

Among Friends

No 117: Winter 2010

Published by the Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation
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Dear Friends,

The end of the year seemed to bring loss and sorrow to Friends in the Section – in quick succession we received the sad news of the death of our Friends Olga Dolgina in St. Petersburg, Birgit Rancken in Finland, Lore Horn in Berlin and Berit Collett in Norway. We give thanks for the grace of God as shown in their lives, and in sharing in the shock and pain of their families and f/Friends discover our own identity as a community. Peter Dyson remembers Olga Dolgina in this issue, and David Blamires' appreciation of Lore Horn's efforts to keep German Friends connected over the years of political separation will be published in the next issue of *Among Friends*, which is planned for June 2010. There will be three issues of *Among Friends* this year. This is to accommodate my absence from the office while I travel on EMES and FWCC business. However, articles and news will continue to be published on our website www.fwccemes.org as they are received, so hopefully you can continue to keep in touch with each other in-between publications.

In this issue we catch up with news of the Copenhagen Summit, and the study tour of Israel/Palestine that led QCEA to begin a new programme of work on this issue.

EMES' work continues to focus on connecting Friends through visiting and on-line learning - the course in English is about to go live, with participants from

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*Wils t'Hart, Liz Scurfield and Patricia Cockrell
in front of "the wall"*

Canada, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Estonia, Lithuania, Turkey, Sweden, Israel, Egypt, and hopefully Lebanon, Palestine and the USA.

Feedback from the courses already run has been encouraging. In the words of a Friend from France Yearly Meeting: *"I really experienced days of spiritual sharing, even a kind of shared Quaker meeting. The fact of knowing you are being read by each one gives a feeling of a warm connection that seemed to me to be a spiritual experience in itself. It was as if a door opened on each occasion. You approach it at first in a bit of a fragile way, then from week to week you feel stronger because what follows throws light on what went before."*

May we continue to grow and develop as a community of faith.

Marisa Johnson, Executive Secretary

A Quaker-inspired Retreat Centre in Portugal

Lizzie Collman describes a life changing move:

It's still hard to believe that we have moved to a mountain village in Portugal to create a centre for Ecological living. But that is exactly what we have done. We discovered Sobral Pichorro in a remote region of the Beira Alta in February 2009 and on the 7th October my partner and I left our home in Somerset, England to embark on a new life in Portugal.

Our 400 year old Quinta and Solar was once a centre for production for olive oil and wine. The terraces of olive trees and vineyards have been neglected in recent years as most of the young people have left the countryside for life in the cities or abroad. Yet the plants are still full of vitality and intact, just waiting for new guardians to clear away the brambles, open up the springs and restore the land back to it's former glory. The Solar (manor house) is home to a 16th century chapel, with renaissance paintings in the ceiling panels, all in need of restoration. Once restored, the Solar will be a centre for natural medicine, and the focal point for visitors to Vale das Lobas.

The project will combine organic agriculture with natural healthcare and ecological architecture. We consider one of the most important local resources to be the elders, who have a deep knowledge of the land and how to work with it. Our new neighbours in Sobral Pichorro have been very welcoming and supportive of our plans, and the project will grow organically incorporating their wisdom.

Vale das Lobas will be a centre for organic production, and it will provide education and inspiration for people who wish to live sustainably. It will be a centre for peace, in all aspects. We will demonstrate here that living sustainably, with low impact dwellings, in harmony with our environment is possible, practical and viable.

There will be a Meeting House for worship, and for hosting conferences, courses and workshops on spiritual ecology and all aspects of living in harmony.



The Terraces

I joined the Quakers in 1998 after attending Bedford Meeting (England) for a while; I was quickly at home with the deep, prayerful silence. What really struck me was that although here was a diverse group of people, there was also such unity and openness in the Quaker testimonies. I became involved particularly in the peace and outreach work over the years and both of my children grew up in Meeting.

