Quaker Higher Education  QHE
A Publication of the Friends Association for Higher Education


How do we live in the world? How do we communicate with each other? How do we put our Quaker values into action, as teachers, scholars, and citizens? The articles presented here, all developed from presentations given at the 2016 conference of FAHE at the Woodbrooke Study Centre, Birmingham, UK, attempt to grapple with these questions.

We begin our issue with an article that reports finding from a qualitative study of college programs in peace studies, whose numbers have been dwindling. William Boudreau interviewed directors of these programs as part of his doctoral research, and he shares with us their inspirations and challenges.

Quakers have not always been... comfortable... with the role of the arts in spirituality. I am reminded of that classic scene in Friendly Persuasion, where Gregory Peck tries to hide from Meeting Elders the presence of an organ in his house, even while it is being played. Mark Russ, Nurturing Friends and Meeting Tutor at Woodbrooke, shares his experiences as a music teacher, and suggests ways that “musicking” and “Quakering” can be mutually beneficial.

Elizabeth Imafuji, Writing Program Director for Anderson University in Indiana, reflects on the role that digital writing can play in putting faith into action. She finds interesting and perhaps surprising parallels to the ways in which Early Friends used public writing to instruct, exhort, and chastise. The tools have changed, but we still seek connections with each other through written missives.

Our last two articles are written versions of two of the plenary speeches that invited guests shared with attenders at the FAHE Woodbrooke conference. We are delighted to be able to share them with you. Both essays address how faith intersects with the wider world. Gerald Hewitson leads us through a personal reflection on how life can be viewed as a journey of compassion. Paul Rogers shares brief reflections on the global political and environmental challenges, as explored in more depth in his recent book, and indicates where he finds hope in a very complicated situation.

Submissions: QHE is published twice a year, in the spring and the fall. Articles submitted for possible publication should be sent as Word documents to: either dsmith4@guilford.edu or to adams@ccsu.edu. Since QHE is not wed to any particular referencing format, you may use the professional style of your choice. If you would like to discuss an idea that you have for an article, our telephone numbers are: 336-316-2162 (DS) and 860-832-2616 (AEA).

FAHE ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Mark your calendars now for June 16-19, 2017. FAHE will meet at Guilford College in Greensboro, NC, to consider the theme of “Global Education, Global Quakerism.” The call for papers with queries and conference registration is available at the FAHE web site and at this site.
William Boudreau
Thompson Brook School

“It is no longer reasonable to or right to leave all decisions to a largely anonymous power elite that is driving us all, in our passivity, toward ruin.”

~ Thomas Merton

At the turn of this century, the United States experienced one of the most horrific attacks in American history. The attacks became indelibly etched on the American psyche eliciting a myriad of responses by politicians and the citizenry. The most common responses seemed to be vengeful, with some sort of retribution by force the recommended consequence. Peaceful solutions appeared to be absent from the debate, though it could be argued that they would have reflected a higher level of consciousness, elevating the United States moral standing in the world. Unfortunately, peaceful solutions are viewed by many to be weak with the result of inviting further attacks from enemies. In the fifteen years since the attacks there has been little retreat from the militaristic approach to addressing world security problems, despite historical evidence that non-violent campaigns have been proven to exert powerful resistance to oppression, militarism, and injustice with a great deal of unheralded success. (Boulding, 2000; Ackerman and Duval, 2000; Shepela, et al, 2007).

The messages from politicians and the media that violent solutions to problems are acceptable or warranted under certain circumstances may contribute to heightened violence in society. The current definition of violence has expanded to include not only physical but also psychological, structural, and environmental violence. (Harris and Howlett, 2011). Higher education peace programs of study in America attempt to get individuals to understand different forms of violence and view themselves as agents of change, willing to transcend differences to promote peace, in order to prevent, and end violence. In a 1693 essay on peace one of the early champions of Quakerism in America, William Penn, wrote, “May they recommend and labor this pacific means I offer, which will end blood, if not strife; and then reason, upon free debate, will be judge, and not the sword” (in Zinn, 2002 pg. 7). Quakers have made a clear distinction between pacifism and passivism with the former requiring social activism, personal responsibility, and civic participation to promote peace and justice.

Today, peace studies is only offered at a small number of colleges. Due to resource allocation competition and budgetary pressures higher education programs have been under tremendous funding pressures (Christenen and Eyring, 2011). College-based peace studies programs that may not be deemed essential or highly valued find it increasingly more challenging to compete for limited financial resources. Considering the complexity of the higher education arena and the intricate demands placed on college-based peace studies program directors, there is value in examining how directors lead in their university settings.

Bolman and Deal’s (2013) multi-frame approach provides a proven framework to understand leadership orientations as well as the complexities of dynamic higher education organizations. A frame is defined as “a coherent set of ideas forming a prism or lens that enables you to see and understand more clearly what goes on from day to day” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 43). Multiple frame orientations provide numerous benefits for leadership, shaping
how situations are defined and helping to determine which actions to take.

The perceptions of seven United States college-based Peace Studies Programs directors regarding the characteristics of their programs and the challenges they face was considered using the four-frame model. Participants were given a brief summary of the four frames to consider, prior to being asked to describe the characteristics, challenges, and their efforts to address the challenges within their programs. Common themes emerged from interview responses.

**Structural characteristics and challenges of College-based Peace Programs**

Directors from six of the seven programs described their peace studies academic units as interdisciplinary, with courses being offered in conjunction with larger departments, and taught by instructors outside the peace studies program. Participant seven explained:

"We are totally interdisciplinary, and that is the way we understand the field. Solving problems of violence and achieving greater justice in the world cannot be done through a narrow disciplinary lens, or focus. It can only be accomplished by a gathering from expertise from different areas, not only the academy, but activism and political engagement."

As a result of being interdisciplinary, the majority of the programs have one or fewer dedicated faculty members, with four of the seven directors reported also using adjuncts teach courses. For example, according to participant one:

"I have one faculty member who is largely within the program and then I borrow or faculty members from other disciplines teach courses in the program. And those faculty members range from tenured faculty that are in the department, some that are within the university but outside of the department, and then adjuncts that I hire that are not tenured or tenure track."

Reliance on faculty from outside the program creates structural challenges for the directors, in addition to other challenges cited related to funding, administrative support, and capacity. Participant seven explained:

"We have always been vulnerable to staffing changes in the departments that support the program. So, for an example, we had a professor in psychology that was very committed to conflict resolution and mediation. For decades he taught these courses and when he retired the psychology department decided to go in a different direction and hire someone in a completely different area; and so we lost that pillar of the program, because of a departmental decision."

Inadequate funding and administrative support was reported to result in difficulties meeting capacity needs of the programs. Participant eight stated, “Well, we hired adjuncts. We had no recourse. We have petitioned the Dean to, for every hire, take interdisciplinary programs into consideration.” One director reported receiving a budget of 2500 dollars annually for their program, and another director 5000 dollars per year. As participant one explained:

"Capacity is the ability for us to meet the demands of the students, the demands of the University, and the demands of the field, which is actually having the program connect and resonate with friends in the field. So when we don't have administrative support, and we do not have faculty trained in the field, it is hard to turn around and create a curriculum for students that actually resonates."

Participant two added:

"Those are our challenges: keeping up, getting enough courses, having people develop courses,
getting enough people to staff the courses, and then the second thing, creating a sense of programmatic ethos, given the challenges of being shared among a lot of faculty from departments to which they also have loyalty.

Addressing the structural challenges was reportedly difficult, with common efforts directed at increasing stakeholders and lobbying for additional resources from the administration.

