

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this;
But what canst thou say?
Art thou a child of Light and hast walked in the Light, and what thou speakest
is it inwardly from God?*

.....George Fox 1652.....

Are Quakers Christian?

When an enquirer asked, during our after Meeting tea and chat time, "Are Quakers Christian?", there were several moments of silence before we started explaining about the inclusivity of New Zealand Quakers. We talked about some Friends being Christians while others were more humanist and others still claimed to be non-theist. We seem to be a mixed bag of all sorts of beliefs and non-beliefs. We endeavour to be accepting of differences in beliefs and lifestyles.

Early Friends were probably all Christians, they wouldn't have even considered not being Christians. The rebellion of all seekers-of-the-truth in the mid 17thC was not against Christianity but against the established church, against the organisation that said God talked only to the priest and the priest talked to the people. They had the bible in English now, they could read the same words as the priest, and they could make up their own mind about what it meant.

Reading the bible and listening in the silence —

Today it would more likely be, 'reading religious and philosophic writings from Quakers and wise people of many faiths, and listening in the silence'.

And then there is the 'inner Light' to consider. Edward Linacre, in 2000, wrote (as quoted in *This We Can Say, Australian Quaker Life, Faith and Thought*) —

1.5 Thomas Muntzer (born before 1490, died 1525) described the Holy Spirit in terms of the inner Light, a concept of great comfort to Quakers. Perhaps the illumination is reflected from an external source (that is a transcendent God, up there away in heaven), but more importantly it is inherent (that is, part of our deepest being, internal, behind even our unconscious selves). Not quite the same as the conscience either, which arises largely from upbringing. Nor the same as ecstasy, which can be induced by drugs or mania, as well as religious fervour. Two words which better indicate the flavour of the inner Light are 'inspired' and 'connected'.

Most people would modestly deny having been inspired to the degree that Jesus was, say, or even Shakespeare or Beethoven. But it is not uncommon to be able to recall rare peak moments of amazement, of discovery, intuition, or creativity, which make you aware of intensities of living beyond the everyday. This is what being inspired means, as though you are infused by the energy of an invisible hypnotist, maybe from within oneself. A sudden view of sublime beauty, the 'ah-ha' experience of abruptly overcoming a significant problem, examples of extreme self-sacrifice, great danger, death, uplifting oratory, certain music— such awaken responses quite out of the ordinary. There is a profound consciousness of deeper levels to life, which is at the root of the religious quest. All can be negated by preoccupation with the ephemeral, but it often leads to a hunger to live in harmony with almost unknowable, underlying, eternal, powerful forces. A feature of the inner Light which contrasts with the significance of rare peak experiences is the sweetness of lives we see lived quietly in harmony with it.

The religious rebels that became Quakers brought an almost unimaginable change to how people could organise themselves and worship. Quakers themselves continued to change further during the centuries until now there are many distinct groups across the world calling themselves Quakers. Some of these are strictly Christocentric, some have developed a pastoral form of worship, some retain silent worship, some are very conservative while others very liberal.

New Zealand Quakers have adhered to silent worship, but may otherwise be described as liberal, many are Christians, many are not. Many of us abhor 'religious' words, but these can be very difficult to avoid. We can all read George Fox's exhortation at the beginning of the letter, understand it and consider the query in relation to our own lives despite the old fashioned manner.

The actions that exhortation puts forward can be put in gentler ways, for instance in the Quaker children's song by Elizabeth A Carter; *God's Love is a Light*. It is number 218 in *Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal*.

God's love is a light that shines on me,
God's love is a light that helps me see.
God's love is a light that you can see
If I let God's light shine out through me!

Yours in friendship

Carril Karr

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 Meeting for Worship. The purpose of the Fellowship is to reflect Quaker life and thought.

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.

If you wish to make a donation to the WQF—

To make a donation on line, the YM Kiwi bank account number is 38 9001 0669022 02

Be sure to put your name and that the donation is for Wider Quaker Fellowship in the reference spaces.

For a tax donation certificate email: ymtreasurer@quaker.org.nz with the amount and date of the donation and your name and address.

Kiwi bank is stopping accepting cheques soon so if you don't do internet banking you will need to deposit any donation directly into the YM account at a Kiwibank branch.

Yearly Meeting 2020

You can look this up on the new website <https://quakers.nz> and register online.

Thursday, 23 April 2020 - Monday, 27 April 2020

Epsom House, Epsom Girls Grammar School

21 Owens Rd., Epsom, Auckland

Contact/registrations; to Raewyn Robinson 126/11 Manuka St., Matamata 3400

<raewynrobinson@gmail.com> or phone 07 280 6605

Junior Young Friends Camp 2020

Monday, 20 April 2020 - Monday, 27 April 2020

Waiheke Friends House, 70 Palm Rd., Palm Beach, Waiheke Island, Auckland 1081

More information about JYF Camp can be found at;

<http://nzquakerevents.cf/jyf20info>

2020 Quaker Settlement Seminars

Our Testimony to Equality

Friday | March 13, 2020 to **Sunday** | March 15, 2020

Starts 6:30 PM Friday

76 Virginia Road, Otamatea, Whanganui

For further information see <http://www.quakersettlement.co.nz/seminar-programme>, contact Quaker Settlement, 76 Virginia Road, Whanganui 4500, or email: settlement@quaker.org.nz