We plan to build 20 eco-dwellings, for people who come to live in the valley. There will be a further six eco-dwellings for shared ownership by regular visitors. Nine retreat houses will be designed through a global competition. The aim will be to demonstrate a variety of organic creative solutions.

There are only three Quakers in Portugal, and I am already feeling the pioneering spirit. I have found many places on this land where a deep silence and reverence for nature and spirituality naturally occurs; nature's Meeting for Worship.

To become fully realised, Vale das Lobas requires financial support, in the form of public grants, private loans, donations and investment.

Please get in touch if you would like to know more:

<http://www.healersjourney.org/portugal.html>
lizzie@remedycentre.org

Olga Dolgina: a St Petersburg Friend remembered

Peter Dyson *writes:*

Krasnoufimsk is a small town in the Ural mountains 224 kilometres due west of Ekaterinburg. Olga was born here in 1950 but the family were moved to Petropavlovsk over the border in North Kazakhstan about a 1000 kilometres in the opposite direction. You should remember that one's place of labour in the Soviet Union was directed and not chosen.

Olga had the good fortune in Petropavlosk to meet the Kolesnikov sisters, teachers who had been educated in Helsinki University and the Sorbonne. From them she acquired her love of the English language. She was a brilliant pupil at school, being awarded with a gold medal diploma: this more or less guaranteed entry to any university in the Soviet Union. She chose The Herzten Institute in Leningrad where she trained as a teacher, graduating in 1972. She remained on its staff thereafter and became one of its most respected and loved teachers. She touched the lives of generations of students; she was an ideal teacher and an ideal person, a role model to build their lives on. Her teaching methods, creative and full of innovation, helped hundreds of teachers from all over Russia master new techniques of teaching and improve their own English language skills. She was "a typical example of St Petersburg's intelligentsia; civilized and heedful".

Olga was amongst the first group of exchange students ever allowed to leave the Soviet Union. She studied at Bradford University from October 1970 to February 1971. Olga met the Rowntree family and her journey into the family of Friends began.

She married Zhenia in 1972 and they lived in Kolpino, a suburb of Leningrad. They had a daughter Anna (now living in Phoenix with her two daughters and American husband).

Olga was an early member of the St Petersburg Worship Group. She studied at Woodbrooke College from April to July 1995; was an active member of Baltic Meeting, organising their gathering in Pavlovsk in 1999: she served as a member of the Board of Friends House Moscow from 1999 to 2004. Her bilingual excellence was always in demand as interpreter and translator, and

she was often asked to facilitate Quaker Gathering. Her legacy as a "wordsmith" remains in her sensitive translations of Thomas Kelly's Testament of Devotion and Douglas Steere's Quaker Spirituality. Many Friends will remember her from EMES Gatherings and QCEA events. Olga made a wonderful and very distinctive contribution to Quaker faith and practice in Russia and beyond.

Olga will be remembered. A Memorial Fund has been set up by Friends House Moscow to continue the work of translating Quaker writing into Russian so that it will become more accessible to the Russian speaking world. Friends wishing to contribute to this Fund may send donations to:



Olga at Maison Quaker in Brussels

The Treasurer, The Olga Dolgina Memorial Fund, Brynmawr,

Westbourne Drive, Lancaster LA15EE, UK

semaj@jeddington2.wanadoo.co.uk Tel: 01524 848661

Bank Transfers to: Co-operative Bank

BIC CPBK GB22 IBAN GB52 CBPK 0892 9965 0368 99

Sort Code: 08-92-99 account no. 65036899

Sterling cheques and euro bank drafts should be made out to 'Friends House Moscow'.

(As a registered charity, if you pay UK income tax Friends House Moscow can increase your donation by 28p in the £; UK Gift Aid declarations from <http://www.friendshousemoscow.org.uk>.)

