

Dear Clerk

It came to me on the night of Saint Cecilia's memoria, 22 November 2009, that it would be a good idea to use my entry to the Friends Quarterly 2009 Prize Essay to write a tribute to you as you lay down the clerkship of the Blue Idol this December. In the Liturgy of The Hours<sup>1</sup> for Saint Cecilia's Day Saint Augustine's discourse on the psalms is used to frame our thoughts on the qualities of Saint Cecilia. We have no facts on the life of this virgin martyr, but the Church's wisdom is not shared by an appetite for facts. The title of the discourse is *Sing to God with Songs of Joy*<sup>2</sup> and a thought from it is

*Let us sing a new song not with our lips but with our lives*

The formal requirement for the essay competition is an analysis of the subject of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, presented with a prophetic voice, a compelling analysis, and wide relevance to Quakerism in Britain. The competition is open to all who have an interest in Quakers and Quakerism, and participants are further encouraged to offer their own understanding and insight<sup>3</sup>.

The Quaker Family in Britain is large, with many views quite keenly defended. In my letter, and, as a one-time Attender at the Blue Idol whose attending is temporarily suspended by my full-time caring duties for my elderly frail mother, I hope to share my thoughts with you, and so allow the Quaker audience to look on, and glean the deeper, but not obscure message of the letter. Perhaps I am expecting a diagonal listening *for that of God*.

There are three main thoughts I want to share in my letter.

The Inspiration of Scripture

Nurturing intellectual gifts in Truth

Extracts from the encyclical of HH Pope Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*

## The Inspiration of Scripture

What a joy it was to hear you ask a few weeks ago had I come across the *Jerusalem Bible*, and that exploring this version of the Scriptures was yielding such pleasure. How wonderful that a copy has been placed in The Blue Idol. One of the loveliest images of my first visit to the Blue Idol for tea in August 2001 was the bible chest and desk that stood at the foot of the raised speaker's platform in the north corner of the meeting room. The timber was dark, rough and glistened with age. William Penn is thought to have made his testimony often from this spot, after meditating on his way up from Warminghurst traversing the Sussex mire by bullock cart.

What can Scripture open up, and offer the Quakers in Britain Yearly Meeting today?

*All inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man of God may be capable and equipped for good work of every kind.*<sup>4</sup>

And from *Quaker Faith and Practice*<sup>5</sup>

*Further, the Bible is a training school in discrimination among alternatives.*

Although our understanding of the inspiration of Scripture by God is incomplete, as new insight is revealed in every age, the great biblical scholar Cardinal Martini remarked

*The faithful understanding of Scripture is dynamic in every age*<sup>6</sup>

## **Nurturing Intellectual Gifts in Truth**

The Middle Ages were the golden age of monastic learning blossoming from worship, the study of Scripture, and physical work. Europe had her birth of knowledge, with perhaps the earliest contribution coming from the *Jewel of the North* - Ireland.

Recently, Queen's University, Belfast celebrated one hundred years of Scholastic Philosophy, and to mark the anniversary, an international conference was held in the University on the *Irish Contribution to European Scholastic Thought*. The conference proceedings have been gathered into a fine book<sup>7</sup>. In his foreword, Cardinal Cahal Daly makes this observation

*Finally, I wish to point, if I may, to what I see as one of the dangers facing the modern university, at least in these islands of ours. Depending as they do to an unhealthy degree on the State as their main source of funding, universities are coming under increasing pressure to subserve utilitarian ends rather than the pursuit of knowledge. They are seen as agents of the economy or instruments of a 'knowledge-based economy', rather than as seekers after truth... A good economy is eminently desirable and even necessary, but it does not of itself serve the still greater cause of the good life*<sup>8</sup>

I think there is an infectious lobby in many administrations of the Western world that seeks to crush scholarly endeavour.

*..over the past three decades our sensibilities have been numbed by the proliferation of economic officialese – "user satisfaction", "market forces", "accountability", and so on.*<sup>9</sup>

Another subtle assault on the riches of true scholarship comes in the epidemic to convert the printed heritage into selected digital reproduction. A Commentary in the Times Literary Supplement point out some of these risks:

*The printed book is immediately gathered into a complex network of trusted information and institutional relations that prepare it for further critical and scholarly engagements. The online work is more widely accessible, it is true, but only in a relatively abstract sense..It lacks the professional infrastructure that the scholarly book possesses by virtue of the mature social network in which it is located.*<sup>10</sup>

## **Caritas in Veritate**

On the liturgical solemnity of the Apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul, 29 June 2009, His Holiness (HH) Pope Benedict XVI put his signature to this very remarkable Encyclical Letter, addressed not only to the Catholic Church, but to all people of good will. *Caritas in Veritate*, Charity in Truth. An ample thesis could be written on this pastoral letter, the fruit of deep pondering on *integral human development in Charity and Truth*<sup>11</sup>.

