

# Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

March 2022



***Do you give sufficient time to sharing with others in the meeting, both newcomers and long-time members, your understanding of worship, of service, and of commitment to the Society's witness? Do you give a right proportion of your money to support Quaker work?***

*Advices and Queries #20*

## Upcoming Events and Announcements

Saturday, March 12 from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m., 350 Canada and the Council of Canadians are hosting a Rally for a Just Transition just outside of Hamilton City Hall. Speakers from grassroots groups will talk about our shared vision for a rapid, just transition away from fossil fuels that creates good, green, union jobs and makes sure no one gets left behind. Then local musicians will entertain the crowd and attendees will enjoy some family-friendly, creative activities. Friends are encouraged to attend.

The next meeting of the Reading group will be on Sunday, March 20 from 3 to 4 p.m. in our Zoom space. We will be discussing chapters 4 to 6 of Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Please contact Shirla ([shirla766@gmail.com](mailto:shirla766@gmail.com)) to be added to the participant list.

Peace and Social Action Committee invites Friends to attend on Wednesday, March 23, at 7 p.m. Meetings will remain virtual, in our Zoom space, for the time being. Please contact Paul Dekar ([pdekar@cogeco.ca](mailto:pdekar@cogeco.ca)) if you would like to be sent the link for this meeting.

April 3 will be our next Meeting for Worship for Business. The meeting will be held at 1:00 p.m. in our Zoom Meeting space, unless the Meeting House Re-opening Committee advises otherwise. Email will be sent inviting members and attenders to this meeting.

It is time to start thinking about Half Yearly Meeting in the spring! It is our turn to host, so there will be tasks from cleaning and set up, to programming and presentations! Please contact Alice Preston or Chris Hitchcock if you would like to be involved.



# From the Meetinghouse Reopening Committee

The Ontario government has recently lifted many pandemic restrictions, including all indoor capacity limits on services or meetings of religious institutions like ours. This raises the question of how we should be proceeding.

We note that Hamilton's daily new case counts have stopped falling and are averaging 63 over the last 7 days, but this is an underestimate of about 80% due to the restrictions on testing. Therefore, actual new daily case counts are closer to 300. The positivity rate among those able to be tested is still 10%. Both these metrics are the highest they have been at any point during the pandemic, except earlier in this Omicron wave. It is quite possible that infection numbers will increase again as the effects of the recently lifted restrictions make themselves felt.

Our recommendation is that we prudently stay the course for a few more weeks and keep our Meetings for Worship on-line. At the latest, we'll have the opportunity to meet in person in April when outside meetings become possible. In the meantime, we think it is reasonable for committees to begin meeting in person at the Meeting House. Such meetings should be subject to the usual symptom self-check screening, masks are still required, and windows should be open for the meeting.

We will be back in touch in a few weeks time.



# Review of Alastair McIntosh and Matt Carmichael's *Spiritual Activism: Leadership as Service*

by Dick Preston

Alastair McIntosh gave the annual CYM lecture in 2015, published as “Decolonising Land and Soul: a Quaker Testimony.” There, he tells of his success in be-Friending the Lafarge excavation behemoth and being invited to sit on their board. “Rather than *deny* power, it requires us to understand, work with, and...*redeem* power”. This book came out the following year. The opening quote is from Rumi, “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I will meet you there.”

**Activism and Spirituality.** This book is a didactic work that serves as a comprehensive “how to” course in servant leadership. Like many courses, it is not intended to entertain, but rather to inform at a surprisingly comprehensive level. I found that it has a “required reading” feel. I found the lessons good, on the whole. Yet I had to take it a chapter at a time, with a day of relief in between. Their style of writing feels like a class where the professors talk down to the assembled students. I will venture my opinion that the authors have been overambitious in choosing the scope of ideas that they claim competence in, and relevance for. This made me uneasy and the book something of a slog to get through.

**Spirituality Justified** is a condensed adult education course in social philosophy that leads to – makes a case for – the necessity of -- a spiritual awareness of our life situation and what this demands of us. It is definitely not an easy read, but it is a good overview. It takes us rapidly through the intellectual milestones of the enlightenment, modernism, post-modernism, and some of its offshoots. Then they choose to return to the premodern view of the sacredness of our lives-in-our-world.