Young Quaker Christian Association Africa Triennial

Jez Smith writes about his recent experience of visiting Friends in Kenya:

On a balmy warm mid-December evening the sound of Jubilate Coeli, a taize chant, gently wafts over the fields of a little corner of western Kenya. In a sparsely furnished room with a tall ceiling, a single light bulb, an old dusty pool table in the corner and some menacing looking spiders among the cobwebs, Marielke Niuewerth of Netherlands Yearly Meeting is leading a small group of Rwandan, Kenyan and British Young Friends through a round. The singing is one of a number of special interest activities taking place at the Young Quaker Christian Association Africa Triennial. The event, as the name suggests, takes place every three years (with a leadership training event in between).

Just as I think that we might never get this round right and could perhaps move onto something else, one of the Rwandan singers is inspired to suggest that we try again. And again. And a few more times after that. Over time different members of the group chip in with suggestions of how we might improve our singing together.

Marielke, Vivian Barty-Taylor (Netherlands Yearly Meeting), Hetty Swancott and I (both Britain Yearly Meeting) are the Europe and Middle East Young Friends delegation. We are not the only Quakers hailing from the liberal non-programmed tradition (we hold Meeting for Worship in expectant still and silent waiting on God who inspires our ministry) as there are similar Friends from the Kenya, Lesotho and the US. But we are in the minority for in the world family of Friends there is some variety of what it means to call yourself Quaker. The majority groups and yearly meetings have some kind of programmed worship (with a set order of events) and many have pastors who are paid and trained for ministry. The majority of Friends are from about eight of the seventeen or so yearly meetings in Kenya. As well as those already mentioned, there are also delegates from Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda.

The theme of the gathering was 'divine perception' (for man does not see as God sees) from 1 Samuel 16:7, which could also translate as 'discernment'.



Jez among Friends

The key speakers on the theme were Oliver Kisaka from East Africa Yearly Meeting North and Deborah Saunders of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Other speakers addressed the history of Quakers and servant leadership. The event ran from 9-13 December 2009 and included different types of worship, singing and general fellowship time.

As Marielke's workshop ends we wind our way along the paths and over grassy banks, singing in a round that we have learned in our time together. Our voices carry around the campus. Although we come from different parts of the world and from different Quaker traditions we have shown each other that we can learn together, support each other and worship together. Although sometimes we may appear to be worlds apart, we have discovered that by concentrating on what we have in common at heart we can all be a part of the world family of Friends.

Footnote: Jez is co-preparing a Woodbrooke Quaker study centre course, 'World Family of Friends', which takes place in Birmingham, UK, from 3 to 5 September 2010. If you wish to take part, see www.woodbrooke.org.uk for more information. Visit jezsmith.wordpress.com to read Jez's blogposts from his time in Kenya.

Copenhagen Report

Mary Gilbert, of *Earthcare Witness*, reports from the much heralded Copenhagen Summit, held in December 2009:

Picture a line of thousands of people, about 20 feet across and very, very long, standing in the dark until sunrise, inching forward through the daylight and a light snowfall around noon, standing as the light fades and the sun sets, with the last 2000 or so being dismissed in the dark, unable to pass through the gate. That was me there in the middle, on my first day at the COP15 climate negotiations in Copenhagen, trying to enter the Bella Centre where the talks were held.

Everyone in the line was properly accredited. In fact, on my second day I inched along next to the President of the Club of Rome, who got in at about 11:50 because he was running a session. I got in at about 1:15. Seven thousand were admitted that day, but we were told that on the next 3 days they would admit 1000, then 300, and on the final day 90.

Why was I there?

I knew that the process leading up to COP15 was lengthy and complex, and that making any input was precluded. Nations had had to submit any words to be negotiated by mid-June. Meetings were held to clarify what could be settled easily, where the big stumbling blocks were and which countries held what positions. Ordinary people who showed up in Copenhagen thinking they might be able to add anything substantive were out of luck. Nonetheless it was important that we be there, representing the numbers and commitment of civil society demanding a FAB outcome...Fair, Ambitious and Binding.

I came with two intentions. The first, to hold open, public meetings for worship in the Bella Centre, failed totally. The second, to build international connections among Friends who care about the Earth, had a good beginning.

