in popular religious circles today is eminently unexceptional, generically inoffensive, and (almost without exception) culturally correct. We too often substitute availability for friendship, agreeableness for dialogue, pleasantry for compassion.

My vision is of a community that allows a narrative of inclusiveness to emerge, that honours the human story, finding in it echoes of the divine. Thus we need to be a community that listens to the voices that are rarely heard. Friends are already involved in many parts of the world with the victims of warfare, with seekers of asylum, with helping people overcoming paedophile behaviour, with communities suffering economic hardship through unjust treaties, with objectors to military service and so forth. What I rejoice in about Friends is that we are not about converting people to be Quakers, but we are about living out Quaker insights which might lead people in very different directions.

My vision is of a community that can honour the eccentric living out of personal conviction, that does not count numbers of majorities or minorities, but respects individual conscience. But also a society where the individual recognises accountability to the group, and where the group values its responsibility to its participants. We attract individualists but must not be overwhelmed by an anarchic individualism.

I see a community that affirms the gifts of all of its members, irrespective of age, social and educational background, and sexual orientation; a community that treats people as equals but with diverse gifts. I would hope also that we are accepting of other people's use of language which may not be ours, but may well be part of the other person's truth.

I see a community that can make the holistic connection between the life of the Spirit, the life of the individual, and the future of the planet. We are to be practical witnesses to this deeper

reality. In Quaker language this is living the testimonies. I would love us to be practical mystics.

I see a community that welcomes religious refugees, loves them over their past hurts, but also challenges them to a new boldness and exploration. This challenge, which is a challenge to members, also involves some grappling with ideas and theological concepts. We live in a world of growing biblical and religious ignorance. The revolutionary understanding of early Friends was based on a serious exploration and reinterpretation of Christian history. We need as a Society not to base our outreach on outdated and ignorant pictures of other forms of Christianity and other religions.

I see a community that is evangelistic, in the sense of not being afraid to share what it has found, as distinguished from evangelical, which is a having a particular doctrine about Jesus Christ. We are proud of being seekers, almost proud of travelling without arriving, but it seems to me that each step of the journey is a discovery. If we listen to others, it is respectful also to hope that others will listen to us.

I see a community of prophets and peacemakers who undertake the great risk of speaking truth to power and who together sustain each other in the sharing of uncomfortable visions.

I see a community of people walking tenderly over the planet, answering that of God in all life.

And to echo words of the American Quaker historian Douglas Gwyn in his description of early Friends: I see egalitarian communities of faith living a peaceful and plain life that stood in stark contrast to (and radical critique of) the conspicuous consumerism of the capitalist society around them.

In a recent Swarthmore lecture, *Minding the Future*, Christine Davis encouraged Quakers to see that stewardship is about far more than money and buildings. It is about handing on wisdom and insights discerned from experience. "We are stewards of vision

and values," she said. So we are all responsible for realisation of the vision into daily life.

When I first came to Friends, I fell in love with the Society. It makes me smile now when I think that the first time I attended yearly meeting, I thought I had reached heaven. As I get older, however, especially as I have stopped working for the institution, I feel a resurgence of my young revolutionary fervour about the spiritual life. But I have learned that Friends are human after all. We are often timid and unsure. We make great claims, and we fail as does everyone else. We don't talk much about sin, but we are aware, at least in private, of some of our limitations. For religious revolutionaries we are often very conservative, hiding behind phrases like, "this is what Friends have done for three hundred and fifty years."

In fact it is very helpful to remember our limitations and weaknesses. It is when we remember that we are part of the human race that we can really speak to others, not from an impossibly high moral ground but from real love. We know also that there will be people who will have great difficulty with what we have to say, to understand our language however we translate it. There are people who cannot come to terms with the light within, who feel they need an outward guide, a body of rules which give them the certainty they crave.

In 1955 Harold Loukes wrote:

We live in a rationalist society that has shed the security of dogmas it found it could not accept, and now finds itself afraid of its own freedom. Some look for an external authority, as they did of old, but in this situation there are many who cannot just go backwards. They ask for an authority they can accept without the loss of their own integrity; they ask to be talked to in a language they can understand.

I question that we live in a rationalist society today, as in many ways we live in a very superstitious society, but I accept the