**Human resources characteristics and challenges of College-based Peace Studies Programs**

All seven of the program directors reported strong collaboration and creating a supportive environment as significant human resource characteristics of their programs. Regarding collaboration, participant five stated:

I collaborate with the administrative assistants, the student workers, the students themselves, the alumni, my colleagues that are part-time. There is also an advisory board for us that is also interdisciplinary. The way we work is always in collaboration.

Communication and empowerment were factors that promote a supportive environment. Participant two noted:

Communication has been fairly good, especially with the junior people. I think teamwork has been okay. Empowerment, I think that was better, for the junior people a little more say and a little more latitude to do what they wanted to do. I think that worked well. I think supporting their growth and development is a strength of mine as an administrator.

The most common human resource challenge for the program directors was faculty commitment. A good example of this is described by participant seven:

Because all of us have our seat in two worlds in Peace Studies and Philosophy I think that we just try, for those who feel more of an affinity to the Peace Studies Program we end up carrying more weight. People are sort of assigned; they end up being assigned to the program but they don't share the same sort of vision or commitment to it.

Efforts to address the human resource challenges were directed at relationship building and increasing commitment. Participant seven explained:

In a non-monetary way, to make sure that all the people that work with us have a stake and commitment and engagement in the program; that they feel that they shape the program. With colleagues I try to seek collaborations and more opportunities to work with other faculty members.

**Political characteristics and challenges of College-based Peace Studies Programs**

The political frame characteristics, challenges, and efforts to address the political challenges were reported by all directors to be closely related. They all reported that a great deal of effort is required to network and market their program to increase its overall standing within the larger institution and increase its resources.

As participant seven explained:

There were periods when Peace Studies was maybe more marginalized than others, when there was a sense that the pre-professional programs, that Peace Studies was not as legitimate an area of study as the traditional disciplines or the pre-professional programs. In that context it was very vulnerable because of the sort of political questions.

According to participant three:

I am always trying to do publicity and internal marketing to keep my core supporters excited and involved and willing to help. I have some alliances but the liberal arts are generally under
attack, as in most places, and so we really don’t have our political strength in influencing the college. It’s decreased pretty dramatically over the last five or six years.

Symbolic characteristics and challenges confronting College Peace Studies Programs

All seven directors described recurring rituals and team building activities that are an integral part of their program, in addition to actively celebrating its history and telling heroic narratives. Although they recognized maintaining traditions and honoring traditions to be challenging, leading by example and building on the past was the way they addressed the challenges.

An example from participant two, whose program has many strong symbolic characteristics:

Every year, in the winter, just as it is getting cold, we have dinner with students in the University’s yurt. We have land out of town and it is way out in the middle of nowhere and you have to get the road plowed out or you have to climb a mile up the hill and you go and the yurt has been heated up and there is dinner there and everyone just hangs out in the yurt and talks.

Participant three described story-telling and bringing in outside speakers to the program:

I love telling people the stories of some of my particular peace heroes, as you might guess, I lean more towards the “Berrigan” Catholic Worker, so I bring in speakers opposing the Afghanistan and Iraq War, Ann Wright who was a Former Diplomat who resigned her position over the invasion of Iraq and Martha Hennessy, Dorothy Day’s granddaughter, who has been an outspoken opponent of drones. So I try to bring people in, people I know and since they are Catholic Workers we can bring them in on the massive budget we have.

Participant five discussed the hero narrative and celebrating the past:

My connection, when I was hired, my book and my work has been on the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which is the oldest women’s international peace organization in the world. Where Jane Addams was the first president and Emily Green Balch was the secretary. There is also the hero narrative of the founders of the program in the eighties and the faculties who were really concerned with the nuclear build up.

Another example of recurring a ritual was described by participant seven:

We always have a homecoming reception in a peace garden where we recognize a peacemaker and rotate a national peacemaker, an international peacemaker, and then a peacemaker connected to the college.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the interview data, the directors of the peace studies programs were able to identify characteristic and challenges from each of the four frames. Their responses yielded some common themes. The interdisciplinary nature of the programs creates a strong reliance on support from faculty from other departments, and in some cases adjuncts to teach courses. A lack of dedicated faculty, in addition to inadequate administrative support and funding, creates capacity challenges. As a result, program directors spend a lot of their personal time and energy trying to increase faculty involvement and lobby for additional resources. Collaboration and creating a supportive environment were significant leadership characteristics.

Increasing the commitment of faculty members who are more closely affiliated with their own larger academic department was a common challenge that was being addressed through relationship building. The program directors are always looking for ways to market their program to increase its standing and political leverage within the
larger institution. There was a high level of significance placed on the symbolic characteristics of the programs as an integral part of peace studies. They celebrate the hard work of their predecessors and alumni, who donate their time and money to support the programs as well. The program directors all seemed committed to building on the past, while carrying the torch into the future, despite the current challenges in higher education.

References


Musicking Quakerism

Mark Russ
**Quaker attitudes to music**

Round the corner from Woodbrooke lies Bournville Meeting House. As it was originally intended as an ecumenical place of worship, it is the only Quaker Meeting House in Britain with an organ. Until recently hymn books were provided and it was a custom for worshippers to request hymns during Meeting for Worship, if moved by the Spirit to do so. These would be accompanied on the piano rather than someone having to scamper up to the organ console. This, however, is an anomaly amongst British Friends. If you visit a Quaker Meeting House in Britain you generally won’t find hymn books readily available. What is music’s place in a tradition where silence is a core component of worship?

From the beginnings of the Quaker movement in 17th century England, music was viewed with suspicion. Instrumental music was avoided, as time spent striving for excellence on a musical instrument could be better spent on something else. Solomon Eccles, a music teacher when he became a Quaker in the 1660s, burned and crushed his violins with an incredulous crowd looking on because he saw ‘a difference between the harps of God and the harps of men’ (Eccles, 1667). George Fox wrote that music ‘burdened the pure life, and stirred people’s minds to vanity’ (Fox, 1997, p. 38). Singing was more acceptable, as long as songs arousing inappropriate emotions were avoided. Singing had a place within Quaker worship, but only when prompted by the Holy Spirit and never from a book (Dandelion, 2007, p. 35).

Attitudes in Britain softened in the 20th century, with the formation of the Quaker performing arts group ‘The Leaveners’ in the 1970s, and music is no longer seen as a vain distraction. Music and song will often be found at Quaker gatherings and several Quaker songbooks have been published. I’ve had no problem in integrating my musical and Quaker identities, having been privileged to work with The Leaveners on a variety of projects, including my own cantata on the life of James Nayler, ‘The Nayler Passion’. The suspicion of ‘prepared ministry’ persists. In my experience, sung ministry in worship is rare, and is always spontaneous and from memory. The word-wide picture is somewhat different, with Programmed and Evangelical Quakers having a rich tradition of hymn singing.

Although British Quakers have abandoned many of their previous reservations, might there still be a distinctive approach to Quaker music making? In joining the dots between the two worlds of Quaker and music education, I’d like to suggest that fruitful discussion may be found in the concept of ‘musicking’.

**Musicking**

The term ‘musicking’ was coined by Christopher Small in his book ‘Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening’ (1998). David J. Elliot, in his ‘Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education’ (1995) uses the term ‘musicing’, without the k, to express a similar idea. Small writes that:

> So many different settings, so many different kinds of action, so many different ways of organizing sounds into meanings, all of them given the name music. What is this thing called music...? The question has been asked many times over the centuries... but none has succeeded in giving a satisfactory answer to the questions – What is the meaning of music? and What is the function of music in human life?... It
is easy to understand why. Those are the wrong questions to ask. There is no such thing as music (Small, 1998, p. 2).