QEW, as the only Quaker group with accreditation, had extended an invitation to Friends internationally to attend as our guests, and we made a group of nine. Copenhagen Friends gave us a warm welcome at their

midweek evening meeting. On the last day, having given up on the Bella Centre, we met in a worship-sharing that became "gathered" and lasted all day. We talked about the possibility of an on-going, global Friends network for the health of our planet, and plan to work together as way opens. As individuals we are already connected with the international Quaker groups QEW, QIF and FWCC. I hope to have more to say about this over time.

What's next?

The sheer numbers of the public turnout in Copenhagen is a sign that people around the world are informed and prepared to speak out. To quote Rabbi Arthur Waskow, "At the official leadership level, it was a dismal failure. At the grass-roots level, it sprouted another stage of growth. Which narrative controls the future – top-down failure or grass-roots growth – depends on us."

In downtown Copenhagen a people's "Klimaforum" featured major speakers and provided a center for networking. What a contrast to the formal meetings at the Bella Centre! There was energy and laughter. They wrote a Declaration much better than the disappointing results of negotiations at COP15. (You can read and maybe sign it at www.klimaforum09.org)

I believe the climate crisis and the societal patterns that underlie it are the challenges for our generation. We can pray about how to step out of our comfort zones, and be let ourselves be stretched by undertaking what we see as ours to do. Discernment will lead us to different choices and different actions, all of which are important and will supplement each other.

In the Reykjavik airport waiting room on my way home I ran into Bill McKibben (the educator and environmentalist, author of *EAARTH*, Ed.), who was travelling on the same plane. He thanked me for my work. I thanked him for his. I am pleased to be travelling a path that crossed Bill McKibben's. Let's all thank each other as we travel together.

More on the Quaker presence at Copenhagen on <http://www.fwccemes.org/news/emes-executive-endorses-quaker-statement-on-climate-change>.

QCEA Council approves new programme of work on Palestine/Israel

In June 2009, the two Joint Representatives at QCEA in Brussels together with 10 Council Members from 9 Yearly Meetings and Belgium and Luxembourg MM travelled to Israel and Palestine on a 10-day study trip. The programme was organised by Kathy Bergen, Programme Coordinator at the Friends International Centre in Ramallah and included visits to Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Tel Aviv, Nazareth, Bethlehem, and the Hebron area and discussions with peace activists, representatives of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the Palestinian Authority, international organisations and, of course, local Friends.

The trip was part of a long process of discernment which had begun at least a year earlier on route to deciding whether QCEA should take up a programme of work on the issues related to EU involvement in the Middle East conflict. QCEA had not engaged with this aspect of EU policy before; rather, it had been – for the previous 4 years – a subject which the Representatives ‘kept a watching brief on’ and which featured in sessions on the annual QCEA Study Tour in Brussels. Those who have participated in those Study Tours will no doubt remember some very frank exchanges on these matters between EU officials and Study Tour participants, including students and teachers from Ramallah and Brummana Friends Schools.

The Joint Representatives had become increasingly conscious of the fact that the EU involvement in the region, in the peace process, and in the economy of the region was sufficiently important both to the region and to EU political developments for us to have to at least consider incorporating it into our work programme.

This is not a report of our trip – the group who went have reported in various ways to Friends. This is an update on the decisions reached at the October 2009 Council Meeting. At that meeting, Council resolved that QCEA would begin to work on the following issues:

1. The Association Agreements between the EU and Israel and the PLO respectively

We will be looking specifically at the different developments in terms of the implementation of these



Kathy Bergen and Jean Zaru with QCEA Representatives

two Agreements and developing advocacy messages towards improving the implementation and the impact of that implementation of the situation on the ground.

We will also pick up on the issues relating to settlement products and their entry into the European Union.

2. Providing Assistance to local NGOs with advocacy in Brussels

We have developed some experience in helping NGO representatives from the region with arranging advocacy meetings with decision-makers in Brussels. We believe that our links with relevant people in Brussels and our understanding of the institutional landscape can bring added value to the work of NGO representatives coming to Brussels to do advocacy work and to present their perspective to EU decision-makers.

