Quaker Higher Education QHE

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What is the careful work that we as educators, artists and scholars must do to foster "Aha!" moments and perspective shifts for our students, publics, and colleagues? How do we draw on the grace of language in poetry, theatre, and song, as well as the tools of consensus, forensics, and Biblical exegesis to take on tough conversations, realities and truths? The six essays and works of this Fall 2016 issue of Quaker Higher Education help us address these queries.

Bill Jolliff, poet and professor of English at George Fox University, shares with us his keynote address to 2015 June's FAHE conferees. He provides guideposts for enjoying and growing from contemporary poetry that offer delight, identification, transcendence, and epiphany.

Darlene R. Graves, Professor of Digital Media and Communication Arts at Liberty University, takes us beyond the Friends' historical aversion to the "lively arts" by immersing the development of performances in Quaker process and queries. She urges us to adapt the power of performance and theatre in other settings and disciplines and to confront the contemporary reliance on violence in film, television and theatre.

Guilford College associate professor of biology Bryan W. Brendly describes how the tools of forensic anthropology help his students bring the Friends testimony of integrity and truth-telling, to the secular task of investigating crime. From Earlham College, Kelly Burk, Director of Religious Life, and Trish Eckert, Director of the Newlin Quaker Center, carefully outline the steps and resources that they and their students have found useful when speaking one's truth, listening to others' truth, and moving forward in (very) difficult conversations.

Stephen Pothoff, associate professor of religion and philosophy at Wilmington College, walks us carefully through the confounding Markan account of Jesus cursing the fig tree. His Biblical and historical "forensics" reveal how Jesus was speaking truth to imperial Rome.

Finally, we present *The Healing Blues Project*, a multimedia engagement with homelessness, co-created by Ted Efremoff, assistant professor of Digital Photography and Video Art at Central Connecticut State University.

Submissions: *QHE* is published twice a year, in the spring and the fall. Articles submitted for possible publication should be sent as Word documents to: either **dsmith4@guilford.edu** or to **adams@ccsu.edu**. Since *QHE* is not wed to any particular referencing format, you may use the professional style of your choice. If you would like to discuss an idea that you have for an article, our telephone numbers are: 336-316-2162 (DS) and 860-832-2616 (AEA).

FAHE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

June 16-19, 2016

Woodbrooke
Quaker Study Centre

Mark your calendars now for June 16-19, 2016. FAHE will meet at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birgmingham, UK, to consider *Educating for Action*. The call for papers with queries and conference registration is available at the FAHE web site and at this site. Deadline for proposal submissions is November 30, 2015.

FAHE

The Quaker Poet in Community

William Jolliff
George Fox University

"It is difficult / to get the news from poems," wrote the poet William Carlos Williams sixty years ago, "yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there." His point, I believe, is that poetry matters; that it is not *frivolous*.

I take comfort in his words, since historically Quakers have not been champions of the frivolous. We try to do things that matter. But how does a Quaker poet today do good and Friendly service in the place where he or she is situated—*situated* in both the inner and outer sense, the spiritual and physical? More simply, what is the role of the Quaker poet in community?

A look at our Quaker history is less helpful than one would like: I'm sure it never occurred to the *poet* John Greenleaf Whittier that his poems might *not* matter, any more than it would have occurred to the *political lobbyist* Whittier or the *journeyman journalist* Whittier. After all, he used his verse to sway popular thought.

That's a concept impossible to suggest now, given poetry's lack of any popular presence. Poetry today inhabits a much diminished cultural position. The functions once performed by poetry in mainstream culture are fulfilled by other arts and media—by popular songs, novels, op-ed pieces, movies, talk radio, television, and the ubiquitous Netflix.

Since the avenue of poetry as a broadly circulating popular medium is gone, today Quaker poets must rethink, and possibly re-invent, the role of their work in our communities: as Quaker poets, as champions in plain coats of the frivolous, where and how do we serve?

Thankfully poetry does maintain a few niches in our culture. With no intention of being comprehensive, I offer you three that I think recommend themselves to consideration by Friends.

Niche #1: Let's start with self-discovery: the examined life. Such helping folks as teachers, spiritual directors, and counselors continue to direct their students or clients to write out their feelings in poetry. Contemporary free verse, with its apparent lack of any necessary craft, lends itself to such exploration, and sometimes the results are good. They perform a helpful and necessary function for the growth of individuals; but generally these "poems" find that their best or only audience is an audience of one or two. So how might a Quaker poet minister in such community settings?

Very well, I believe. As teachers who help students find a voice for dreams and fears, as spiritual directors who help directees look closely at their own souls, as counselors who help clients make sense of their past, their present, and their full potential, a Quaker poet may readily find opportunity for ministry. The Quaker teacher, spiritual director, or counselor skilled in the techniques of poetic discovery can be a Friendly paraclete who helps self-discovery

happen. The actual poetic *craft* in such contexts comes to the fore as we teach the invention skills, the exploratory methods, the powers of figurative comparison, the surprising recognitions in narrative form, even the places of non-judgmental expression—any and all techniques that open the way for everyday miracles.

Niche #2: At the opposite end of the spectrum stands the persistent place of poetry in the rarified air of high art. When poetry ceased to be a popular form, it became the stuff of specialists, and its techniques changed utterly. As a result, what may seem to the uninitiated like the craftless expression of free verse is often, in fact, following complex principles that could never have been conceived by Whittier or, for that matter, Shakespeare. The inevitable result is that high art poetry is now the stuff of universities, devotees with carefully developed tastes, and other poets. Much of such work is difficult, even off-puttingly so; simultaneously, the more easily accessible and gratifying aspects of poetic craft have fallen away. That isn't bad and it isn't good. It simply is.