To say that there is no such thing as music can initially sound nonsensical to those who use the word all the time. Small is saying that we use the word ‘music’ as a noun, whereas it is more accurate to use it as a verb. It is not a ‘thing’ but an activity. Small is making the point that ‘music’ is an abstraction that can be thought of as more real than the actual action of music making. He goes on to define the verb ‘to music’, or ‘musicking’, as ‘to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing’ (ibid.).

One of the things that Small is attempting to challenge is the compartmentalizing of musical behavior. ‘Musicking’ is an inclusive term. The traditional Western paradigm of dividing musical behavior into a hierarchy of composer at the top, performer as mediator and then listener at the bottom, has created a perceptual divide between the ‘musical’ and ‘non-musical’. Small’s definition includes many people (particularly those who limit themselves to listening or dancing) who would not recognize themselves as musical.

‘Musicking’ also challenges the idea of music education as the ‘appreciation of musical objects’. For much of the twentieth century, music education in England was focused on learning to appreciate the ‘great works’ of classical music. But is music really a collection of objects ‘out there’, independent of us, like an ‘imaginary museum of musical works’? Related to this is the Platonic notion of the ‘ideal performance’ that can never be truly realized. Somewhere out there in the realm of ideas is the perfect performance of Beethoven’s 9th Symphony, and every performance is striving to realize such a performance, but can never do so. I recently sang with a prestigious choir and saw the effects of this idealism realized in an almost perpetual air of dissatisfaction and a culture of constant critique. How frustrating to never be able to perform something good enough! ‘Musicking’ abandons this notion of the musical object and therefore challenges the notion of the ‘perfect performance’.

**Musicking Quakerism**

So where might parallels between Musicking and Quakerism be found?

One parallel may be the use of ‘music’ as a noun. More and more I find myself challenging the Liberal Quaker idea of ‘the testimonies’, spoken of in Britain using the acronym STEP for simplicity, truth, equality and peace. I find that this list is unhelpful, in that it allows us to speak of ‘testimonies’ as a list of ‘things’ or ideals rather than as something we do. In the Advices and Queries of Britain Yearly Meeting we have the much-loved phrase ‘Christianity is not a notion but a Way’. To me this expresses that Quakerism is not an ideal but a messy lived experience with other people. When we commit ourselves to Quakerism, we’re not allying ourselves to Quakers out there, separate from ourselves. If we come to meeting seeking the perfect performance of the perfect meeting for worship, we’ll always be disappointed. So Quakerism is something we do with real people, not a collection of abstract ideas.

During my training as a music teacher I and my fellow trainees were presented with a government publication containing a suggested activity for a music lesson – a
word search about the composer Bach. We were then told to rip it out the offending page. The message was that if an activity doesn’t involve a musical, sound based experience then it can’t claim to be music education. The best way to learn about it is to do it. Can the same be said about Quaker education? Should Quaker education always include an experiential element? Is it best learnt by doing it?

Quaker musicking

Do these parallels also suggest a distinctively Quaker musical pedagogy? In his book, Small offers an analysis of what is going on in a performance by a symphony orchestra in a concert hall. His main premise is that musical performance enacts idealized social relationships. With this sort of analysis, the symphony orchestra doesn’t come out very well. The work of musicologist Geoffrey Baker (2014) supports this analysis. Baker casts a critical eye on Venezuela’s El Sistema music education program which has been praised as an agent of social change. Its motto is ‘Social Action for Music’. Baker points out that El Sistema holds the symphony orchestra up as the model for an ideal society. But what social model does it represent? What relationships are being enacted? If you’ve played in an orchestra as I have, you’ll know that far from being a democracy, it’s a dictatorship! Baker also references research showing orchestral musicians to be more likely to suffer from alcoholism and depression. How does this particular web of relationships measure up to a Quaker understanding of the Kingdom of God?

So in Quaker ‘musicking’, what relationships are we expressing? What would Gospel Order music making look like? In the singing retreats I’m developing as part of my work at Woodbrooke, I’ve approach this by:

Performing in a circle, expressing the equality of worth of all present.

Insisting that everyone can take part, at whatever level.

Sharing the leadership role, asking others to choose, teach and lead songs.

Emphasizing that our goal is not perfect performance but honest expression of our whole self and shared communion with God.

Using music congruent with the Quaker tradition, both wary of appropriating songs from other traditions, and recognizing that there is a Quaker tradition to root ourselves in. This also means using material that complements our way of worship. Simple, repetitive chants (such as those from the Taizé community), beginning or ending as the Spirit moves, fit well with Quaker practice.

This is born out of a conviction that music making can serve unprogramed Quakers in a number of ways:

Musicking can act as a preparation for Meeting for Worship, helping us come to a place of deep listening and expectant waiting.

Musicking can be a powerful vehicle for ministry. An in jazz improvisation, we can only play around with material we already know. The richer our musical vocabulary, the more readily we’ll be able to use song to express the workings of the Spirit in our worship.

Musicking can help us to share the Quaker story, and our own stories, amongst
ourselves. Songs about our Quaker ancestors, or the words of Quaker wisdom set to music (such as Paulette Meier’s ‘Quaker Plainsong’) can connect us with our rich heritage. The Quaker singing community in the US, ‘The Nightingales’, have found a deep way to share their deepest selves with each other through song.

I now regularly read the following quote at the beginning of my Quaker music making workshops:

We sing, yet not we, but the Eternal sings in us. It seems to me, in the experience of plateau living in the Divine Presence, that the Everlasting is the singer, and not we ourselves, that the joy we know in the Presence is not our little private subjective joy, pocketed away from other men, a private gift from a benevolent and gracious God. It is the joy and peace and serenity which is in the Divine Life itself, and we are given to share in that joy which is eternally within all Nows. The song is put into our mouths, for the Singer of all songs is singing within us. It is not we that sing; it is the Eternal Song of the Other, who sings in us, who sings unto us, and through us into the world (Kelly, pp.73-74).

This article draws on material for a course I developed called ‘Song and Silence’ and a presentation at the Friends Association of Higher Education annual conference in 2016.

References


Eccles, S. (1667). A musick-Lector: or, the Art of Musick (that is so much vindicated in Christendome) discoursed of, by way of Dialogue between three men of several Judgements:...


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Teaching Digital Media from a Faith-in-Action Perspective

Elizabeth Imafuji (Anderson University)
Recently I was thrilled to begin teaching a new course, Writing and Digital Media, but I struggled to find a model for teaching this type of writing from a faith-in-action perspective. I realized that I needed to adopt this approach as soon as I met my first group of students and found them desiring to use digital media primarily for faith-motivated reasons. My school is a Christian liberal arts university, and most of the students in this initial class wanted to use blogs, social media, and websites to forge relationships and accomplish some good in the world, all for reasons stemming from their Christian faith. Those students truly were on to something; Clay Shirky (2011), who studies the social effects of the Internet, argues that digital media are so popular because they facilitate human relationships: “When we use a network, the most important asset we get is access to one another. We want to be connected to one another, a desire... that our use of social media actually engages” (p. 14). I found my best inspiration and a foundation for approaching the course from a faith-in-action perspective in the collected letters of Margaret Fell, one of the founders of the Religious Society of Friends. Fell’s 17th-century handwritten letters relate to today’s digital media both in their method of communication and in their content. These letters thus can provide a basis for students or instructors wishing to explore how writing connects us and makes change in the world.

