

**Report on “Quaker Studies” at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre with an educational grant from Education and Outreach Committee of Canadian Yearly Meeting**

**Othmar F. Arnold – Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting**

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to report that I have now concluded my “Quaker Studies” program at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre leading to a Postgraduate Certificate from Lancaster University. This program “is designed to introduce students to theories, issues and processes connected with the history, theology and sociology of Quakerism in a global context. The programme is especially relevant to those interested in Quaker theology and history, the adaptation of religious groups to new social and geographical settings, globalisation and religion, and secularisation.”

This offering from the Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham, England is designed to be delivered online. I never set foot in England, never browsed through the books at Woodbrooke library, and never met any of the faculty in person. The lectures were all recorded and available over a decent broadband connection at home whenever I had time. Every week, there was one or more video recordings to complement the ample reading material. Most of the readings were also supplied in digital form, either as download from a scanned book, or as access to an e-book through Lancaster University library network.

The Quaker Studies are well structured, which supports also an interactive learning environment. My fellow students sat behind their computers or tablets in many parts of Great Britain, Canada, France, Norway, South Africa. However, the weekly discussion fora provided opportunity to engage in lively discussion about a relevant question from the program. Once per term, every student needed to provide a video recorded contribution, a task that brought many learners to their limits in handling available technology. The students in this program were not from the YouTube generation, but represented the general demographics of Quakers in the global west.

Here are the links to my video contributions for each course module for those who like to get an impression of the academic work in this program:

From PPR.489d: Quaker Theology in Context: “Early Quaker Theology: A Characterization”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcHVo9vCKKE>

From PPR.490d: Quakerism, Peace and Justice: “Models of Quaker Peace Making: Prophecy or Reconciliation”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6TV5efJZsM>

From PPR.491d: The Sociology of Contemporary Quakerism: “Quaker Testimony of Many Peaces”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iRMGhT0IIM>

When I started the program in fall 2014, I reduced my workload to part-time. I hoped to be able to complete the program in two terms. However, I realized quickly that a single course per term was ample stimulation and challenge to keep me busy in my spare time! Ben Pink Dandelion, the program leader, provided not only a broad range of reading material for each week’s topic, but also gave timely feedback to all online interactions and discussions to keep the flame burning.

The academic evaluation, needed to satisfy the requirements of the university, was based mainly on a major essay for each course. During each term, smaller assignments prepared

each learner to reflect on a relevant topic or question, to look for and prepare adequate resources, and to outline the essay. I chose to write on “The Spirituality of Restlessness”, “Economic justice in the light of Quaker double culture between radical thought and pragmatic action”, and “Quaker identity among seasoned Swiss Friends”. Furthermore, on various occasions I was also able to share writings and thoughts with Friends on Vancouver Island, or through keynotes and in group discussions and workshops at Switzerland Yearly Meeting or the German-speaking Border Meeting in Europe.

It was my aim to satisfy my curiosity about and to increase my depth of understanding of Quaker theology and the situatedness of Quakers in this world. Through this academic process, I was able to systematically explore my faith-based roots and how they relate to the peace testimony that is very important to me. I am grateful to Canadian Yearly Meeting for the financial support from the Quaker Studies fund. Otherwise, I could have not afforded the international tuition charged by the university. After all, credentialism has its market price as contemporary Quakers operate in a globalized context.

After completing the program, I feel much better prepared to look at Quakerism in the modern world. I have gained an understanding of the underlying theology, as well as the tradition and its multiple transformations over time in various global contexts. I feel better prepared to let my life speak as a Quaker in the modern world!

Othmar F. Arnold  
Tenna, Switzerland, August 18, 2016

Othmar is a nurse and peace worker, currently living in Switzerland, offering palliative and spiritual care for people wishing to die at home. After more than twenty years in Canada, he relocated back to the old country three years ago. He is member of Victoria Friends Meeting (VIMM). He serves Switzerland Yearly Meeting as their treasurer.