

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 132

FEBRUARY 2015

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Dear Friends,

Thank you for your responses to the last WQF Letter. There are clearly many attitudes to the need for prayer – here are three from members of our Fellowship:

“I don’t pray, but I responded to Betty Fowler’s (1979) observation [*about awareness that all our actions affect the lives of others and the glories of the universe*]...”

“One of greatest joys of my life is prayer.”

“I have no affiliation with any particular church or movement but...I was especially attracted to the thoughts of Harold Loukes and Mary F. Smith...”

Other members have offered more quotations. Here is one from a book by Thomas Kelly, a well-known Quaker:

“It is said of St. Francis not merely that he prayed, but that he became a prayer. Such lives must be reborn today, if the life of the Eternal Love is to break through the heavy encrustations of our conventional church life, and apostolic life and love and power be restored to the church of God. God can break through any time that we are really willing.”

The Reality of the Spiritual World and the Gathered Meeting. Friends Home Service Committee, London, 1996.

And a much earlier one from a letter written by Alexander Parker in 1659:

“...turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong.”

It seems appropriate, in view of recent world events, to devote part of this Letter to the topic of terrorism.

The problem seems to revolve around the violent expression of religious fundamentalism. In a recent (31 January) Listener article, Marc Wilson, a psychologist, defined this as “a closed-minded or dogmatic religious outlook”. He maintained that fundamentalism of any kind is a bad thing – “you’ll see it not just in churches”.

Chris Marshall in a 2005 public lecture organised cooperatively by the Department of Religious Studies at the Victoria University of Wellington and St. John’s in the City, had this to say:

“Finally, and most importantly, every religious tradition should be encouraged to undertake a terror-audit on itself – by which I mean a fresh and honest assessment of its own historical, moral and theological complicity in violence.”

Quaker views on violence are fairly well-known. They were expressed clearly in our Peace Testimony published in 1987 and were reaffirmed in a Statement issued at Yearly Meeting 2014:

“We equally and actively oppose all that leads to violence among people and nations... The primary reason for this stand is our conviction that there is that of God in everyone which makes each person too precious to damage or destroy. Refusal to fight with weapons is not surrender. We are not passive when threatened by the greedy, the cruel, the tyrant, the unjust.”

The original version also included these words:

“We must relinquish the desire to own other people, to have power over them, and to force our views on to them. We must own up to our own negative side and not look for scapegoats to blame, punish or exclude.”

Our Testimony was/is based on views held by Quakers for more than four centuries. It all started with George Fox in 1651 “I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strife were.”

William Penn wrote the following in 1693:

“It is as great presumption to send our passions upon God’s errands, as it is to palliate them with God’s name... We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive or gain by love and information.”

Since then much has been written about peace activism. Here are some more recent examples of Quaker thought:

“There are no barriers of race, national feeling, custom, climate or culture which cannot be broken down by the method of Woolman and St. Francis – the method of self-identification with the need of the poorest.”

John S. Hoyland 1936: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice 1995: 24.31.*

“I do not believe in the use of violence as either effective or moral; my job is to try to help people who can see no alternative to violence to find a substitute...the social worker, the teacher, the wise legislator, or the good neighbour is just as much a peacemaker as the woman or man unravelling some lethal international imbroglio.”

Adam Curle 1981: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice 1995: 24.35.*

“Being respectful, choosing for ourselves how much we wish to share, stating our own positions without trying to convince others, listening with care for the other, drawing from our own experience to help us understand the other, avoiding judgment, exercising tolerance and patience. You don’t have to be a Quaker to practise these attitudes, as many of us have found in other settings. It is an approach that many Friends find compatible and helpful.”

Barbara Mountier, 2000: *Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand 2003: 5.21.*

“It is important to ask how and in what ways the current war against terrorism is going to help or is currently helping the weak and vulnerable.”

Kevin Clements (2002): *Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand 2003*: 7.29.

In January 2015, Yearly Meeting Clerks, on behalf of members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Aotearoa/New Zealand, sent the following message to the President of the Federation of Islamic Associations in New Zealand:

“Dear Dr Ghani,

Salaam aleikum! We send you greetings of peace and friendship in the name of God.

We grieve at recent violent acts in Australia, France and other countries, and also grieve at the irrational urge among some people to hold all Muslims responsible for these acts. Your recent public statements disassociating the Muslim community from extremist acts are most welcome, and we hope they will meet with a warm response. Our hope is that you will be free to live without harassment, in friendship with your neighbours and with the whole New Zealand population. Can you suggest any ways in which Quakers might show our goodwill in these difficult times?

We pray that the peace which is at the ground of your faith and of ours may flourish on the earth among all people.

Elizabeth Duke & Elizabeth Thompson, Co-clerks.”

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

Weekends at the Quaker Settlement, 76 Virginia Rd., Whanganui 4500:

27 February – 1 March - Penal Reform

Contact Judith Robinson, judith.robinsonqa@gmail.com

13 - 15 March – Summer Weekend @ Quaker Acres

Contact Jason Quinn, jason.e.quinn@gmail.com

27 – 29 March – Peace Testimony

Contact Peter Watson, pbiet@clear.net.nz

7 – 11 May – YEARLY MEETING (Quiet Day Thursday 7 May).

The Wider Quaker Fellowship is an association of persons of diverse backgrounds who wish to have ties with the Religious Society of Friends without necessarily being in its membership, or who, through isolation, illness or some other circumstance are unable to attend a Monthly Meeting.

Any person who finds the fundamental Quaker testimonies and the Quaker way of life, with its emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, compatible with his or her philosophy of life is welcome to join the Fellowship. A request to the Clerk will ensure enrolment as a member.