We will develop a briefing on what the important elements of such advocacy are, what NGO representatives need to do to be well prepared, and we will help to arrange meetings and, where this is considered useful, accompany NGO representatives to meetings in Brussels.

We see approaches from NGOs in Israel and Palestine coming primarily through Quaker routes (i.e. via the EAPPI programme or via FICR in Ramallah).

3. Issues arising for EU nationals

There are EU nationals living in the occupied Palestinian

Territories, in Israel and in illegal settlements. We will look at the practical and legal issues these situations involve and develop advocacy messages to the EU and its Member States.

This is an area where we would be very glad to work jointly with interested Friends in Yearly Meetings, as some of the advocacy would need to be done at national level.

4. Arms Trade and Security Cooperation

It became clear to us during our visit that cooperation on military matters (arms procurement, security expertise, and security research) between the EU Member States, EU Programmes and Israel provide a powerful set of interests in not challenging the status quo. We will be undertaking research in this area and developing advocacy messages.

5. Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) implementation in Israel/Palestine

The European Union is active in the context of its CFSP through the work of the EU Special Representative to the region and the two current crisis management missions in the region.

QCEA has been doing work on the EU's CFSP for a number of years and we will focus some of this on this region.

6. The European Investment Bank

The European Investment Bank is active in the region both through lending to small and medium size enterprises (through local partners) and through lending to infrastructure projects. We will undertake research into this area of activity and scrutinize the extent to which it meets the Bank's own social standards (which include conflict sensitivity).

The programme is ambitious and we recognise that we will not be able to do all of

this at once and that there may be areas which will pose more difficulty than others in terms of finding data and information. So we see this as an outline on the basis of which the programme will develop. Council has appointed a Project Advisory Group which will guide our work.

Involving Friends, Meetings and Yearly Meetings in this Programme of Work

We would very much like to work with Friends, Meetings and Yearly Meetings on these areas. We would therefore like to hear from you about the work you are involved in in the region. We are interested in knowing about expertise and knowledge you have, personal connections you have, and NGOs which you/your Meeting supports. We would also welcome any responses to and comments on our programme. Please send any information you can share to: Liz Scurfield, by e-mail at lscurfield@qcea.org, or by post to Quaker House, 50 Square Ambiorix, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium.

We are fully aware of the sensitive nature of work on these issues and we want to make sure that we are as well informed of the range of views and approaches of Friends in the Section as possible to ensure that we can truly represent European Quakers.



The QCEA Study Tour Team



2-9th April



Spring Gathering 2010

How We Experience Conflict

Opportunities and Challenges of Internal and External Conflict in our lives

European and Middle Eastern Young Friends (EMEYF) invite young Friends in the region (and those who are interested in Quakerism) of 18 years and older to Northern Ireland for our Spring Gathering 2010. Spend a week surrounded by green pastures and beautiful countryside at the Moyallon Centre on the grounds of a historic Quaker Meeting House.

What brings us into conflict? How do we deal with conflict, spiritual and otherwise? Are we afraid of conflict? Can all conflicts be resolved? We will explore these questions in a safe environment through worship-sharing and reflecting on our personal experiences. Drawing on our different cultural backgrounds, we will build a diverse community with friendship, fun and fellowship.

The programme will use the local conflict as a launching point to explore our personal and spiritual conflicts. The group will be introduced to Northern Irish culture and history, visit Belfast, and have plenty of time for reflection.

The gathering fee is 135 GBP per person. This will cover our food, accommodation and programme, but not transport to and from the gathering. Please do not let financial limitations prevent you from applying as we have bursaries to help cover costs. However, as our resources are limited, approach your local or yearly meeting first so that EMEYF bursaries can go to those who do not have access to outside funding.

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If you have any questions or want to chat with one of the organisers, please contact Liz (lizugden@hotmail.com) or Mair (mair@maircrossoft.com) who will be happy to help.