*We are reminded of the Indigenous teachings of Richard Wamagese.  
Returning to premodern world view brings to my mind: "We shall not*

*cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we began and to know the place for the first time." T. S. Eliot*

**Higher Consciousness** is a consideration of the soul – at once universal (Gaia?) and individual – The emphasis is on the conjunction “and”. The soul is conceived as the whole-ness of everything in the universe, in its full eternity. Any particular piece, such as your soul or my soul, partakes of this whole-ness. Lie on your back and look at the stars. You can get a small but intrinsically respectful sense of this beautiful enormity. They warn that drug induced highs are not the same. Brain hemisphere research allows us to contrast our left-brain “managerial” culture with right brain “insightful” access to spirituality.

*I found this way of imagining the soul to be much more believable or acceptable than a soul that is merely individual. It matches at least some indigenous views. I recall a French theorist of individuality writing that the notion of a separable soul is a fundamental mistake that has led to tragic consequences.*

**The Structure of the Psyche** is a consideration of our inner life. An overview of psychological and psychiatric theories takes us all the way from behaviourism to emotional dynamics, including Freud’s schematic view of the inner life, with civilization and its repressions (which are considerable). Unfortunately, for him and for us, Freud’s theory was based on a flawed evolutionary view of culture. Jung opens up Freud’s pessimism into a rich and fluid structure of the psyche that holistically embraces all humanity rather than “civilization”. Several post-Jungian psychologies provide further guidance for activists.

**Movements and their Movers** gets us directly to activism. McIntosh and Carmichael take the plunge into the Jungian notion of archetypes, and then lead us quickly to the ethic of **servant-leadership**. Their prototype and ideal is Paulo Friere, who led by helping people to see and name their oppressors and then recognize that both they **and** their oppressors have become dehumanized, and that the truth may make you – **all of you** – free. Friere’s case is then joined by the Gandhian example, and is made poetic by Gibran. Servant-leaders work

with a weather eye toward any intrusion of ego-identity, lest they work unaware of their position of relative privilege, as Friere discovered, and took to heart.

*Because I used Friere in my Anthropology of Education seminars, I happen to know that Friere's awakening came as a gentle eldering by a poor fisherman, who commented that these were fine words, but at the end Mr. Friere would go away to a quiet room with a comfortable bed, but the fisherman went to a cramped home with sick and crying children. His respectful honesty made a deep impression on Friere. He reports this in his subsequent book **The Politics of Education**.*

Giving outward witness to an inner calling may fairly be called **prophecy**. This may be thought of as spiritual recruiting. It may or may not come to fruition, and success may or may not bring heightened ego-identity. Be cautious about the latter. It is at this point that a leader's temperament may sway the result. Prophecy may be located in shamans, in bards/storytellers, and in artists. What they share is an inward movement toward new truth and in outward action of healing.

*My sense is that this chapter is more discursive than well-argued. Their reliance on Mircea Eliade as their source on shamans is ethnographically narrow – the Siberian material in Shirokogoroff's "Psychomental Complex of the Tungus" (1935) monograph. I am familiar with a wider shamanic literature and find both Eliade and Ch 5 overgeneralized. But it probably doesn't matter in this context, since we are being recruited as prophets, not as apprentice shamans. There is a difference.*

**Understanding Cults and Charisma** warns us against phoney shamans (& bards/storytellers?) with case studies of cults and their misleadings. An arresting and subtly portrayed first case describes the process of becoming and being a cloistered Catholic nun. Then we see more pernicious examples. From Jonesville's 900+ voluntary suicides, with cognitive dissonance, through several other cautionary examples where humility and healing are lacking. Ego-enhancement of the leaders and stifled self-reliance are the hallmarks. It may be prophecy gone wrong, or it may be exploitation by false prophets. Charisma,

individual or collective, may lead to followers giving up on good judgement. Whether it's the shining light of a leader, or the presumption of national exceptionalism, or of being a chosen people, increased risks come with the inspiration. So it is wise to be careful: charisma is a powerful source of motivation, whatever its goal. When the activist is charismatic, it will be important that there also be collaboration with a skilled manager.