A central feature of today’s digital writing is that we do not know who will share it or eventually see it. This ability to share a message across a broad network is a large part of the appeal of digital writing; we hope our website will get traffic, our blog post will get viewers, our Tweets will be shared, and so on. Early Modern letter-writing practices also allowed for such open-ended sharing. Fell was clear that she released control of her letters, knowing and hoping that they would be shared widely. For example, she instructed in a letter sent to Friends in Ireland, “Let this be Copied over & Redd in your meetings in the fere of the Lord” (Glines, p. 351). In a letter to northern Friends, she wrote, “Let this be copied and sent abroad amongst all friends where it comes” (Glines, p. 213). Fell wanted her message of encouragement to go wherever it could go. “Please Retweet,” we might say today, indicating that we want more people to read what we have written, and we relinquish control of who those readers might be.

Many 17th-century letters include similar statements urging others to copy, read aloud to groups, and pass along to others. There was not always a clear border between private and public written conversation, a situation similar to today’s writing that uses digital, web-based technology. Thus, these letters can serve as a useful framework for our thinking about digital writing.

Readers can also find in Fell’s letters a privacy ethic to inform their digital writing. In Fell’s letters she is often intentionally vague, talking about “the man” or the situation without naming any names. Elsa F. Glines, the editor of Fell’s collected letters in the *Undaunted Zeal* (2003) edition, points out that Fell was “loath to use names in correspondence” (p.273). Unless names were strictly necessary, Fell opted to be quite discreet.

For example, in 1660 Fell wrote in a letter to her daughter Margaret Jr., “Thou desire an Answer from me Concerning the man....I Expect little Cure from that man, whose
heart is only to get Mony” (Glines, p. 273). This is a conversation between a mother and daughter about someone who is causing them problems, and Fell needs to provide very specific instructions. It might have been expedient or justified to name names. Yet anyone might see this letter eventually, so Fell is careful to communicate with her daughter without naming the man. In other cases the situation is neither negative nor particularly sensitive, but privacy is preserved all the same. In 1661, Fell gives instructions to her daughter Bridget as to how a certain newlywed Quaker couple might register their marriage, since they were not married by a priest. Fell discusses this couple without mentioning names, to preserve their privacy just in case (p. 335).

This care and forethought is a good model for digital writing today. Privacy is a major concern for social media like Instagram or Twitter when settings make content visible to anyone, but also for email or any other web-based writing that we intend to remain private. Because of the ease and speed of sharing digital writing with a wide audience, it is even easier for our digital writing to be widely spread and to unintentionally hurt others than it was for Margaret Fell. Though we are in a different era, writing with different technologies, we can use Fell’s high standards for protecting others’ privacy in order to guide discussions about safeguarding our digital writing so it does not hurt others.

Fell’s letters had similarities to digital media writing in regards to the mode of communication, but also in terms of message content. Fell wrote to fundraise for missions abroad. She wrote to government officials to seek rights for Quakers, to get people out of prison, to seek merciful treatment for prisoners and protesters, and to see that physical needs were met. She wrote to encourage fellow believers to persevere and to establish and explain doctrine. She wrote to oppose the death penalty, to discuss women’s right to preach and many more topics all arising out of her faith. My Writing and Digital Media students were writing for almost all of these reasons as well, or for their 21st-century equivalents. It is important to recognize these similarities because we may be tempted to think that writing is about ideas only, and not about actions in the physical world. The derogatory term “internet slacktivism” refers to online “activities that may make the active individual feel good, but have little impact” (Christensen). This term implies that using digital spaces to take action is worthless, but writing did accomplish real-world results in Fell’s time, as it does in ours. Just as Fell’s letters effected real change in people’s tangible lives — in that people were helped financially, a prisoner’s rights movement was founded, religious rights for Quakers were eventually granted, the Quaker peace principle was established, and more — digital media has facilitated meeting people’s needs as well.

For example, Patrick Meier’s Digital Humanitarians (2015) discusses how digital media, used by regular citizens, can contribute to relief efforts during humanitarian crises. One of Meier’s examples involves the 2010 Haiti earthquake. At that time, Meier was a student in Boston and he wanted to do something to help earthquake relief efforts. He and his friends looked through Tweets from Haiti asking for help, then digitally mapped the Tweets’ geolocations on a live, “crisis map” of Haiti. To do this they used Ushahidi, a crowdsourcing crisis mapping technology developed originally in Kenya that has been used to monitor voting, map
protests, track agriculture and provide famine relief. Haitians living in the US and around the world translated Tweets and text messages and improved the digital maps through Ushahidi, and this digital project saw tangible results. Meier reports that official US search and rescue teams, the Coast Guard, and other large rescue groups used the Haiti Ushahidi project to help them provide disaster relief.

According to Meier, “If people hadn’t cared, those digital maps would have been blank. But people cared and mobilized online. These ‘digital Samaritans’ spent hours, some even days and weeks of their own time, to help others thousands of miles away, to help people they would never meet. Why? Because it was the right thing to do, because they could, because helping others during tragedies is what makes us human.... Global goodwill is real; we simply need to connect the dots and channel this action toward positive social goals” (p. 18). Spending time online, engaging in humanitarian and social justice projects virtually is a legitimate way to do good, putting faith into action just as Fell did in her letters.

Another aspect of Fell’s letters relevant to today’s digital media writing practices is her frequent petitioning of government officials. She argued for Friends’ legal rights, informed officials of the peaceful nature of the Religious Society of Friends, and petitioned for mercy for Friends and for others. In this capacity, Fell is an example of how faith may motivate us to participate in our communities and governments. Many of her letters were civic in nature; she signed petitions and wrote to Oliver Cromwell, King Charles II, magistrates, judges, bailiffs, and many others, until the end of her life. She makes it clear that her faith is what motivates her to write. “It is laid upon me from the Lord God, that I should not let another first day passe, until I had acquainted the King with it,” she wrote in a 1661 letter to King Charles II about soldiers’ violent attacks on Quaker meetings (Glines, p. 343). Faith can motivate toward civic participation today through digital media; many people are choosing to voice their opinions online. In a Pew Research Center report, Aaron Smith (2013) provides data on how digital media are becoming an important site for civic action. He reports that 17% of American adults have signed a petition online, and 18% have contacted a government official online. These rates are almost as high as for paper or phone. Citizens’ public discussion of political issues have moved to digital spaces as well; 18% of American adults have commented on an online news story or blog post about a social or political issue, more than double the amount who have called in comments to radio or TV shows (Smith, 2013).

Digital media enhances our ability to participate in civic discussions since it allows for easy access. Fell used handwritten letters to contact government officials not because handwriting is more dignified or more holy in some way; it was the mode of communication of the time. Today citizens are emailing or using web forms to contact our government officials and going to blogs and social media to discuss civic matters.

However, for all the benefits of digital writing, and all the good reasons to use Fell’s letters as inspiration for faith-in-action writing projects, online spaces can be sites of violence as well. There is real potential for our own students to be harassed online, even for projects they might complete for class. Dorothy Kim’s (2014) article “The Rules of Twitter” discusses what faculty
should know when incorporating digital media into their teaching. Kim says we should realize that some people are more likely to be harassed online: “Marks of race, gender, disability, religion, and sexuality make Twitter both a medium of possibility and a medium where the same sorts of surveillance, abuse, control, and silencing happens to these divergent bodies as in real public spaces.” So while these technologies can allow for meaningful connections, moments, and actions, there is also danger. Faculty need to know what students may face online, such as harassment, bullying, and threats. If we use digital media projects in our classrooms and co-curriculars, we may want to discuss with students the pros and cons of protected accounts and other privacy measures, and may consider multiple views of how one ought to establish one’s online identity.

