

Book Reviews...Book Reviews...Book Reviews

Constructive Spirit: Quakers in Revolutionary Russia
David McFadden and Claire Gorfinkel (213 pages)
International Productions, 2004
(Available at Ottawa Quaker Book Service, \$27.15, plus shipping)
Reviewed by David Millar

In 1916, harvest failures in the central Volga threatened 100,000 villagers, including their refugee population. More than half of the 30,000 war refugees had died in flight, leaving thousands of children homeless, those *bezprezhorniy* who survived would later typify Soviet Russia's tragedy and ruthlessness. Everything had been eaten: farm animals, cats, dogs, grass, weeds, and worse. Epidemics of typhus, malaria, and tuberculosis (TB) raged. In this dustbowl, a handful of British and American Quakers put faith into practice. In 1918, they would continue their efforts for ten years in spite of civil war, banditry, the Great Famine, and rising Stalinism.

Themselves recent American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) veterans, the authors movingly quote many eyewitnesses: medical crises, starving "shadows that drift by our office ... and at our door wring our hearts" (p.14). The new AFSC appealed for "a dollar a month" to feed 200,000 Volgans. It asked relief workers on the spot to shoot "pitiful but attractive" pictures of children (p.117).

Back home, the supporting com-

mittees were divided by humanists and missionaries, right- and left-wingers, bureaucratic delays, political interference, and naiveté. During the 1921 famine, Herbert Hoover of the U.S. government's American Relief Agency, while threatening to withhold huge food surpluses unless the Soviets freed Anglo prisoners, accused the non-political Quakers of cloaking "Reds" [U.S. labour unions] (p.70). In 1928, a leading British Friend stopped local medical training to further "reconciliation and understanding," while another gushed about Quaker-Soviet solidarity after "my short stay of fourteen days." (p.153). The authors raise a number of critical questions about Quaker infighting, the relation of fieldworkers to head office, and contemporary hopes for government-sponsored reconstruction, armed peacemaking and humanitarian intervention à la Michael Ignatieff.

One of many such relief efforts in ravaged Europe, by 1923-28, Volga relief had 1,000 feeding stations, TB sanatoria and health trains, agriculturalists and nurses. It employed men and women in well-digging, reservoirs, and village industries. Yet compared to Russia's needs, it was a drop in the bucket.

But worldly success was not the criterion: "those who suppose that the Quakers were or are discouraged ... do not understand the Quakers," said Rufus Jones. "The Kingdom of God is not going to come in by a sudden bolt from the sky, but ... by

the process of building it in the lives of men." (pp.157, 55)

I recommend this book for the library of Canadian Meetings, and for those involved in Canadian Friends Service Committee. Not only is it a rattling good read—for the personal stories, passion and courage of Quaker workers and some Russians who caught the spirit—but history professor McFadden's analysis of the pitfalls of peacemaking is as current as today's headlines. ☞

David Millar is a member of Victoria Monthly Meeting, currently living in Montreal.

Sails on the Horizon: A Novel of the Napoleonic Wars
Jay Worrall
Random House, 2005
Reviewed by Bert Horwood

Desperate naval battles filled with gore and mayhem, corruption and beauty ashore in the early days of England's struggle with revolutionary France are the stuff of this new novel. The historical context takes us to the famous battle between Spanish and British Fleets of Cape St. Vincent, and into several single ship actions.

The Quaker connection involves the hero, a naval commander, and a young Quaker woman. We are given glimpses into the difficulty of explaining pacifism to the world

Book Reviews...Book Reviews...Book Reviews

and the sacrifices required when love crosses the lines of culture and conviction. There is a believable portrayal of the deep puzzlement caused when the Quakers in the story speak against the wars but provide deep care for the warriors.

But the rest of the story is too easy to be believable. In a clever twist, the hero, Commander Edgemont, meets Horatio Hornblower in a scene which links this novel with C. S. Forester's *Lieutenant Hornblower*. Yet the story is a pale imitation of its predecessors. The characters are likable but not well developed. Wealth, power and control come too easily to Charles Edgemont. His marriage to his Quaker wife is too free of pain and consequences.

There is a welcome attempt to initiate the reader into some of the special nautical vocabulary used, though it is too little and too inaccurate to help. The best part of this story is the complete acceptance in Friend Penelope Brown (would Quakers in 18th century England use the name Penelope?) of her own sexuality, her loving support of a young prostitute, and her care for wounded seamen. This character powerfully illustrates how a Quaker can respond to the world, being in it but not of it.

