



FORTY-THREE

OXFORD FRIENDS' MEETING
43 ST.GILES OXFORD OX1 3LW

NEWSLETTER

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Keith's Conundrum

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Just eighteen simple words, yet they've been troubling me – tormenting me, even – for decades. Here's the problem. I steadfastly believe in a loving God, but I can't find it within me to believe that a loving God would reject believers of all faiths except Christianity.

This problem is one of the reasons I have never joined any of the "mainstream" faiths. In fact, I did for a short time try the Alpha Course – the Anglican church's outreach (or should that be marketing?) programme – which I had been led to believe would address questions like this. But it didn't. The only answer offered was that those who had never in their lives heard of Jesus Christ had nothing to worry about, but those who had heard of Jesus and had still decided to follow another religion were heading for big problems on resurrection day. I've never found this even remotely plausible. Far too many intelligent and insightful people have made an informed and thoughtful decision to follow a faith other than Christianity and, once again, I cannot believe that a loving God would reject them for this.

With this in mind, imagine my joy when I recently discovered the Quaker faith and found that, just like me, it has its roots in Christianity, but it also

accepts that non-Christian faiths can be valid and a potential source of enlightenment. At last I wasn't alone!

But my problem, though much diminished, still hasn't quite gone away. According to John 14:6,

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From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

The art of living must be studied, as must every art. It calls for imagination, so that every advance, every change, is not merely a difference, but a creative act. Achievement, at any level above the lowest, calls for courage to hold on, in spite of current moods, and for exacting self-discipline. The art of Christian living calls for the same self-preparation; but its reward is not merely aesthetic satisfactions. The soul, hungry for God, is fed. Life itself takes on new meaning. Thus it is that we break from the confines of the prisons we have built about ourselves. Thus it is we are brought into the freedom of the Kingdom of God which, every day, through the wide world, is being realised in the hearts of men.

QF&P 21.21 Horace B Pointing, 1946

Thank you to Mat Hartshorne for choosing and reading this from the copy of QF&P presented to him in October at our annual All-Age Worship.

Deadline for contributions to the January 2012 issue: noon, Monday 19 December

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org, and items for the calendar on page 6 can be emailed to lukesamuelmartin@gmail.com. Paper copy can be left in the Forty-Three pigeonhole at the Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit www.oxfordquakers.org

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Jesus said, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” I’ve already explained why I can’t accept this, but nevertheless I find it uncomfortable to dismiss what seems to be such a clear pronouncement from Jesus himself.

One possibility I’ve considered is that perhaps these are not truly the words of Jesus. After all, the gospels were written some time after his death by people who were not only intent on recording the facts of his life, but also in promoting the nascent religion of Christianity. It would suit the gospel writers very well, therefore, to include a statement to the effect that Christianity was the only true path. Bearing in mind the promotional function of the gospels and that there was no Advertising Standards Authority watching over the writers, they were not particularly likely to say, “Other paths to the Almighty are also available”, were they?

Dear Friends, I look forward to your comments but, I must admit, not without a little trepidation.

Keith Wilson



Keith has been an Attender at Oxford Meeting since April. He has started a blog as part of his Becoming Friends activities. It documents some of his adventures in finding out about Quakerism, and you can visit it at

www.attender.org.uk

Keith, who describes himself as the Inquisitive Attender, very much welcomes feedback and comments.



Dear Friends,

Elisabeth Salisbury has let us know that she and her daughter went to the Meeting for Worship at St Paul’s on 13 November, and found it a really inspiring and valuable occasion. She particularly wanted to tell us that someone stood up in the Meeting and said they had received a minute of support from us [see minute 72/11 from our LMWB in November], and read it out. Apparently it was very well received, and had a very warm and positive reception, and people were pleased to hear the part about our upholding the clergy at St Paul’s and thought it was well expressed. Apparently some of the clergy were much in evidence and spent a lot of time talking to protestors and visitors. She had a lot of appreciative feedback about our minute and statement after the meeting too.

Sandra Figgess

*In addition, Friends House have issued a statement in support of OccupyLSX:
www.quaker.org.uk/news-releases*

Becoming a Sustainable Community

In August, Yearly Meeting made a momentous commitment on behalf of our whole Quaker society in Britain to ‘become a sustainable low-carbon community’. We are all asked to work on this together as a community of faith. How can we in Oxford Meeting come together to make this a reality? It is a huge challenge, but also an opportunity to strengthen the spiritual roots of our lives as a Meeting, to support one another, to work on practical witness together.

To begin this process, we have two gatherings of ‘Fridays with Friends’ at which we will ‘thresh’ through what this is going to mean for us, to test our concerns, and to build our sense of shared commitment: **Friday 2 December, and Friday 6 January, 7.30 – 9.30 pm at FMH.**

This is for *all* of us! We hope that everyone in Oxford Meeting — if you possibly can — will try to get to these two meetings.