Margaret Fell’s letters can provide readers today with a long-term view of what can be accomplished through writing. We cannot see the future to know the impact of today’s digital writing, and it is tempting to view it all as frivolous and disconnected from any real action. Yet Fell and many other Early Friends used letters among a network of Friends, to establish doctrine, encourage others, raise money for missions, meet physical needs, and plead for legal help, and much more. These letters can help provide a vision for helping students to write from their faith, thereby connecting with others and taking action.

References


From a Deep Place: Reflections on Narrative, Action, and the Quaker Way

Gerald Hewitson
Brian Boyd’s book *On the Origin of Stories* is an intellectual tour de force, an attempt to find an evolutionary explanation of the function of narrative human society and culture. Like many modern thinkers, Brian Boyd is dismissive of the role of religion. In the Bible, or as he characterises it “the Hebrew text”, he argues –

God’s will is inscrutable, permanently unknowable except when he chooses to reveal it, and even then remains of an order fundamentally beyond human fathoming. [Yet] in Homer, the comprehensive vision is in principle humanly obtainable, not unimaginably incomprehensible, even if we do not have access to all relevant mortal facts. ¹

As a young man, I inclined to this sense that all was comprehensible, and that human beings were capable of understanding everything. As I get older I find I am increasingly amazed at the mystery of ordinary life and the mysterious truth of story.

At university, even though I studied English Literature, I was not taught – and it certainly never occurred to me – that narrative offers a different kind of knowing, not ascertained by the reasoned logic I so eagerly sought as a student. Albeit, adrift on the sea of faith offered by different churches, with no family tradition to guide me, it was the sustaining narrative of gospel stories which kept me afloat.

Those of us who were at Britain Yearly Meeting during 2016 heard many inspiring stories of faith-impelled work, carefully woven into the texture of the flowing business Meeting. Although they were told in different ways, they shared many features of story in general. First, stories are inclusive: “Only the gifted few can fully understand a philosophical classic, but everyone can relate to a story.”² Second, narrative repudiates single, linear interpretation in favour of multiple interpretations. The depth and quality of these interpretations is often contingent upon the experience and capacity of the reader. In such a way, the multiple relevance of story can meet us where we are, assisting us, as it were, toward greater truth.³ Furthermore, in seeking an emotional resonance with us, the readers, stories can appeal at a deeper level than our conscious minds, helping us identify with the ambiguity and complexity inherent in the human condition: “…only stories adequately reflect what it is to be human.”⁴

As Shelia Bees puts it,

Stories…are able to elucidate human experience in ways which ‘theoretic positions’ might be more challenged to do. We can often identify with and find commonality in recognizing dilemmas and personal challenges experienced by others. Through entering that space we can shift from feeling different and distanced from others in our travails, to a sense of connection, commonality and shared humanity.⁵

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¹ Ibid p 280

² Jonathon Sacks *Genesis: the book of Beginnings* (Kindle edition)

³ Peegy Heeks *Truth, ambiguity and stories* Friends Quarterly November 2014

⁴ Sacks, op.cit.

⁵ Sheila Bees – private communication of as yet unsubmitted thesis
This insight is part of the cultural DNA of Quakerism. It seems to me that we Quakers eschew creeds because we indeed eschew abstraction in favour of the narrative of lived experience. A section of our British Faith and Practice is a series of stories. There is the story of Naylor, being called from his plough; the story of Howgill, discovering the kingdom of heaven amongst very ordinary Quakers in the north; there is the story of Mary Dyer, dying for her faith; and that of the small and determined Lucy E Harris, hectoring warring Chinese bandits from a boat on the river until they into peacefully withdrew without engagement and loss of life.

But my favourite story is that of William Dent. William Dent was a tenant farmer:

He and his family were known to be of the salt of the earth; but what could a plain tenant farmer accomplish in a small village aloof from the life of the world? At the time when he settled in it several of the houses were in an insanitary condition; the labourers had no gardens to speak of; the children had no school, but there was a public house for the parents. When at four score years his call came to go up higher he left a village where every cottage was a healthy home, where all able-bodied labourers wishing for an allotment could have one. The public house had gone and a good village school had been established. For many years the schoolmistress had lived in his house. A Bible Society anniversary in his big barn was the annual festival and Eirenicon of the district. It may fairly be said that the whole neighbourhood was slowly uplifted by the coming of one quiet life into its midst.

What this story tells me is that William Dent was simply faithful. And in so being the world changed around him. The world, his immediate world, became a better place.

Of course, stories can be abused and distorted. In their hinting towards truth, rather than stating ideology or ideas, they take on the power of metaphor. The ability of metaphor and story to point towards the delicate filigree of love can be diminished by the oppressive manacles of literality. Such is the power of the fundamentalism of any religion. Yet if it is in narrative and metaphor where we learn religious truth which matches the complexity of human experience, it is these very same that allow us to be changed at a fundamental level

What Quaker metaphors and stories cumulatively tell me is that, if I open myself up to it, the very darkest recesses of my being can be infused by Light. At the very core of our being, our darkness may become so imbued with Light that our motivations change – they can be transformed, so that our lives begin to demonstrate light and love. Not that any of this is easy: old words pertain – worship, discipline, sacrifice – though we may find these words need to be rewritten to cope with how our unique configuration fits inside them. And rather than reading these words in a framework of punishment and guilt, we can see them in the context of a loving purpose in which we flourish and grow. We can do much to facilitate this growth of loving purpose in our lives.

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6 Quaker Faith & Practice Ch 18
7 Quaker Faith & Practice 18.11

8 R. Melvin Keiser and Rosemary Moore Knowing the Mystery of the Life within Quaker Books 2005 p. 122
My small Local Meeting is currently trying to decide whether we are called to move from the arts centre which has been our spiritual home for the last twenty odd years, or stay where we are despite some considerable disruption to our silence by people interrupting us to ask for cups of tea, noise from art teachers busily preparing for children’s class, or repeated refrains from practising choirs and the like. In our last Meeting on this, despite strong feeling on both sides, we recognised we were not trying to force a particular decision, but to place ourselves in a state where the decision flowed through us. To do so, we have to remove much clutter and cumber – one person feeling the burden of responsibility of having to open up each time; considerable irritation with staff of the Centre who sometimes forget when we are going to be there; questions about keys; and so on. Each issue to be patiently worked through, until, in time, it will be clear. Right action will flow effortlessly because we have placed ourselves in right relation to Spirit.

I read this as a metaphor for our internal world. We too have much work to do to remove the barriers which impede our ability to dance in concert with divine Presence. To remove these barriers, and to learn this dance, may take a long time. The replacement of the fundamental drivers at the root of our being by a generous loving-kindness – toward ourselves, others, and this beautiful world around us – may be a prolonged process requiring much patience. In being obliged to work with myself, I can see how patient God has been, and continues to be, with humanity. For Love is still very far from being the first motion of the world. As Quakers, we use the term ‘right ordering’. At its heart, the phrase helps us understand that the world is a disordered place. I don’t mean tsunamis, floods, fire and the like. We are embodied in a material world, and natural consequence flows from this. Rather, ‘right ordering’ helps us understand that congealed human structures refuse to allow the “dearest freshness deep down things” to flow freely, easily, as the milk of human kindness is intended to flow. The consequences of this can be seen all around us. Where we are offered abundance we are trapped in a nightmare economic system, in which my gain is another’s loss; inequality and injustice abound; the Pax Romana might be consigned to history, but power still seeks to rule by fear and division.

What can our response be, to such a world?