Travel: Moyallon Centre is 3 miles from Portadown, which is easily accessible by train and bus. The nearest airports are in Belfast.

Accommodation: En-suite rooms of four to six. Bedding can be provided for an additional cost. Wheelchair access. We will be cooking our own food. www.moyallon.co.uk

Cost: 135 GBP (approx 150 Euro), bursaries available

Application: Forms available at www.emeyf.quaker.eu.org. You can fill it in online or download and send to: Liz Seume, Von-der-Tann Str. 25, 83022 Rosenheim, Germany



News from Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre

An update from **Julia Ryberg**



The **Quaker in Europe** on-line course has now run in Hungarian and twice in French and Finnish. Second runs in Norwegian and Czech are in progress. Danish, Dutch and Russian courses will begin during the spring. The course widens its embrace beyond Europe as one in English goes live with participants from several countries. A Friend in Canada with close connections to European Friends will also take part. More people, both Friends and enquirers, are getting involved.

Woodbrooke travels to Georgia. Woodbrooke Tutors Julia Ryberg and Michael Eccles travelled to Georgia in late October 2009 to hold a *Woodbrooke-on-the-road* for Tbilisi Worship Group. The event was designed to provide Georgian Quakers with an introduction to Quakerism and Quaker values and an opportunity to reflect on their own development. The Quaker business method and procedures for Quaker marriages and funerals were also discussed; and there was a chance to think about the strengths and weaknesses of Tbilisi Worship Group as well as do some visioning for the future. An image of a tree was used throughout the course to indicate how Quaker roots and values have grown into Quakerism today. As part of the course an



Woodbrooke on the Road in Tbilisi

open-door session was held for a number of seekers who came to hear more about Quakerism. Local Friends, Julia and Michael shared thoughts on what Quakerism means to them and this was then followed by a period of worship. Throughout the weekend the group worked in English, Georgian and Russian!

Becoming Friends: Living & learning with Quakers is now live! This is a new learning project in English, developed by Woodbrooke and the Quaker Life department of Britain Yearly Meeting. It aims to nurture and support those who are new to Friends. The Becoming Friends course is available online and in paper format, providing Quaker meetings with an innovative new way to help introduce newcomers to Quakerism and Quakers. A wide variety of people have signed up online, with some who live in remote areas or who have childcare issues saying that they're really pleased to be able to access Quaker learning in this way. One new course participant said "How wonderful to have such rich material to draw on. Who knows what benefits our meetings will reap from it as we go along. I can only see it enriching our lives together." More information from www.woodbrooke.org.uk/becomingfriends.

February sees the official book launch of two books, both products of Woodbrooke's work. Ben Pink Dandelion's *Celebrating the Quaker Way* is an easy to read, pocket-sized book that celebrates the Quaker way and affirms the wonderful riches of the Quaker tradition in Britain, and in the Quaker 'Liberal tradition' more widely. Tim Peat Ashworth & Alex Wildwood's *Rooted in Christianity, Open to New Light: Quaker Spiritual Diversity* is the result of a project developed by the two authors which has travelled around many Quaker meetings in Britain. The book explores the issues that spiritual diversity raises for Quakers individually and corporately, and the challenges and rewards of being a diverse, inclusive community of faith. Purchase from www.quaker.org.uk/bookshop

Thinking of attending a course? Catchpool Fund bursaries are available if financial help is needed. Contact Julia Ryberg, European Project Co-ordinator julia.ryberg@woodbrooke.org.uk or +46 (0) 175-715 30.

See www.woodbrooke.org.uk for general information and course brochures.

Letter to the Editor:

Franco Perna, *International Member and former EMES Secretary, writes:*

First, I wish to express my gratitude to you for putting out such a well balanced publication.

Jahan Maurer's survey of the Friends in Europe (AF No. 115) does convey a sort of realistic, perhaps even negative, view, especially if one is concerned about the maintenance of Quaker organizational structures in our continent. During my ten years' involvement in FWCC-EMES work I too gave much importance to structures. Today, being an isolated Quaker and living with a Muslim partner, unable to attend regularly meetings for worship, mainly because of considerable geographical distances, my views about the future of Friends in Europe are changing.

