

The Quakers of France gathered this year, from 27 to 30 October 2018, around the theme of "Despair and Trust" in the haven of peace and greenery that is Enclos-Rey in the 15th arrondissement of Paris. Friends of diverse nationalities, as well as the presence of children full of *joie de vivre* have participated in the excellent atmosphere of the meeting. A play, *Crying Wolf*, has emerged from the children's program's work on the Quaker value of Truth. The occasion of the yearly meeting was seized to present a beautiful, newly-released book, *Quakers in France: experience and practice*, the fruit of collaborative work on the history and practice of Quakers in France.

We find that times are tough: climate change, migratory dramas, Brexit and terrorism are just some examples of causes for concern in the world around us. There is also a particular context in France, which is a country that is both secular and therefore not very attentive to organizations such as ours, and a country in which the military and the armaments industry are very influential.

Through various testimonies, we have seen how the Quaker movement does not give in to despair. On the contrary, Quaker culture builds trust and empowerment. There are indeed a number of specific ways the Quakers have developed to spread their message of peace and truth.

Thus, the operation of quiet diplomacy was presented, emphasizing the importance of making space available for exchanges, where listening to all interlocutors is paramount. Such a framework encourages exchanges that are not distorted by media echoes, and it contributes to building a relationship of trust, which is essential for quiet diplomacy. The whole thing is done in a small group around a meal, contributing to the conviviality and emphasizing a common humanity. Olivia Caeymex illustrated how discreet diplomacy could happen at QCEA in Brussels, and QUNO's Jonathan Woolley outlined the influence that Quaker House meetings in Geneva could have on climate change negotiations in the United Nations.

By listening not only to political actors but also to everyone, Quakers put themselves in the interstices of political and civil life, filling important gaps in communication. They disseminate existing experience, through research and professional compilation of information. This is the case for the QCEA publication, *Building peace together*, which makes it possible, in particular, to build bridges with other actors in civil life who pursue the same objectives as us. This publication presents a resource that we must all promote.

All this work requires patience. It is done over several years, to create lasting transformations. A testament to the success of this strategy has been the Quaker initiative of reconciliation between victims and executioners in Burundi, which we saw in a short film as an inspiring example.

Any transformation is indeed seen as a process, in which Quakers can intervene strategically and also, through different and institutions, more and more professionally. Quakers therefore act behind them in the long run, and discreetly. But there are also more visible actions, such as that of Stop Fuelling War, which manifests at Eurosatory, in addition to instigating dialogue.

These are the testimonies of current actions, but also the history of the Quakers who encouraged us. Thus, it was recalled that the movement was precisely created in a moment of great disorder, during the English Civil War of the 1640s. It has developed during all the wars since, as Clothilde Druelle-Korn and Dale Andrew showed particularly in their presentations on the role of Quakers in France during the two world wars, and the testimony of Jutta Izumo on food brought by the Quakers after the bombing of Hamburg.

These experiences have given us confidence in our ability to contribute to the transformation of society into a non-violent alternative vision. Indeed, instead of giving way to despair, it is at these moments of crisis that we are needed more than ever. And the results are there: the evidence is not lacking to show that the group of Friends is small, but effective.

The history of Quakers is also our common heritage. Jo Scott gave us a glimpse of it by presenting the Quakers' relationship with music, and its evolution over time. This intervention was crowned by a beautiful session of singing in canon, symbolic of the harmony which reigns throughout this meeting.

How can we act at the individual level and at the level of our groups? These questions were the subject of the evening hosted by Paul Parker and a group work on SPICES, Quakers' testimonies of equality, peace, integrity, community, eco-responsibility and simplicity. A profusion of ideas has emerged; but also the awareness that we already do things, sometimes at the individual level. A question to be discussed in the future is that of the creation of a French Quaker Service, following the example of and perhaps in partnership with the Quakers of Norway. Nevertheless, an important function of the group is support of each other, which not only allows for the exchange of resources but also gives us hope and confidence. A fully successful challenge for the yearly meeting.

In conclusion, we wish you the folly of believing that the world can be transformed.