Overall, it is hard to be enthusiastic about this book, yet it does touch on difficult issues between Friends and the rest of the world. Read it lightly. ☞

Bert Horwood is a member of Thousand Islands Monthly Meeting.

Science in Faith and Hope: An Interaction

George Ellis

Quaker Books, 2004

Reviewed by Bert Horwood

Before beginning this book, I spent some time contemplating the intriguing cover photograph. It shows stunning multiple images of the Cartwheel Galaxy, formed by two galaxies colliding, overlaid with a pair of spectacles. Contemplation did not enlighten me, and I began to read with curiosity aroused.

This is not just another book of philosophy grappling with the problems of science and religion. In only 36 generously-spaced pages, George Ellis, a distinguished astronomer and Quaker, has written a lucid and complete account of the place of science and religion as joint sources for understanding our world. His central argument is that each domain of experience is essential to provide a whole view of the world. Fundamentalism, defined as "proclaiming a partial truth as a whole truth," is as dangerous among scientists as it is among religionists.

This argument is extended to claim that science is unable to help with aspects of life which call for ethics, art, poetry, and hope. The deep problems of existence call for faiths which spring from spiritual rather than scientific experiences. For

Friend Ellis, some form of sacrifice is always needed to make things right both within scientific and religious enterprises. And there are always uncertainties that call for testing and discernment, whether scientific or spiritual.

The writing is clear and simple, given the challenging nature of the subject. Technical language is largely avoided, but where technical terms are needed they are carefully introduced and illustrated. The most important of these is *kenosis*, by which the writer means the willingness to make a sacrifice. The sacrifice of one's life is the extreme example, but on a more ordinary level *kenosis* includes the need to empty one's mind of preconceived notions, of letting go of a cherished idea in order to gain new insight, of thinking one might be wrong.

The book includes powerful examples which enliven abstract ideas. One of the most vivid and timely is an account from a regimental officer describing how his peace-keeping soldiers were forbidden to fire on people suspected of throwing grenades at them. The troops must have positive identity first. And rock-throwing was to be tolerated. This was *kenosis* of almost gospel dimensions. The end of the story was that the entire battalion fired only two rounds, killed one grenade thrower, had 120 men injured, one killed, and in the end enjoyed a peaceful mission, in which the soldiers spent more time playing soccer

Book Reviews...Book Reviews...Book Reviews

with local youth than on patrol.

This book can be read at one sitting, but deserves a more reflective treatment. It could be easily used by study groups, especially given its excellent bibliography. And yes, I now know the significance of the cover. It illustrates the marvels of what physics can do and the realms in which it is powerless to give meaning. ↻

Terror: Responses to War and Peace after 9/11/01
Sharon Hoover, Editor (223 pages)
Friends Publishing Corp., 2006
Reviewed by June-Etta Chenard

For those of us who are contemplating a deepened response to the culture of violence, this book is a timely gift. In it, we find a wide range of expressions from many Quakers in the U.S. as well as a few from Canada—responding as individuals, as a society, and as the Religious Society of Friends. Canadian readers may recognise Keith Helmuth, Jay Cowsill, and George Lakey among the contributors.

The book begins with a chapter on *Immediate Responses from Quaker Organizations and Individuals*, after the historic events of September 11, 2001.

It is followed by chapters on *Extended Responses of Seasoned Friends*; *Response from a Journalist* (and many responses to this response); *Time to Heal: Grieving,*

Meditating, Reflecting, Praying; and Learning Complex Truths.

The selections express a wide range of viewpoints, from those who hold to what we consider the traditional peace testimony to those who believe there is a need to use military force. Though readers may find thoughts similar enough to their own that they might think, “that Friend speaks my mind,” they will also doubtless find some that may challenge deeply held points of view. And likely they will find some that offer new light.

Historic perspectives, a letter from a child and a few poems are interspersed with detailed essays, reflections, and what are called forum opinions. Each of the six chapters ends with a set of queries to help us deepen our reflection.

We find profound thinking and diverse opinions on topics ranging from the testimonies, to pacifism, and torture.