When I lived in London, early 1960s, I remember reading an impressive article in *The Observer* saying that the problem with Quakers was that they were at least 50 years ahead of time and, concluding therefore that one could never reach their standards. Perhaps this was true then and, indeed, history shows that, especially in situations of great need, e.g. war or post-war times, Quakers have often pioneered initiatives and taking risks when others would hesitate. Such practical involvement was certainly not prompted only by humanitarian feelings, but it derived from a deep spiritual concern; hence the distinctiveness of Quakers and their message. At present, this is less evident in Europe, but still very clear in places such as Georgia (AF No.116), the Middle East and parts of Africa.

During the past 10-15 years I have had less inter-action with other Friends and more with people/groups, described by some of us as 'natural Quakers'. These are people, with or without any religious affiliation, who would get involved in situations where Friends would feel at home. Occasionally, one could even experience with them deep periods of silence, even if not identified as meetings for worship after the manner of Quakers. On such occasions I would feel that, were Friends more visible in a specific area or type of work, close and fruitful cooperation would ensue naturally. In other words, I would not despair, for whenever I meet such people I feel affinity and would go as far as to think that perhaps this might also be the fruit of

seeds sown quietly in the past by some Friends and their action.

Admittedly, all this does not help much if we are too much concerned about Quaker structures. Personally, I would be more inclined to give importance to the spirit that moves us to carry on a life-style that speaks to others, rather than thinking too much about certain structural aspects, which I would consider mere tools in our work aimed at mending wounds in the world.

The other comment I wish to make is prompted by Jane Rose's excellent review of 'Iran Awakening' by Shirin Ebadi. Having lived and worked in Iran about 35 years ago, I have always maintained a keen interest in that country. So, a few months ago, when I heard that Shirin Ebadi was going to Bolzano (South Tyrol, Italy) to receive the Alex Langer Award 2009 (Langer was a member of the European Parliament, much involved in peace efforts in former Yugoslavia, who died in 1995) on behalf of Narges Mohammadi, prevented from coming there by the Iranian Government, I made an effort to go to Bolzano and hear Shirin Abadi about the present situation in Iran.

I am very glad I did, for most of what she said, especially in describing the person and work of Narges Mohammadi (and her imprisoned husband for promoting democracy), could have easily been said by a Quaker. Narges is a lawyer, human rights activist and president of the Iranian Peace Council. She works closely with Shirin Ebadi in promoting grass-roots peace and nonviolence, equality for women and direct democracy. Unfortunately space here prevents me from writing longer about her inspiring life.

In conclusion, I feel in sympathy with such people, whom I would likewise describe as natural Quakers. Together, engaged in meaningful actions and moved by the same spirit, I don't fear for the future of Quakers in Europe or in the rest of the world, provided we don't mind remaining a minority, albeit with a long history.

Re-Reading Leviticus 18:22

Summary of article by Renato Lings in Theology & Sexuality, Dec. 2009: 'The "Lyings" of a Woman: Male-Male Incest in Lev. 18:22?'

Few Quakers in the liberal unprogrammed tradition are avid Bible readers. Others may find scripture irrelevant to their religious life. However, in some Friends churches on other continents the Bible is regarded as the cornerstone of Quaker faith and practice. For this reason, biblical interpretation is paramount, even to Friends, whenever the issue of homosexuality is discussed. As is currently the case in Uganda, our reading of the Bible may well become an issue of life and death.

In such debates, Leviticus 18:22 is among the texts most frequently quoted. However, a close inspection of this short verse throws up a series of queries. Do we know for certain what it means? What exactly are "the lyings of a woman"? This arcane expression is found in the original Hebrew. Despite their unusual nature, these words belong to what many regard as a clear prohibition of homosexuality. In most Bible translations and commentaries Leviticus 18:22 is presented as such. For example, the New Revised Standard Version suggests, You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

In recent years several scholars have pointed out that Lev. 18:22 does not deal with female homosexuality. It is addressed to male Israelites only. In addition, there is considerable debate as to the specific nature of the sexual act in question. Some think the verse simply describes anal penetration. Others take the view that reproduction and the loss of valuable semen is the main concern of the Levitical legislator. The debate is far from over.