Before going on with my selected extracts and comments from the letter, I would like to share my own thoughts about HH Pope Benedict XVI. Perhaps, the media have built up the notion that Pope Benedict XVI is a stern traditionalist, hostile to change, and uncomfortably authoritarian. These judgements are rather like the pessimist who sees half a tumbler of ale, half empty. Pope Benedict XVI brings to Christian Faith, in particular, but also to all people of good will, tremendous historical and contemporary wisdom.

Yet another digression: one of the many joys over the past decade has been the correspondence you and I have shared. Many aspects of living Quaker life have been conveyed through the medium of the epistle between friends. How symbolic the theme of the writing scroll, chosen by the great land of China, when it hosted the recent Olympic Games in Beijing. I will never forget the spectacle of the opening and closing of the games, for its intricate celebration of paper, brush, and ink!

This brings me to Pope Benedict XVI's *Culture of the Word*.

Pope Benedict XVI made his first pastoral visit to France during the second week of September 2008, and his first very symbolic function was a visit to Paris to reopen the restored College of the Bernardines. Paris in the Mediaeval Age was the heart of learning in Europe. It was natural that the monasteries within and beyond France should want to set up places of learning and study in Paris. In his opening address, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us the unique monastic purpose was *Quaerere Deum*, the Search for God<sup>12</sup>. The Pope elaborated this search for God required, intrinsically, a *culture of the word*, for the desire for God involved a love of letters, a love of the word, and its exploration in all its dimensions. Likewise, the Library, by its very title, was an integral part of a monastery, as was the monastic school or learning house, and both Library and School concretely opened the path to the Word<sup>13</sup>. The Word gives birth to a Community, that is, the discovery of the Word does not take place in splendid isolation. The Word makes one sensitive to other 'Searchers' in the Community of Faith. Saint Benedict, Father of Western Learning, and Patron of Europe, called the monastery the *School of the Lord*. What were the tomes that brought the Word to the monastic scholars in *God's School*? It was the Bible. Pope Benedict XVI went on: *God speaks to man in his humanity, through man's words and man's history*.

Returning to the encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), I do not want to suggest the advice and wisdom it contains replace convictions that prompt Quaker social action and outreach, but that here might also be found a deep tradition built on the

witness and fruits of Christendom. Nor do I want to rehearse the entire Encyclical from Pope Benedict XVI, because I cannot claim to have critically studied all that the work has to offer. For this letter of tribute, I would like to offer just a few points, chosen because you might readily recognise them from our many discussions, both spoken and silent, over the decade of our friendship.

### ***Authentic Development***

Development of the whole person is a vocation, and gift. It presupposes a transcendent view of the person: *that of God in every man.*

Every life is a Vocation. Since each man and woman is called to develop and fulfil his, or her life, the Church has a duty to wisely nurture and protect this vocation. Personal development is far from mere technical rearrangement. Being open to God, and aware of this Vocation, gives Human Life its meaning.

The Charity and Love that guide personal development are not the sentimental gush of instantaneous responses to dancing, singing, quizzes broadcast on television, radio, or newspaper, sent by text message, email, or chat-room.

*I am aware of the ways in which charity has been and continues to be misconstrued and emptied of meaning, with the consequent risk of being misinterpreted, detached from ethical living, and, in any event, undervalued.. Only in Truth does charity shine forth. Truth frees charity from the constraints of an emotionalism that deprives it of relational and social content, and of a fideism that deprives it of human and universal breathing-space.. Truth, by enabling men and women to let go of their subjective opinions and impressions, allows them to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things.<sup>14</sup>*

Christian Love, at the heart of the Gospel, animates true Development, and the *Evangelisation of Development* involves a Christian concern for life-ethics, social-ethics, missionary service, and the nurturing of Faith.

Pope Benedict XVI is not the first, in the long history of Christendom, to articulate a vision of development. Others before him have *reflected on the different aspects of the future good of humanity, its solutions, and development which call for new efforts of holistic understanding, and a new humanistic synthesis. The challenges in our time have become an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future.* So, authentic development whether personal or wider, is that development grounded in Truth and Love, for, indeed, as Pope Benedict XVI expresses it, love in Truth is the energy that builds personal development.

### ***The Intellect and Gift of Understanding***

The intellect grasps the profound meaning of the truth of *Love as a gift*, requiring acceptance, and communion. This deep awareness of Truth makes it less likely that relativism, fashion, or sentimentalism will thwart the authentic qualities of Love, understood in the deeper legacy of our Christian Tradition.

