

Kurt Strauss Richard Carey Lecture

Review by Kathleen Hertzberg

At German Yearly Meeting 2000, German Friends celebrated the 75th anniversary of the founding of German Yearly Meeting and the 59th anniversary of their annual lecture named after Richard Carey, an American Friend who went to Germany immediately after the First World War to help organize children's feeding programs.

Last year, 2000, Kurt Strauss, a Britain Yearly Meeting Friend, was invited to give the lecture.

Kurt Strauss was born in Germany. As a child, the family went to England immediately before the war to escape Nazi persecution. Kurt attended Sidcot Friends School in England, became an engineer and has been active in Britain Yearly Meeting with special concern for Continental European Friends.

Kurt's lecture is well informed, with a sense of dedication and caring. He is a good critic of modern developments amongst Friends, particularly in Britain Yearly Meeting. He writes with humour and the insight of an intelligent human being. He remains optimistic if critical and deeply concerned for the future of Quakerism and for the present situation. He is very aware of the dangers and the "dead-ends" for Quakerism today.

Whilst he recognises that the Quaker faith is anchored in the great early religious experiences of George Fox and the early Friends, he mentions other early Friends as being significant but he feels we need to study the faith of early Friends in order to win a faith for the 21st century, now simply to "move on" (as the saying goes today).

He points to pitfalls into which modern Quakers may fall. I wonder whether he may underestimate the influences from the modern world which form modern life, such as technology and TV, which also affect the interior, spiritual life and which can cut us off from our own inner life and the workings of God in our hearts, making us self-centred and apparently self-reliant, "self-opinionated" though the opinions may be those conveyed through the mass media. Above all, this gives us the impression of onward development into the future, when in fact "the ground has gone from under [his] feet." (Rufus Jones)

Therefore, we need to seek for "the eternal"* in our lives the "Golden Thread" which may guide us out of the labyrinth, or free our spirits from the "straight jacket" the constraints of the times, surviving history through which we long to glimpse the "timeless spiritual moment" the "Eternal Promise" and it was Thomas Kelly in his Richard Carey Lecture to Germany Yearly Meeting* in 1938, during the Nazi time, who reminded us of that truth.

Kurt Strauss raises the difficulty which some Friends have of holding to the Quaker Peace Testimony in the face of Bosnia and Kosovo and the still deadly conflicts in other parts of the world today. He asks how we may become truly faithful in today's world; faithful within ourselves, within our own spirits "here I stand, I can no other," and how, with God's guidance, we may be led as individual Friends and as a Society of Friends to a united witness and work for peace in the world in which we live today.

The lecture was written first in English, translated into German and delivered by Kurt Strauss at German Yearly Meeting in Bad Pyrmont 2000. It is available in both languages and well worth reading in either!

Kathleen Hertzberg is a member of Toronto Monthly Meeting.

** German Friends changed the name of their Yearly Meeting recently from Germany Yearly Meeting to German Yearly Meeting to include all German speaking people, especially Austrian Friends.*