In his article, Danish Friend Kjeld Renato Lings has performed a close reading of the original Hebrew. He emphasizes that the wording is anything but

straightforward. A literal translation may sound like this: And with (a) male you shall not lie (the) lyings (of a) woman. (An) abomination (is) that. To most English speakers such language is incomprehensible. To reach some form of clarity in accordance with modern English style, many translators have opted for a simple solution. They have taken the unfamiliar noun "lyings" and converted it to two familiar prepositions, namely, "as" and "with." However, this procedure is problematic. Only at the very beginning of the sentence does the Hebrew feature the preposition "with" (Hebrew *eth*). The other preposition "as" (Hebrew *ke*) is entirely absent.

Renato focuses on a major issue that has been under-researched and ignored for years: incest. In a recent scholarly work, David T. Stewart has suggested that Lev. 18:22 addresses male-male incest. He bases his view on the fact that the primary concern of chapter 18 is precisely male-female incest: with mother, stepmother, aunt, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law, etc. A supplementary clause in Lev. 18:22 proscribing male-male incest would make perfectly good sense. Renato backs up his hypothesis with supporting evidence located in Lev. 20 and the book of Genesis.



Renato Lings

The original Hebrew phrase is extremely difficult to translate. However, the incest link provides valuable insight into its possible meaning. In this article Renato arrives at the conclusion that male-male incest is indeed a major factor. It should be taken into account whenever Lev. 18:22 is discussed.

The complete article is available for purchase via this link:

<http://www.equinoxjournals.com/ojs/index.php/TSE/issue/current>

Renato Lings may be contacted at: biblioglot@gmail.com

Diary Dates 2009/2010

We are short of space for full postal addresses and phone numbers. Please contact the EMES Office if you need this information. More dates for 2010 are available on the website: www.fwccemes.org. Please send items for inclusion in the diary to Marisa Johnson at emes@fwcc.quaker.org.

6th March 2010: Ramallah Meeting House Centenary

Information from ficr@palnet.com

19-21 March 2010: German Speaking Gathering in Lindenberg

Information from k.mangels@gmx.de

26-28 March 2010: Denmark Yearly Meeting:

Information from hjerre@superusers.dk or hjhviid@gmail.com

1-4 April 2010: EMES Annual Meeting 2010, Bonn-Venusberg:

Information from emes@fwcc.quaker.org

2-9 April 2010: EMEYF Spring Gathering in Moyallon, Northern Ireland:

Information from lizeume@gmail.com

8-11 April 2010: Ireland Yearly Meeting, Friends School Lisburn, Co. Antrim:

Information from office@quakers-in-ireland.ie

13-16 May 2010: Sweden Yearly Meeting:

Information from <http://www.kvakare.se/>

21-24 May 2010: Central European Gathering: Lake Balaton, Hungary:

Information from eastland.zsuzsa@freemail.hu

21-24 May 2010: Switzerland Yearly Meeting: Charmey, near Bulle:

Information from rorie_nazareth@bluewin.ch

28-30 May 2010: Netherlands Yearly Meeting:

Information from secretariaat@dequakers.nl

28-31 May 2010: Britain Yearly Meeting: Friends House London:

Information from karlg@quaker.org.uk

20-25 June 2010: QCEA Study Tour: Brussels.

Information from sgoertz@qcea.org

24-27 June 2010: Norway Yearly Meeting:

Information from <http://www.kveker.org/>

14 July -13 August: Quaker Youth Pilgrimage:

This bi-annual event will take place in the Northwestern United States. General information on the pilgrimage may be found on our website <http://www.fwccemes.org/emes/quaker-youth-pilgrimage>.

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