Alan Allport

Blind to Disability Equality



In 2005, the BBC World Service Trust invited me to lead a disability equality training programme in Beijing. Sixteen blind people from around China

attended. The Trust hoped to sponsor six of them to train as radio journalists, specialising in disability matters. No such programming existed. Radio is the perfect medium to reach a print-disabled audience, thus a platform to discuss the prejudice endemic in Chinese society. Blind journalists were selected, and now produce ground-breaking radio programming.

In 2007 I repeated the training. This time my students were school-leavers. The Trust wanted to encourage more young people to consider radio journalism as a career. Thinking like a privileged Westerner, I asked them to share their wildest dreams about the future, expecting 'pop star', 'catwalk model' or 'company director'. Within blind education, these youngsters were the brightest. Some wanted to study psychology, law and social work. I was puzzled by the longing in their voices, until informed that university study is impossible for disabled people: passing the medical is a prerequisite for university entrance. Others dreamed of bringing their life experiences to the wider community, as actors and directors. A young man dreamed of playing football professionally. Yet another aspired to be driven along an open road in a classic car.

I was shocked. Why? Because what these enthusiastic youngsters longed for, British disabled people take for granted. Universities are required to make places accessible. Blind theatre directors and actors tour plays, not always about disability. Highly skilled, professional, blind footballers exist. The bell in the ball is the only difference.

The career paths awaiting my trainees, if not selected for the journalist programme, would be Chinese medicine and massage, which in five years would lever them into a world too often exploitative and stagnant. I'd originally decided to use my fee to educate five Chinese blind children, but the reality of the severe limits in special education changed my decision. The massage

industry needed no more fodder, whereas questions about Western methods of education and support for disabled people seemed constant while in China: teachers and parents there are desperate for information to help the youngsters in their care. My fee would set up an online newsletter, where articles from around the world, on aspects of disability from equipment and technology to education and lifestyle, could be translated into Mandarin and distributed with the use of screen reading and speech synthesisers. These articles highlight challenge and empowerment. Staff found, continuing funding secured, and four years later, this bi-monthly newsletter reaches eighty thousand readers. The feedback is always about knowledge changing lives.

In Britain in 1981, the Year of Disabled Persons, our consciousness was raised about the day-to-day barriers experienced by most disabled people. Many of these barriers, if not banished, are now known. Not so in China, where the struggle is still ahead. On 3 December, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we should salute the British efforts to secure civil rights for disabled people. Sadly, we also need to be vigilant: the proposed cuts may threaten these achievements. I found it unbearable to listen to the dreams of these young Chinese kids; such a waste of talent which diminishes both the individual and the wider society. It mustn't happen here.

Ellen Bassani

Second Thoughts

I collected the following piece at Woodbrooke, and at first saw it as perceptive and witty. Now I am having second thoughts. Where is equality in this? George Fox claimed that each of us has an office and is serviceable. We have a diversity of gifts in each Meeting, and we all contribute to Meeting for Worship, whether in spoken ministry or silence. Our purpose is similar: to draw closer to the Spirit and to one another.

There is another important challenge in this piece: the challenge of being part of a community. Maybe those Front Benchers are a bit too dominant, but they are clearly supporters of the

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Meeting's range of activities. So I am left with a personal question. How am I working to strengthen our Quaker community?

Peggy Heeks

"Blessed are the Front Row Friends who sit in the middle of meeting and give it a heart; who stride up to the empty benches and listen to every word of talks; who are the first to ask questions and to get a lively discussion group going; who remember to give a word of thanks to the tea committee in a clear and well-fed voice. They are the Ministry of every Meeting.

"But blessed are the Back Row Friends who creep late into meeting looking both eager and shamefaced; who edge noiselessly past protruding knees and then trip over a hassock; who subside self-effacingly into the door-keeper's seat and have to be dislodged. They remind us that meeting is too precious to be missed, even if it always comes at the wrong time."



Welcoming the Web

When our Meeting's new website becomes ready, we shall welcome the help of Friends regarding its content, in various new roles; please contact us if you think this coming opportunity might be of interest. The new site is written in 'WordPress' software, which is relatively easy to learn how to use if you have access to a computer.

**Ruth Mason, Rhonda Riachi, Mark Ebdon,
and Sandra Figgess**

OSAM Friends in Print

'Singing to sustainability', *The Friend*, 16 September, featuring a song by **Bridget Walker** (Headington Meeting)

'How Universal is Universalism?', *The Universalist* no 93, October 2011 No. 93, **Rupert Booth**

'Quakers and the Cuts', *The Friend*, 28 October, **Stuart White**

Letters in *The Friend*:

'The steps of St Paul's', **Sarah Lasenby**, 11 November

'The significance of spiritual', **Ron Hillier**, 11 November

'Tax and Financial Transparency', **Janet Toye**, 18 November

'Principles and Politics', **Ian Flintoff**, 18 November

Oxford for Peace and Global Justice

A number of years ago, in response to increased concerns about the wars etc, Oxford for Peace and Global Justice was founded with our previous Warden, Richard, as well as a number of Quaker women and others.