We can perhaps remind of ourselves that while discipleship generates the expectation that we will be as innocent as the dove, this expectation does not preclude us from being as wise as the serpent (Matthew 10.16). And this wisdom, subtlety, intelligence and wealth of learning can be brought to bear as we look at such injunctions as ‘walking the extra mile’. Walter Wink shows us that, in the context of the time, a Roman centurion could compel a local inhabitant to carry his pack for a mile. By insisting on walking an extra mile, the peasant of ancient Palestine both places the oppressor in the position of offender, and exposes the nature of the oppressive law. Similarly, first Friends used the strength provided by their Quaker hedge to challenge surrounding oppressive structures. In their way of dress, of speaking, their refusal to doff hats or take oaths, even apparently their way of walking – with directness and purpose as opposed to a Restoration swagger – early Friends undermined and made apparent the

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9 God’s Grandeur Gerard Manley Hopkins
10 See Walter Wink Engaging the Powers Fortress Press 1992 pp 179-182
pretension, pomposity and ugliness of the surrounding cultural norms.\textsuperscript{11}

In rejecting those oppressive aspects of their surrounding culture, Quakers were walking cheerfully over their world, in order to call forth God in every situation which they encountered, no matter how apparently dire.\textsuperscript{12} They could do so because they knew, (in the sense that they had encountered experientially) that which Penington calls “the inward substance of all that appears.”\textsuperscript{13}

To both live in the world, whilst challenging the fundamental presuppositions on which it is based, is as radical now was it was in Roman occupied Palestine or Restoration Britain. The Catholic pastor, Henri Nouwen writes:

> every real revolutionary is challenged to be a mystic at heart, and those who walk the mystical way are called to unmask the illusory quality of our society. \textsuperscript{14}

Quakers have been described as a “community of practical mystics,” \textsuperscript{15} and as in any mystical path, sincerely following the Quaker way of silent listening opens up the universe and reveals its true condition. It is this condition which requires reordering.

However, since we no longer possess the Quaker ‘hedge’ (those distinctive features which both separated and protected First Friends from the surrounding cultural norms) we can ask ourselves ‘What forms, structures and practices can our Quaker community develop to enhance the necessary inner strength, the psychological and spiritual resilience, which would allow us to both live in the world as it is, and to respond more fully and authentically to those leadings of Spirit which enable the world to be transformed?’

Quakers form a key chapter in the continuing Abrahamic story. A recurring leitmotif of the story is that we will be ‘called’, as Abraham, Jesus and Mohammed were all in turn called. The thematic motif of Friends telling us their stories throughout Britain Yearly Meeting 2016 was that of individual Friends receiving and responding to their call. And, we were reminded, of the consequent responsibility this places on their community.\textsuperscript{16} Yet if we are not careful, we Quakers can generate the default expectation that we will be called into activity. I suspect that the actual call is an ever deeper relationship with that which is the source and basis of the richness, the depths and the fulfilment of our own humanity, and the activity is simply the outward sign of this. So when the Gospel of Mark tells the story of Jesus’ vision of the Holy Spirit descending a dove, and he heard the voice of God saying “This is my son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:9-11), I do not read it...

\textsuperscript{11} In his course in 2014, Ben Pink Dandelion spoke of the Quaker hedge. A Friend who worked with costume in theatre showed us participants the way a Quaker walk might be the direct result of simple Quaker clothing compared with Restoration finery.

\textsuperscript{12} See the story of Mary Dyer in Quaker Faith & Practice 19.18

\textsuperscript{13} Quoted by Harvey Gilman in Article in The Friend April 8th 2016 – subject of subsequent letter in The Friend


\textsuperscript{15} Harvey Gilman – Words Friends Publication London 2016 p.32 See also Everyday Mysticism Friends Quarterly November 2014

\textsuperscript{16} Marion McNaughton told the moving story of her involvement in a Clearness Meeting, where she realised that it was not the individual’s concern which was being tested through this process, but the strength of the Meeting in its ability to sustain and nurture the concern. The clearness required was not by the individual at the centre of the meeting, but by those apparently upholding. I understood Marion to say that it was she who was being called.
as the experience of one man at a single, defining moment in time, but rather as a metaphor for the whole of humanity, for the rest of history. The call exists for all of us to enter into relationship with the Divine. And my faithfulness to this call from loving purpose is defined and tested in my response to the particularities of my life, to the fullness of the situation which confronts me now, this moment.

As Thomas Merton puts it:

I am a member of the human race – and what glorious destiny is there, since the Word was made flesh and became, too, a member of the Human Race.\[17\]

Our personal, unique Word is our life story. “God comes to us disguised as our lives.”\[18\] It is in our personal narrative, the intimate life history of each of us, that we can find the experience of God written on our hearts. And this narrative can be founded on the sure and certain knowledge that we are an articulation of the divine. We can recognise and truly comprehend that our lives are the only opportunities God has to speak across the world. The Word is made flesh in us, so that we can be a living minute, a human record, of God’s presence on earth. Furthermore, the power of that Word is weakened if I diminish my distinctive significance in any way – or if I diminish that of others. It’s not good enough for me to wish I had more competence, more energy, a greater ability to focus, or the capacity to work harder. This is not humility, but immature spiritual formation. A mature spiritual formation is the sustained effort to grow as a human being, in order that the Word can be spoken more truly, more powerfully and more authentically through me. To put this another way, the more we are prepared to live into our humanity, the more deeply we can engage with the ground and source of humanity:

The Glory of God is the human being fully alive, and the glory of the human being is the beholding of God.\[19\]

The more deeply we engage with Spirit, the more our capacity for compassion and loving kindness increases. And that loving kindness flows through us according to the design of our particular, unique creation.

For the book of our lives is not one where we are held to account, but a text in which can be found a loving hand, shaping us.

In this respect, Brian Boyd is right – it is a text not easy to read. In reading the manuscript of our own lives, we can recognise that the words we use say as much about ourselves as they do about an objective reality:

The model we choose to understand something determines what we find. …how we think about ourselves and our relationship to the world is already revealed in the metaphors we unconsciously choose to talk about it…Our first leap determines where we land.\[20\]

In contrast with Brian Boyd’s celebration of Homeric total perspective, I prefer that offered by the nature writer Robert Mcfarlane, who writes

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\[17\] Quoted in Nouwen. Spiritual formation: following the Movements of the Spirit Harper Collins 2010
\[18\] Richard Rohr Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality (Kindle Edition)
\[20\] Iain McGilchrist The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Western World (Yale University Press 2012) p. 97
[it is] the mountaineer who longs to look down and outward onto total knowledge. The pilgrim is always content with looking along and inwards to mystery.\(^\text{21}\)

As a pilgrim, I revel in the mystery that I am being carved by the ever-flowing river of God’s love. This river of love carves me so the map of my life might more nearly represent the geography of my unique, individual soul. And as in geography, where focus on an individual feature is only helpful as part of the reading of the entire topography, I need to read my personal landscape in its completeness: the pilgrim path is a journey towards wholeness.

The euphony between wholeness and holiness is not, in my view, accidental. Wholeness is a kind of perfection. This perfection is not a Greek sense of faultlessness. It is rather a completion of a lived reality – of seeing the wholeness and fulfilment in what is, at any particular moment in time. What this means is that each one of us has to accept the totality of our personal history. “The message of the Incarnation is that nothing is wasted,”\(^\text{22}\) in our movement toward wholeness. Think of a great tree blown down a great storm. When a craftswoman examines the rings in a slice of that tree, she can see all the things that have gone into the growing of that particular great manifestation of nature – the knocks and hardships which made the tree what it is: the long lean years of drought; the harsh winters; the trauma inflicted by lovers carving their names; the bright sun and the spring rain – they are all written indelibly in the heart of that tree. The craftsperson does not laminate over these apparent flaws, these seeming imperfections, but rather polishes the wood it so its essential character shines forth. We can only gaze in wonder at this perfection, in which the apparent flaws play an essential part.

