

Live in the Light: Reflections on Reconciliation drawing on Quaker wisdom by Ruth Harvey

“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.” George Fox, 1656

‘Advices and Queries’ is a summary of the wisdom of The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. ‘A reminder of the insights of the Society’, these A&Q have been gathered and modified through experience since the late C17. Within their 42 brief paragraphs, they offer guidance for the individual worshipper, for the community of believers, and for each of us all alone and in community as we engage in the concerns for peace, justice, equality, simplicity and right relationship in the world.

In the following five reflections I have selected excerpts that ‘speak to my condition’ in the hope that they may also ‘speak’ to yours. Additional paragraphs are suggested in brackets that relate to the same heading. I have followed the pattern of beginning with inner reconciliation, moving through reconciliation in our worshipping community or church, to reconciliation in the world. For a complete (free) copy of Advices and Queries please visit www.quaker.org.uk

1. Inwardly Reconciled: “Cherish that of God within you”

“Bring the whole of your life under the ordering of the spirit of Christ. Are you open to the healing power of God’s love? Cherish that of God within you, so that this love may grow in you and guide you. Let your worship and your daily life enrich each other. Treasure your experience of God, however it comes to you. Remember that Christianity is not a notion but a way.”

(Advices & Queries 2. See also 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 28, 31 and 32)

Being a ‘reconciled reconciler’ is a life-long journey – first we are invited to be reconciled with ourselves – with all those parts of our self we struggle to embrace, those character traits that we perhaps even deny, or push away.

The God of love loves each part of us, for God is within and without.

To be a healer it helps to know how it feels to be in need of healing. To be a peacemaker, it helps to know how it feels to be at war with oneself. To be a reconciler, it helps to know how it feels to be reconciled to oneself. To love our neighbour as we love ourselves, first we must know what it means to love our self from the inside out.

In so much of Christendom it may seem counter-cultural to focus on the self, to be mindful of the peace that Christ wishes for each one of us. But Jesus spoke of living in the present, of embracing the kingdom, present now within each one of us.

- What is the 'note'* that resonates most deeply within you?
- When, and in what contexts, do you feel unquestionably cherished by God? Notice these times. Nurture, welcome and encourage them. For it is out of this space of inner peace that we are more able to become peacemakers in the world.

*John Knox spoke of 'the notes of Presbyterianism' – the core, resonating identities that give that tradition its singularity.

2. **Resilient and Calm: “Live adventurously”**

“Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another?”

(Advices & Queries 27. See also 28, 41)

With the children in our local Quaker meeting we explored what it might mean to live adventurously. For some, this meant to plan trips to wild parts of the country. For others, living adventurously meant standing up to school bullies, speaking 'truth to power', coming forward with ideas rather than holding back. Yet others reflected that to live adventurously would mean to give up busyness. Comfort in activity can mask a deeper discomfort in stillness. To stop, seek out stillness in busy lives may lead us on an inner adventure.

Margaret Silf in her book 'Inner Compass' offers a simple, Ignatius-inspired exercise for discerning how to live adventurously. She invites us first to reflect on 'the givens' in our lives: those things that we cannot change, perhaps our genetics, the place and time of our birth. After reflecting on these, then try to set them to one side. Next she invites us to reflect on those areas of our lives over which we have choice: it may be work, location, use of time.... then set these aside. Finally, she invites us to reflect on what remains: the core, the inner identity, who we are at root once the outer layers of happenstance and choice have been set aside for a while. She suggests that it is out of this inner 'I am' that we encounter the immanent God, the God who dwells within. And from this inner place of clarity, the 'God-seed' can flourish and grow – and we can then 'live adventurously' in the world. This, I think, is the 'clearness' of which Quakers speak – an inner clarity that speaks through the everyday.

- What does 'live adventurously' mean to you?
- How do you seek God's guidance as you make decisions
- How open are you to any surprise that may emerge as you wait?
- What comfort zones do you inhabit?
- What could nudge you out of familiar patterns?