**Nonviolence and the Powers that Be** opens with an example of young Russian women trying to **redeem** power, in a public performance. The “Pussy Riot” group touched an official nerve, and three were sentenced to two years in jail. “The myth of redemptive violence” is then critiqued as the endlessly recycling of oppression and resistance. At this point, Paulo Friere (1972) is joined by Joanna Macy (1998) and Walter Wink (1992), urging us to redeem powers by naming them, unmasking them, and **engaging** them. Unexpected acts of conscience may surprise them and open a dialog. Pussy Riot made the attempt, and after their initial suppression and imprisonment, the Russian Duma voted for their release, showing a larger social scale change of conscience.

In an interpersonal setting, McIntosh faces a drunk and belligerent R.D. Laing and tells him that he will not hit back if struck. It worked, and moved Laing deeply. I believe that this “redeeming” is the primary lesson to be gained from this book.

The chapter ends with a condensed biography – an appreciation -- of Mohammed.

**The Psychodynamics of Campaigning.** Shrink your ego, do your work, and expect some failures. If you show yourself with honest openness, you have the better chance of recognition, as was the case with McIntosh's confrontation with Ronald Laing, mentioned above.

“Our struggle as activists is to try to hold compassion even in the face of atrocity. It means pushing with one hand and supporting with the other.”

**Tools for Discernment.** This chapter perks up my enthusiasm for the whole book. Trying for insight is a continuing task. Working “under a concern” among a Quaker Meeting includes group support. These Clearness committees are described by Parker Palmer as “circles of trust”. “A circle of lovely, quiet people / becomes the ring on my finger.” (Rumi) Mentoring is also worth consideration. Finally, Bishop Tutu’s Truth and Reconciliation Committee is a large social-scale option, now also being used in Canada.

**Into the Deeper Magic.** They end the book by pushing our limits a bit. Magic is about changing our own consciousness in a spiritual direction. They revisit Jung, and introduce Starhawk, one of the leading voices in contemporary Goddess spirituality. The goal of spiritual activism, they assert, is redemption of the “other”, and suggest a whisper may do better than a shout. Meditation is much more than quiet contemplation, and seeks redemption of others. Prayer is similar, one definition says it is like inhaling God. Another is that it is seeing with God’s eyes.

*At this point our authors go liminal, and I do not grasp their connection of spiritual activism, with eroticism. I wish their readership luck.*

Afterword. “This is indeed a terrible time to be advocating “spiritual” activism. That’s why the time is right.”



# Lines for a Blustery Day

*by Beverly Shepard*

On wind-blown heights  
I can feel God.  
On a tall building in Toronto,  
High in an apple tree on an Indiana farm,  
On a rocky peak in New Mexico –  
The wind rushes at me,  
Insistent,  
Shouting God at me.



# About this Newsletter / Submission Guidelines

This Newsletter is a monthly publication of news and announcements relevant to Hamilton Quakers.

It is also a venue for members and attenders to share creative works or articles they have written on subjects that may be of interest to our Quaker community. As a general guideline we are looking for submissions that are inspirational and related to Quaker concerns, as well as announcements and news. Members and Attenders are encouraged to submit works for the newsletter.

Requests for newsletter items are announced after Meeting for Worship and/or via email during the week before Meeting for Worship for Business. Submission of materials implies permission to publish. Copyright for original material resides with the author.

If the person submitting the article is unknown to the editor or if there are questions as to whether the article will be appropriate for the Quaker newsletter, the editor will consult with the clerk(s) who will together discern what will be included. Written permission to publish must be obtained from the copyright holder if a submission is not the original work of the submitter, unless the works are in the public domain, or are covered under the creative commons license.

Hamilton Meeting reserves the right to edit submissions for length or content in consultation with the authors. When opinion pieces are included a line will be added indicating "Submissions reflect the opinions of their authors, and not necessarily of Hamilton Monthly Meeting".

Submissions should be directed to the current editor, Síân Reid, [daywitch@gmail.com](mailto:daywitch@gmail.com).