We write leaflets on various currently concerning topics where we feel not all the information is being told. We then give them out on Cornmarket on Fridays from 3 to 4 pm (in winter).

We would love to have a few more people to turn up to hand out the leaflets with us (on a 'come when you can' basis). We retire to the Nosebag afterwards for tea, although this is not obligatory.

Please contact **Sarah Lasenby, Virginia Brookes or Janet Toye** via the pigeonholes.



More than 40 people participated in this year's Remembrance Day vigil for Peace. Photograph by Sarah Lasenby.

Sad News

Friends who remember the irrepressible and inspirational Andy Minns will be deeply saddened to hear that his much loved younger sister Harriet (Hattie) died in a road accident in France on 1 November. Our thoughts and prayers go to Sally and Bridget, their surviving sisters. Mary Rainford contacted us with the tragic news, adding that Hattie had texted her only an hour or so earlier to say how much she was missing Andy (it would have been his 58th birthday that day). She ended her message: 'Please remember her as I always will – they are reunited.'

Penny Ormerod

In Church

*Often I try
To analyse the quality
Of its silences. Is this where God hides
From my searching? I have stopped to listen,
After the few people have gone,
To the air recomposing itself
For vigil. It has waited like this
Since the stones grouped themselves about it.
These are the hard ribs
Of a body that our prayers have failed
To animate. Shadows advance
From their corners to take possession
Of places the light held
For an hour. The bats resume
Their business. The uneasiness of the pews
Ceases. There is no other sound
In the darkness but the sound of a man
Breathing, testing his faith
On emptiness, nailing his questions
One by one to an untenanted cross.*

R. S. Thomas

Selected by **Stephen Yeo**

"The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." G.K. Chesterton

Provided by Alan Mynall

Meetings and Notices

Sunday 25 December

We will have just one Meeting for Worship, from 11:00 to 11:45 am. Afterwards, we're hoping that hot fruit punch and a mince pie can be provided, in the Meeting House. This will be followed by a bring-and-share lunch in the Garden Room. Contact Sandra or Jill on friends@greenfig.org.uk or ring 01865 580121 if you would like to discuss food you are planning to bring for the lunch.

Elders and Overseers

Young Adult Friends

We hold Meetings for Worship each Thursday at FMH. From December, we will be meeting at a slightly earlier time — from 7:00 pm for a 7:30 pm start. We usually worship for around half an hour, followed by some discussion. All aged 18 to early 30s are very welcome.

Beth Howard

Help us Host

On Saturday 14 January it will be Oxford Meeting's turn to host the Area Meeting. Offers of food towards the lunch or afternoon tea will be greatly appreciated. Please contact **Ursula Kneisel** on 01865 744540.



Save the Date

Our next 'Meeting for Meeting' (see page 1 of the March 2010 issue) will be on **Saturday 19 May**, at St Margaret's Institute, Polstead Road, Oxford. The aims are for us to get to know each other better "in the things which are eternal", to deepen our Friendship and to find spiritual inspiration. Members and Attenders of both Oxford and Headington Meetings are all very welcome and we hope to see lots of you there!

Naomi Morris

CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER 2011

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Thursday 1	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends <i>(see page 5)</i>	Friday 9	7 for 7:30 pm	Friday with Friends <i>(see p. 5 of Nov. Issue)</i>
Friday 2	7 for 7:30 pm	Friday With Friends <i>(see p. 5 of Nov. Issue)</i>	Wednesday 14	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship of Healing
Saturday 3	10:30 am - 3:30 pm	Quaker Quilters <i>(see p. 3 of Nov. Issue)</i>	Thursday 15	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends <i>(see page 5)</i>
Sunday 4	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Saturday 17	11 am - 3 pm	Extended Meeting for Worship
Thursday 8	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends <i>(see page 5)</i>	Sunday 25	12:30	Bring-and-share lunch <i>(see page 5)</i>

What will you be doing?

1 December: Prisoners for Peace Day, and
World AIDS Day

2 December: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

3 December: See article on page 3

10 December: Human Rights Day

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The Warden, 43 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW.



You may also like to contact the warden about the environmentally friendly option to subscribe by email
(write to oxford@quaker.org.uk)

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Sundays at 9:30 and 11 a.m. at 43 St Giles
(followed by coffee and tea)

Wednesdays at 12:15 p.m. at 43 St Giles
(followed by coffee and tea)

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7:30 a.m. at 43 St Giles
(followed by breakfast at 8 a.m.)

Sundays at 10 a.m. at The Priory,
85 Old High St, Headington

OPENING TIMES (43 ST GILES):

Wednesday - Friday, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Forty-Three is available online, at
www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter

If you are considering writing an article or notice but would prefer it not to go online, please don't hesitate to contribute it. Just indicate that the piece is not for inclusion in the internet version — no reason will be asked for. Articles and notices are very welcome to appear in the print edition only, and the same applies to calendar items.

*Editorial Team: MARK EBDEN, PENNY ORMEROD,
and BECKY RIDDELL (Joint Editing & Production);
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