3. **Reconciliation in Community: “Think it possible that you may be mistaken”**

“Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people’s opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.”

(Advices and Queries 17. See also 22 and 26)

Dear Lord,

we pray for a round table* –

 a united nations negotiating table;

 a number 10 oval office table;

 a communion kitchen table –

 any such sacramental table.

A table where the corners have been replaced by curves,
and where the stuff (and word) of life is blessed and sent around

 (like the salt and the spice)

where the holy spirit loops the bend to rest -

these are holy round tables:

places of reconciliation.

For reconciliation

to come around,

give us grace, good Lord,

 to notice our stolid square-ness;

then so much more grace

 to embrace the complete ‘round’ in ourselves.

Where rough edges

 have been smoothed;

where hard opinions

 have been softened;

we give you thanks that

here

is the space

for reconciling love.

Amen

* inspired by 'A Round Table Church' by Chuck Lathrop in 'Seasons with the Spirit', Ruth Harvey (ed), CTBI publications.

4. **Peace in the church**

"Take time to learn about other people's experience of the Light"

(Extract from Advices & Queries 5. See also 6, 14, 18 and 22)

It was a warm summer's day and we were resting from our work. A team from across Europe had joined together for a summer language school, while also building a new sauna for the local community ('a demanding common task alone builds community' I hear George MacLeod saying in the background). Living in a hut on the White Plains of eastern Poland, not far from the border with Russia, we were a mixed bag of trainee theologians: Baptists, Orthodox, Presbyterians, Catholics and Methodists all in our 20s. Over the evening campfire, talk turned to belief, theology and eventually baptism. And in the heat of the flames, and conversation, I found myself arguing my line of thought fiercely. In a lull, I realised I was arguing for a concept about which I really knew very little. I was taking time to push my line, rather than to learn about my friends' "experience of Light." That was a turning point for me, after which I realised that to live out my passion for unity I had to be prepared to set aside my own beliefs for a while in order to hear those of others.

In Place for Hope (www.placeforhope.org.uk) we support people of faith, many in local churches, as they transform conflict and embrace difference. Working with groups, we initially agree ways to ensure that our gathering will be effective. These are agreements to which we will hold one another, in the course of our work. They can act as a steady rock while all else may seem fluid. One of these agreements is that we will listen to 'one voice at a time.' This means that when one person is speaking, others listen. Full attention is given to the speaker. This also means 'stilling the voice in our heads'. There may be no one else speaking, but the voice in our heads may be rehearsing a response, a reaction, a refute to what is being said.

- As we search for peace and (comm)unity in the church, are we prepared to sit lightly to what we hold dear in order to understand more fully the Light of the other?
- In our search for unity among believers, to what extent are we looking for community, or for uniformity?

5. **Peace in the world**

"Bring into God's light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace. In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations?"

(Advices & Queries 32. See also 33, 34, 35, 36 and 42)

The Truth and Reconciliation commissions of Rwanda, Northern Ireland, Liberia, South Africa and others remind us that many great hearts and minds

have, over decades, worked tirelessly for reconciliation through attentive listening, forgiveness, and the grace of God. [The Forgiveness Project](#), [The Forgiveness Challenge](#), and the [Global Elders](#) (Mary Robinson, Desmond Tutu, Kofi Annan et al) remind us that many great people are still putting their energies into this task of peace and reconciliation.

We can all be agents of change, or 'global elders' in the sense that we are each one of us called by God to be peacemakers in the world.

In the Quaker tradition, an elder is someone who is "responsible for fostering the spiritual life of the meeting". In other traditions, elders are "men and women called and committed to ... help release, realise and enrich the full Christian potential implicit in the spiritual calling of all those in the Church and, indeed, in the wider society they encounter in everyday life" (['The Eldership Past and Present.'](#))

- In what ways are you a global elder in your own community?
- What does forgiveness mean to you? Share a story of a powerful experience of either giving or receiving forgiveness.

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