

Transcript of Jean Wardrop's Contribution at London Quakers event

What do we think about God?

7 February 2015, 10.00 Friends House

I am a passionate Quaker.

I believe in reverence for life, for love, for beauty.

I believe in making peace not war.

I believe in equality and justice for all.

I believe in simplifying my lifestyle so that I am not exploiting peoples, creatures or the resources of this wonderful world.

I believe that truth and integrity are paramount in my daily life.

Within meeting, I have the opportunity for self-examination, reflection and reconnection with those things that are most important in life.

Within meeting my beliefs can be discerned, nurtured and developed.

I believe that, through love and compassion, I can strive for wholeness within myself, with others and the world around us.

I believe life is the journey.

My personal approach to prayer is akin to those expressed by Harold Loukes in 1967 and quoted in QF&P 2.23.

"Prayer is experienced as"

Sometimes in meeting for worship I can experience the 'oceanic feeling' that psychologists speak of.

As Pierre Hadot put it "time for worshipping life or the universe itself and feeling deeply rooted in it, in a mystical communion with it and with the other human beings surrounding us."

Or as James Reimermann, an American Quaker, explains, meeting for worship for him, is like "stepping into a warm bath".

I try to express my faith in straightforward, 21st century language. I find Quaker jargon and quasi-religious sound-bites confuse and are open to mis-interpretation. This can cause a barrier to dialogue, especially with those new to Quakers or when we are reaching out to the general public.

However, when Friends use language that I would not use, for instance in their ministry during meeting, or when they are speaking or writing from their own experience, I try to remember the section of A&Q 17 which says:-

" 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. "

For me religion is, as another American Quaker, Os Cresson put it, "a matter of how we live our daily lives".

For me, the unity within Quakerism is expressed in orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy.

Again I quote Os Cresson, “The embrace of religious diversity in our midst can be our gift to the world around us where differences in belief matter so much. Let us be patterns of living together and loving each other, differences and all. Let us openly and joyfully celebrate our peculiar combination of Quaker diversity and Quaker unity.”

Finally I quote from Henry Cadbury’s 1957 Swarthmore Lecture, the poem ‘Outwitted’ by Edwin Markham:-

“He drew a circle that shut me out –

Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.

But Love and I had the wit to win.

We drew a circle that took him in!”

Thank you for listening!