## ***The Praxis of Truth***

A living application of Truth, as the Word of God, or ΛΟΓΟΣ in Greek (Logos), is needed to create and sustain development of Society, or the wider Global Family. Though imperfect in ways, the Church's Social Doctrine is built on this foundation.

What does this praxis of Truth at my personal level involve, I wonder?

How do our Communities promote and nurture an informed zeal for this praxis of Truth in Love, and of Love in Truth?

## ***Justice and Common Good***

Justice and Common Good, together, are the foundation upon which Faith, Reason, and Love blossom.

The aspirations for Learning, Scholarship, Cultural Patrimony cannot yield their harvest without their vigilant and wise advocacy for Justice and Common Good.

With these selected thoughts from Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical, I will pass on to my concluding tribute. Before I do, I must make a comment on my sources. To avoid too laboured a citation list, I have acknowledged my sources generally, not intensively. By no means do I disrespect the sources, the main one being Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical, and so I make the statement now that these thoughts in my letter owe almost their entire conception to the learned Pastor.

## ***Concluding Tribute***

Over the decade of our friendship, the testimony to a living Quaker Faith has been a great gift and joy. Thank you. I should not have had the opportunity to have these thoughts which now appear in this letter, however imperfectly, a letter offered as my entry to the Quaker Essay Competition 2009.

Many of the thoughts have, indeed, experienced their concrete manifestation in knowing you, and your dear husband. The wisdom and refreshment of the quiet moments in your home have enriched my personal development and resilience in the opportunities and challenges of my life. You have been a comfort and strength to those close to me.

In the wider Quaker Family, you have invested a rich energy, which even before our eyes, has produced a wonderful harvest, the latest being the Outreach Ministry. You have patiently withstood the not so Quakerly intemperate outburst at some meetings, yet with your quiet wisdom, sense of gladness, and joy – rather like the favourite ancient, gnarled apple tree framed in the northwest window of the Blue Idol, that had witnessed so many years of Quaker life – you gave generously. As you lay down the clerkship when this year closes, may you have every satisfaction for the legacy you have brought to The Friends.

Not long ago, in *The Friend*, there was a spirited correspondence on whether meetings should write thank you letters of appreciation, it being taken that a serving Friend was doing a duty. But, it is the nature of life to record a tribute, and that I do gladly as an Attender.

## A Final Conclusion

The Inspiration of Scripture, the Culture of the Word, Nurturing Intellect and Scholarship for Justice and Common Good, Love in Truth, are some of the gifts in life.

*It can be bewildering to flick through the TV and radio listings. Where to start in this blizzard of choice?...The terrific writers who point you to their best movies every week have shown their class again, with 22,000 film reviews in our most comprehensive edition yet.*

So wrote the new editor of the Radio Times<sup>15</sup>.

The gifts I have selected to mention might offer us some help through the *blizzard of choice*.

Above all, in a quest for authentic development, and in the spirit of HH Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical, may our continuing search for God explore with Love in Truth, and Truth in Love.

A small brick tablet, high on the south west gable of the Croydon Friends' Meeting House, opened January 26, 1957 has this Latin inscription

*Caritas Vero Ædificat*

For truly, LOVE BUILDS.

With appreciation and every kind wish,

Attender.

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<sup>1</sup> Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite English Translation

<sup>2</sup> Liturgy of the Hours (ICEL) 1975 Volume Four p1576

<sup>3</sup> Guidance Notes of the Essay Competition Entry Form August 2009

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17 The Revised English Bible Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, The London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends was among those who planned and directed the edition.

<sup>5</sup> Second Edition 27.31 Henry J Cadbury, 1953

<sup>6</sup> The New Jerome Biblical Commentary Eds Brown, ER. Et al 2000 Geoffrey Chapman page 1033

<sup>7</sup> The Irish Contribution to European Scholastic Thought Eds McEnvoy, J & Dunne, M Four Courts Press Dublin, Ireland 2009

<sup>8</sup> Op cit page 10

<sup>9</sup> Impact on Humanities : researchers must take a stand now or be judged and rewarded as salesmen. Stefan Collini, The Times Literary Supplement 13 November 2009 pp18-19

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<sup>10</sup> Our Textual History: Digital copying of poetry and prose raises questions beyond accuracy alone. Jerome McGann, *The Times Literary Supplement* 20 November 2009 pp13-15

<sup>11</sup> A full library on this Encyclical can be consulted in a variety of languages at <http://vatican.va>

<sup>12</sup> *Le Monde* 12-16 September 2008, variously.

<sup>13</sup> Op cit HH Pope Benedict XVI *Le Monde* 12-16 September

<sup>14</sup> Op cit HH Pope Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate*

<sup>15</sup> *Radio Times* 19-25 September 2009 Preston, B