Yet sometimes the rivers of adversity run deep, and much is demanded of some people. In our pursuit of the Light, and that which is good, I sometimes wonder if we Quakers are able to truly contemplate and comprehend the darkness and malevolence which lies in the human psyche, and the hard, hard journey some people have. Accepting the vicissitudes which life has visited upon us as individuals is one thing; it can be more difficult, more challenging, and far more demanding, to accept the impact of history without bitterness or anger.

In his book Rebel Land, Christopher de Bellaigue spends time among the Kurds of south eastern Turkey, as they fight against the Turkish state for their language and culture. As he talks to people there, he becomes aware of the underbelly of history, and the participation of the many Kurdish men in the Armenian genocide of the 1920s. This history is made transparent on his journey back home, where he finds himself sitting next to an Armenian man. His travelling companion shows him a silver belt he had bought from a Kurdish man in Eastern Turkey. The Kurd had claimed it was a family heirloom. Christopher’s Armenian travelling companion explains that in fact this belt was undoubtedly an Armenian bridal belt. It would have belonged to a young Armenian woman, and stolen from her – most probably after her rape and murder – in the horror that was Turkey of the 1920’s. De Bellaigue reflects at home:

\(^{21}\) Introduction written by Robert MacFarlane to The Living Mountain – Nan Shepherd – p. xvii

\(^{22}\) Ross op. cit. p. 81
I think these things in a neat, well-ordered terraced house in London, where I have belts of my own–my family; the nice, reassuring things I inherited from my mother. Supposing these people, these things, were wrenched away from me by an ancestral enemy, supposing I was robbed of everything in a matter of minutes – I suppose that I too would disregard those principles, of love and forgiveness that were instilled in me painlessly as a child, and abandon myself to insatiable rage.  

My ancestors were all miners of coal. For generations they worked underground. They were never systematically enslaved, the women raped, and removed from the plot of earth where they had lived for generations. But I understand resentment, anger and even rage. For a long time in my life an incandescent fury could flare when I thought of my forefathers, and their forefathers, slaving for coal in candlelit holes of heat and sweat and dust. While others, across generations, lived lives of ease, comfort and well-being, soaring by effortless achievement to positions of power, wealth and comfort.

It would be very easy to use past experience to claim victimhood. To say the suffering of my people entitles me to claim a special privilege over others. It is, instead, part of a mature spirituality which refuses to inflict pain on the world; which says that my sense of injustice, my experience of desolation, is not an opportunity for me to demand that the world be reshaped in the light of my hurt, but rather that I am refashioned so as to recognise that pain and hardship places me at one with a suffering humanity. As hard as it is, it is an opportunity for me to extend my capacity for compassion:

Through compassion it is possible to recognise the craving for love that men feel resides also in our hearts, the cruelty that the world knows all too well is located in our impulses. For a compassionate man (sic) nothing human is alien: no joy and no sorrow, no way of living and no way of dying.  

Any who make a journey into compassion, in however limited a way, imitate the protagonist in that great story – the story which may not, in all details, be true, but nevertheless points me in the direction of truth. For what is the crucifixion story but a metaphor of transformation: the movement of spirit which takes us to a place we cannot aspire to, and barely desire, yet where we are at one with the spirit, and the spirit flows though us unceasingly?

And the end of history will be when “justice flows like a river, and righteousness like a living stream”. (Amos 5:24) Grounded in love, we have no desire to wound, manipulate, or dominate. Walking with assurance is not to strut arrogantly. Action can be an emanation of the divine, flowing through us.

How does this play out in a world of busy lives and multiple demands in a full day? I can only say that my life is very much a text in progress: “Hints, followed by guesses,” to quote TS Eliot. It doesn’t take very much to

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23 Christopher de Bellaigue Rebel Land: Among Turkey’s Forgotten People London: Bloomsbury Publishing 2009) p. 264

24 Nouwen, op. cit. p. 44

25 Rhiannon Grant used a similar formulation in a Meeting of the Review Preparation Group in 2015

26 See William Penn No cross no crown Chapter 3: “The cross of Christ is a figurative speech borrowed from the outward tree, or wooden cross, on which Christ submitted to the will of God, suffering death at the hands of evil men so that the cross mystical is that divine grace and power which crosseth the carnal wills of men and so may be justly termed the instrument of man’s wholly dying to the world and being made comfortable to the will of God”
knock me off my centre. But when troubled by the suffering of the world, my own failures of vision and courage, or the times when we Quakers hold strife, anger and hurt above loving community, at such times I am put in mind of the ending of the Jesus story as told by Mark. Not the confident ending as we currently receive it, but the ending of Chapter 16 vs. 8, as originally written. This does not offer a fairy tale of roundedness and conclusion.

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.27

This ending of Mark is baffling, unsettling, these disciples left doubting the validity of their experience of the living Christ as they had known him. The gospel – ‘good news’ – seems to be a story of hopelessness and failure.

I am heartened by reading Ched Myers in his book *Binding the Strong Man*. In the end, whether or not we can will find a way to carry on with this story of biblical radicalism, this way of living and dying together, this way into a new heaven and earth, depends upon our understanding and acceptance of the tragedy and hope of our own failures. For it is there that our discipleship will either truly end or truly begin.28

As individuals and as a Society, we can ask for the grace to be transfigured into discipleship to that spirit of love and Truth which simultaneously enjoins us to live at peace with our neighbours and also invites us to challenge the roots of a surrounding culture not founded in love and truth and justice. I would suggest that minimal as it is, attending to stories from our tradition helps us by offering inspiration and authentic example. They embody the truth that it is possible to live this way.

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27 Most scholars agree that verses following this are an interpolation to the original manuscript.
28 Ched Myers *Binding the Strong man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* Orbis Books 2008
Irregular War and Chances for Peace
Paul Rogers
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We present a written version of remarks presented as a plenary speech at the 2016 FAHE conference at the Woodbrooke Study Centre. Streaming video of this oral presentation is available through the Woodbrooke web site.

The shock of the 9/11 atrocities made it almost inevitable that the United States would respond forcefully, engaging in war in Afghanistan and leading to the dispersal of al-Qaida and the termination of the Taliban regime in Kabul. There were a few voices in the United States and Western Europe calling for a more measured response; some arguing that the attacks should be seen as part of a transnational criminal conspiracy which should be countered by the vigorous international pursuit of legal actions. This was never a likely response given the shock of 9/11 and the Bush administration’s seeking to consolidate its vision of a New American Century and global US Leadership.

In the event, the early results of military action appeared effective, with the Taliban gone within three months and the al-Qaida movement dispersed. Two key leaders were not killed or captured–Osama bin Laden of al-Qaida and Mullah Omar of the Taliban–but in other respects President Bush could give his January 2002 State of the Union Address by reporting on considerable success.

The speech was even more notable for enlarging the “war on terror” to encompass a much wider group of opponents. This was an “axis of evil” of rogue states determined, in the administration’s view, to sponsor terrorism and develop weapons of mass destruction. At the heart of this axis were Iraq, Iran and North Korea, and the mood in Washington in the spring of 2002 was very much of preparing the domestic and international audiences for regime termination in Iraq. This was further emphasised by President Bush’s graduation address at West Point in June that made it abundantly clear that the United States had the right to pre-empt potential threats.

