

## QUAKER UNIVERSALIST GROUP NEWSLETTER APRIL 2020

Dear QUG supporter

It is amazing how everything can change in such a short period of time! In our last newsletter we were looking forward with confidence to our annual conference at Woodbrooke. Now we are all in lockdown and social isolation and this may last for several months; for those of us who are older, or who have an underlying health condition, we may be talking of a year or so. So it is very difficult for the QUG committee to plan ahead.

### **Next edition of *Universalist***

Many of you reading this newsletter will be members of QUG and you will usually receive two copies of *Universalist* per year, plus the pamphlet produced following the annual conference. However, this year the pamphlet will not be published. What we would like to do is to publish a copy of *Universalist* in the summer to replace the pamphlet, as well as the copy in the autumn as usual. So this will need articles, book reviews, poems, etc. from you. The committee cannot write them all (and you might be getting tired of the same authors!) so we need your help.

Please send any articles to the editor of *Universalist*, Shona Lowe, at [shonal@qug.org.uk](mailto:shonal@qug.org.uk). Articles can be anything related to universalism. For example, we would love to have some thoughts on how different religious groups have responded to the Coronavirus, which may be related to their attitude to science. Another topic we would like to continue to explore is how much Quaker universalism can be found within Christianity itself, rather than going out to other beliefs. The deadlines for the two editions are 31<sup>st</sup> May and 31<sup>st</sup> August, but this year these will be more flexible; also, although we will be able to send out e-copies easily, we are assuming printing firms will reopen in due course.

So please get writing!

### **The QUG Committee**

This is the time of year when we have our annual general meeting at our conference. Since this cannot occur this year, some members of the committee will meet online using Zoom sometime in mid-May. If any other QUG members wish to join us online, please contact Tony Philpott at [tonyp@qug.org.uk](mailto:tonyp@qug.org.uk).

This year we say 'goodbye' to two members of our committee who have given us great service over many years: Hazel Nelson and Fran Deegan. We thank them very much for their hard work and dedication to QUG.

We now need more members on the committee. We think it is so important to keep the universalist flame burning in the Quaker community: there are so many people, Quakers and others, who find our message speaks to them.

However, we cannot do this without a committee to organise things, so if you have any interest in helping us please contact the Clerk, Tony Philpott, at [tonyp@qug.org.uk](mailto:tonyp@qug.org.uk).

## **Our website - <https://qug.org.uk>**

Our website is open for comments at any time, so please use it. For example, it would be good to have some QUG perspectives on how you are coping in the present lockdown and what the future might be post-COVID 19 (if that will ever be possible!). See <https://qug.org.uk/posts/>

## **London Quakers – Saturday February 8<sup>th</sup> 2020**

Before the lockdown Alan York, QUG committee member and author of QUG Pamphlet 39, spoke to the London Quakers on the topic *Language, Truth and Religion*. A news item was written for the Friend, part of which was published on 28<sup>th</sup> February. Here is the full item:

On Saturday afternoon February 8<sup>th</sup> over 30 people attended a meeting in the Sarah Fell Room in Friends House, Euston Road. The meeting was jointly arranged by London Quakers and QUG (the Quaker Universalist Group).

Alan York, QUG committee member, spoke on the topic *Language, Truth and Religion*, which derives from the famous 1936 book by the philosopher A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*. However, Alan's approach is quite different from that of Ayer who argued that religious language cannot be verified and is therefore meaningless.

Alan believes that there is a primal spiritual experience shared by all which is expressed particularly by the mystical practitioners of all religions. He sees a remarkable commonality in a felt sense of peace and love for one's fellow creatures, in a losing of one's sense of self and of separation from others, and in a sense that time, decay and death are of no consequence.

However, Alan explained that as the various religions became organised into communities they expressed this primal spiritual experience in different languages, creeds, rules and regulations, political structures and ethical systems, and this fact has led to conflict and violence in the world.

One of the words loved by Alan is allegory, and he said that much religious language is allegorical, i.e. stories which can be interpreted to reveal hidden meanings. Stories have been invented to hold the ineffable in words.

Alan's talk was followed by lively discussion in groups, then questions and further debate in a plenary session.

When we started on some rather technical discussions of the differences between words like 'story', 'allegory', and 'myth', and the meaning of 'truth', we were brought down to earth by recognition that much of our learning is not done through words, that much religious expression is through the arts like architecture, visual art, music, poetry and drama, and that there is a profound religious experience beyond all of this (which we might call 'the real') which underlies everything. This last-mentioned is where we hope to go in a Quaker meeting for worship.

Alan has written QUG pamphlet No 39, *The Language of Spirituality*, available from QUG or the Quaker Centre Bookshop, Friends House.

We hope to publish Alan's talk in full in *Universalist*.

## **QUG Annual Conference**

### **LIFE, TIME AND ETERNITY**

**Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham, B29 6LJ**

We were intending to have our annual conference at Woodbrooke in May this year, but due to the lockdown and the temporary closure of Woodbrooke this has not been possible.

We hope to have the same conference next year so we have carried over our booking of Woodbrooke until May 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 2021. We have refunded all the money paid to us by the participants, and we will reopen bookings when we can have some confidence that the conference will take place.

We cannot of course guarantee that we will have the same speakers, though some of them may be free and willing to come. We will, though, have the same topic.

We will keep you in touch through this newsletter, the website and *Universalist*.

## **Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering**

Similarly, the BYM Gathering scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020 at Bath University, has been postponed until 31<sup>st</sup> July to 6<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

We hope to have a table at the Groups Fair and a special interest meeting as usual.

## **Membership of QUG**

Renewals for QUG membership were due on 1st January 2020, so to renew your subscription for this year (or to join QUG for the first time) please complete the membership form in our January newsletter or on our website at <https://qug.org.uk/membership/>