It may be the last chapter, *After Worship, Action* that will be of particular interest to Canadian Friends at this time, especially those who attended Canadian Yearly Meeting in session this year. There, gathered Canadian Friends began a more engaged corporate search to once again find a collective way to take a strong stand in the face of the encroaching culture of war.

Though often challenging and at times disturbing, I found this collection to be inspiring, giving me more hope that we may find individual and collective actions, as well as words, to address the violence that

escalates around us today.

This rich tapestry of reflections is a useful resource, one that may serve us well for many years to come as we grapple with our own responses to terror, war and peace. ↻

June-Etta Chenard is a member of Pelham Executive Meeting.

Enough Blood Shed: 101 Solutions to Violence, Terror and War
Mary-Wynne Ashford, with Guy Dauncey
New Society Publishers, 2006
Reviewed by Dale Dewar

This is a powerful peace tool. Mary-Wynne not only describes the 101 actions that individuals (children to elders), groups, and municipalities can take to further a culture of justice and equity, she also cites living examples of where the ideal has successfully become real. This is a book of success stories!

To me, one of the most empowering *Solutions* is the one entitled “Demonstrate the Possible — Intentional Communities” (pages 126, 127). The strength of people joined by a common purpose can be amazing as witnessed by these three examples: Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam, an Oasis of Peace, consisting of a five-family village of Jews and Palestinian Arabs; Nueva Esperanza in El Salvador, composed of returnees from refugee camps; and Ground Zero in Washington!

No matter where you open this book, you will be inspired by the

stories. Each solution and its examples are contained within two facing pages. It is easy to pick the book up and read a couple at a time—or to thumb through the whole book, as a resource. Each *Solution* lists website resources while pictures and a suitable quotation complete the layout.

In several paragraphs, Quakers are mentioned as an example of “Becoming a Track II Diplomat” (page 135). Track II diplomats, Mary Wynne explains, are unofficial supporters of the peace process who work to build connections and trust between parties in conflict. She

goes on to say that “Mennonites and Quakers are renowned for their quiet work in conflict zones ...”


This book get a five star rating from me! ☺

Dale Dewar is a member of Prairie Monthly Meeting.

BOX 4652 STATION E OTTAWA K1S 5H8

QUAKER BOOK SERVICE

Quaker Book Service



Mail orders, enclosing payment, may be sent to:
 Quaker Book Service, Box 4652, Station E,
 Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5H8.

Phone orders cannot be accepted.

For orders from Canada:
 Please add the following mailing costs.

Value of an order up to \$12.50	- postage \$2.00
Orders between \$12.55 and \$20.00	- postage \$4.00
Orders between \$20.05 and \$50.00	- postage \$6.00
Orders over \$50.00	- postage \$8.00

For orders from the United States:
 With payment in U.S. currency, you pay only the catalogue prices. No extra payment is necessary for the postal charges since the exchange rate difference between Canadian and U.S. currency is sufficient to cover postage costs to the United States.

For orders from outside North America:
 We require an extra 20% to be added to the total cost of the order, to cover the extra mailing charges.

The following titles have been added to our stock. For a complete listing of QBS books, see our 2006–2007 Quaker Book Service Catalogue (in the July 2006 issue of *The Canadian Friend*). Our Book List is also available on the CYM website at www.quaker.ca/qbs.

God is Silence by Pierre Lacout (Quaker Books London, 2005). The author examines how the practice of silence deepens our spiritual experience. This spiritual classic has been reprinted several times since it was originally published in 1969. (51 pp; \$7.50)

Godless for God's Sake: Nontheism in Contemporary Quakerism by 27 Quaker Nontheists; edited by David Boulton (Dales Historical Monographs, 2006). Twenty-seven

Quakers from 13 Yearly Meetings in four countries tell how they combine committed membership in the Religious Society of Friends with rejection of traditional belief in a transcendent, personal and supernatural God. (146 pp; \$27.75)

On Living with a Concern for Gospel Ministry by Brian Drayton (Quaker Press, 2006). The author, a seasoned Quaker minister, shares his views on how to cherish, live with, and grow into the gift of ministry. (196 pp; \$29.90)

Reflections from a Long Marriage by Roger and Susan Sawtell (Swarthmore Lecture, 2006). The authors tell of what they have learned from their experience of being together since 1957. They believe there is an important synergy to be found in a lifelong loving relationship in which “the energy of the two people in a long marriage is greater than the sum of the energy of the same two people not in such a relationship.” (110 pp; \$22.50)