Although international support for a war in Iraq was much less than for the war against the Taliban and al-Qaida, the US was able to gather a formidable coalition of states for the occupation and anticipated liberation of Iraq in a military campaign that started in March 2003. As with Afghanistan 18 months earlier, the initial results were remarkable, with the Saddam Hussein regime collapsing within three weeks. This enabled Bush to give his famous “mission accomplished” speech three weeks later on May Day, declaring that the war was being won and that the United States had fully recovered from the 9/11 trauma.

May 2003 was the high point of the entire war on terror. In Afghanistan the Taliban had gone and US bases were being established near Kabul and Kandahar, the remnants of al-Qaida were holed up in remote parts of Pakistan and the United States had established good military links with Central Asian republics, giving it major influence in an energy-rich region in competition with Russia and China. In Iraq, four major military bases would be established and the Coalition Provisional Authority would re-make the Iraqi economy in the free market mould, with wholesale privatisation of all the many state assets, a
deregulated financial system, a flat rate tax level and an absolute minimum of labour organisation. Iraq would be a pro-western free-market beacon for other states in the region to emulate.

Within two years it had all gone terribly wrong. Even by mid-2005 it was evident that the Taliban movement and other armed opposition groups (AOG) were regaining territory in many parts of Afghanistan, governmental corruption and maladministration was rife, the Afghan National Army and police could not maintain order and the whole country risked descending into civil war. The US and its allies began to reinforce the small contingent of troops, with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) growing from 5,000 to 100,000 within five years.

When Barack Obama was elected in 2008 ISAF was subsequently boosted to 130,000 but that has failed to bring stabilisation and the hoped-for withdrawal by the end of 2014 has been abandoned. At the time of writing (Fall 2016), the Taliban and AOGs control up to a third of the country, including most of the province of Helmand which is responsible for the majority of the world’s illicit opium poppy crop.

In Iraq the insurgency developed within months rather than years and was to last eight years before President Obama ordered the withdrawal of troops. A singularly dirty shadow war fought by US and UK Special Force against hard-core insurgents, especially al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) appeared initially to work but survivors of that war went on to form the core of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), taking substantial territory in Iraq and Syria and leading to a further intense war between a western coalition of air power which began in August 2014. Meanwhile the termination of the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011 produced not a peaceful country but multiple militias, endemic instability and violence and an environment for extreme Islamist groups to prosper.

Close to 3,000 people died in the 9/11 attacks, but the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya have killed some 300,000 people, mostly civilians. Many hundreds of thousands more have been wounded or maimed, millions of people have been displaced from their homes and the financial costs of the wars exceed $3,000 billion. Al-Qaida and ISIS remain the leading Islamist movements, and while both are under pressure, they have developed the ability to evolve in new directions. They are linked to groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and Shabaab in Somalia, as well as insurgents in Libya, Egypt, Yemen, the Caucasus, and across South Asia.

The major western military response in the early 2000s involved very large scale expeditionary forces in Afghanistan and Iraq but these have now been largely replaced by what is being termed “remote control warfare”. This relies on air power, including the much increased use of armed drones, together with the expanded use of Special Forces and private military and security companies. Much of this remote control warfare can be, and is conducted, with minimal public exposure or political accountability. There is little evidence that such an approach is proving any more effective than “boots on the ground” yet received military wisdom assumes that it is the way forward.

Taking a more rigorous and independent view leads to the conclusion that the control of al-Qaida, ISIS and other revolts from the
margins is simply not amenable to conventional military solutions. Fifteen years of war, with no end in sight, suggest that far more attention has to be paid to the conditions which allow such movements to gain support. This is a serious enough matter in relation to the immediate post-9/11 world but it becomes even more important if there are other global factors that suggest we are moving into an era of multiple revolts. In this context, ISIS and other loosely related movements should be seen as part of a much wider trend towards what might loosely be called “revolts from the margins”, an age of insurgencies rather than a clash of civilisations between the West and the Islamic world.

The two main factors driving global insecurity in the coming decades are the deepening socio-economic divisions resulting in the relative marginalisation of most peoples across the world, interacting with deep and lasting environmental constraints especially climate disruption. Forty years ago the geographer and politician Edwin Brooks warned of that what we had to avoid was a dystopic future of a “crowded glowering planet of massive inequalities in wealth, buttressed by stark force yet endlessly threatened by desperate people in the global ghettoes.”29 In a recent analysis it was argued that:

“The fundamental drivers of conflict – economic marginalisation and climate change - are exacerbated by two more elements. One is that a whole raft of welcome improvements in education and literacy are having the effect of making far more people aware of their own marginalisation and unwilling to accept it, and the other is that there is a presumption that security can best be controlled, when other methods fail, by resort to military responses. This is greatly aided by the power and influence of what Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex but is better described as the military-industrial-academic-bureaucratic complex. At its crudest level, what is sometimes termed the “control paradigm” might better be termed “liddism” – keeping the lid on problems rather than understanding their causes and manifestations.

The argument here is that ISIS is an example of a revolt from the margins, initially specific to the Middle East but with much wider implications. Others that are also indicative include Islamist militant groups such as Boko Haram and Al Nusra Front but also the little-recognised but highly significant neo-Maoist Naxalite rebellion in India as well as, in the recent past, the neo-Maoists in Nepal and the Shining Path movement in Peru. All in their different ways are indicators of the problems likely to be faced if that “crowded glowering planet” is allowed to evolve. There are ways to stop it but they go far beyond conventional thinking on security.”30

There are three interlinked issues that therefore need to be addressed. One, the most immediately evident is that the military control paradigm simply does not work, especially if applied to revolts from the margins. Fifteen years of recent experience in multiple countries shows that such a determination to maintain the status quo simply increases the extent of the anger. There may on occasions be apparent short-term gains, as in Afghanistan in 2001-2, Iraq in 2003, the killing of bin Laden in 2011, the fall of Gaddafi in the same year and the apparent demise of ISIS in 2016, but the evidence is that these have no more than a limited immediate effect. Alternative approaches have to be used that recognise

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the underlying reasons why movements such as al-Qaida and ISIS have gained such support. While these may relate to popular but false interpretations of one of the world’s great religious traditions they are greatly fuelled by a singularly widespread perception of economic marginalisation and political impotence.

The second relates to the critical need to address the increasingly evident failings of the neo-liberal economic era that evolved in the later 1970s and has held sway across most of the world for more than four decades. That system has proved woefully unfit for purpose, primarily by concentrating the fruits of variable economic growth in the hands of barely one-fifth of the world’s people, with a further obscene concentration in the hands of just one percent resulting, for example, in less than a hundred individuals controlling as much wealth as half of the world’s people. As the neoliberal era stutters to end it has to be transcended by a far more equitable economic system, a massive task but one in which there is already much good research and many examples, not least the world-wide development of cooperatives and other mutual forms of enterprise.

The final challenge is the requirement to move to ultra-low carbon economies, aiming for at least 80% cuts in carbon emissions across the Global North by 2030. That seems as difficult to achieve as a more just economic model but it is perhaps in this area that there is the greatest potential for rapid action. Highly impressive technical developments in the exploitation and storage of renewable energy resources have greatly improved the capacity for a rapid transition to low-carbon economies with what is most required being the political will to do so.

Putting all three challenges together, we have to recognise that the global community is facing the third transition of its existence. First, the agricultural revolution around 10,000 years ago when humans first learnt to farm and led on to concentrated food production that could support towns, then cities, and then civilisations. It continued with the second transition of the industrial revolution, starting 250 years ago. The third transition is learning to live sustainably within a finite global ecosystem. If all can be achieved, then we have the prospect of a more peaceful second half of the 21st century. If not, then Brooks’s “crowded glowering planet” with multiple revolts from the margins will be the order of the day.

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Photo by Don Smith