How does the Quaker poet find a way to contribute to, to serve in, that high art milieu? The most obvious answer is difficult but clear: if serious poetry is your gift and passion, you do your art, and you earn your status in that community. The Quaker poet can and should play a role in that world, practicing her craft with excellence and rigor, just as a Quaker painter or composer practices her craft among her fellow experts. Even with professional success, of course, the community served will be small; but that doesn't mean that the art doesn't bear cultural significance.

Niche #3: A third community that can be served by the Quaker poet is the remnant of a popular audience. When poetry is published by *Christian Century* or *Friends Journal*, the editors are banking on the fact that just as some of us go *occasionally* to a gallery or hear a symphony, some of us *occasionally* read poetry. The remnant may be few, but that doesn't mean the ministry shouldn't be offered to such a community. What the poet must keep in mind for ministry in this community, however, is that readers must be able to access and enjoy what the work offers. The poem must be something more craft-rich than therapy; and, simultaneously, it must be more accessible than what is offered by the most craft-intensive high art.

As I think about the potential role for the Quaker poet in these communities, I'm struck by the strangeness of our particular art form in this particular time. Is contemporary free verse a craftless mode of freewriting for self-discovery? Or is it an extremely complex and subtle, and occasionally inaccessible, art form? Or may it be a way of bringing some aesthetic bliss or deep insight to a more or less general population? Considering such a quandary, I'm struck by that same question every free-verse poet has fielded from some well meaning student or reader or listener:

What makes that stuff you do poetry?

It's a legitimate question.

If free verse apparently fulfills no easily defined standard of craft—no rhyme, no regular meter, no prescriptive form—

what makes any offered page of language a poem?

Here's my current answer, dogmatic as it may appear. As it happens, I think my answer comes from a place where my Quakerism and my craft converge. So let me offer my own quirky, but much obsessed upon, standards.

Delight. To begin, a poem must call special attention to itself *as language*, and the attention paid must reward the reader with delight in that language. If meaning is all that I gather from having read a particular chunk of language, it's not a poem.

If that sounds dogmatic, it may be saved from the most horrific narrowness by this fact: language may delight in myriad ways, ways that are very traditional (like rhyme, meter, and figures of speech), contemporary (like the position of the words on the page, line breaks that play against syntax, intentional ambiguity, or the subtle musicality of vowels), or radically innovative (like those I've not thought of yet). If a chunk of language says, "Look at me! I give you delight by my own, uh, something-or-other," then that chunk of language has met the most essential demand of poetry.

But a poem must be more than craft that leads to delight. Poetry is, in the broadest possible sense, *spiritual*. On some deep level, you all know: there are phenomena we cannot analyze empirically, but which have been important to humans of many cultures and many ages and which, right now, you share, to one degree or another, with everyone you know and don't know. Such phenomena are spiritual, and they are the very stuff of much of the best poetry. Even when it doesn't seem like it.

Now I'll become still more prescriptive. In addition to the delight factor, a poem must allow the reader to experience one of these three qualities: identification, transcendence, and epiphany. And yes, these qualities often overlap and ultimately become a little hazy.

Identification. This quality is, I think, the one that happens most frequently in a good contemporary poem. By *identification*, I mean that the poem must make the reader feel something in common with the experience of the implied speaker. I think of this as the *ain't-that-just-the-way-it-is* factor. At their best, poems can communicate something true and meaningful about your own experience of life as lived. Maybe you identify with the anger, or the joy, or the lousy tricks experience plays on a person.

Sometimes the lightning strike of identification in a poem may simply be, "Yes, I feel the same way when the sky looks like that in the morning." Or, "Yes, I feel the same way when I run across my grandma's high school photographs." Or "Yes, I feel that same isolated, lost-in-the-world way when my cell phone dies in the airport." The intensity of the emotion, the importance of the predicament, the weightiness of the topic—those things don't necessarily matter. What matters is the "I feel the same way. . . ." part. That means that the poem has struck upon something true about the broader human condition, often in an unprecedented way. And because the feeling takes us outside ourselves and situates us deeper in a

common humanity, it's what I consider a spiritual experience.

Transcendence. *Transcendence* can be an intimidating term, but needn't be. In its most basic definition, to transcend means this: to cross a boundary. Sometimes a poem may be rambling on about something perfectly mundane—cooking squash, waiting for a traffic light to change, fishing without catching fish, etc. But by the time you get to the end of the poem, and often right at the end of the poem (maybe on the third reading), you realize that there's an abundance of significance, a *spiritual* significance, in that mundane event.

A boundary has been crossed: you thought you were just tasting a delightful stew of language apparently about waiting on a traffic light, but somewhere you began to sense that you, along with the poem's speaker, were struggling against the very nature of the human relationship with the disheveled reality of place or time . . . or something like that. Often you *feel* the transcendence first, before you verbalize it. And in fact, nothing says that as a writer or reader you ever have to verbalize it *at all*--or even fully make sense of it. You know that *something is there*, that the poem has significance that crosses a boundary from the mundane matters of the flesh to the extraordinary matters of the spirit. You've been processing particulars, but experiencing universals—something more deeply, more meaningfully human, than waiting to turn off the burner or try another artificial bait or punch the accelerator pedal.

Epiphany. In literary criticism an "epiphany" is a moment of sudden understanding. But in the Christian tradition, an epiphany is the appearance of God (in one form or another). Some poems are accounts of epiphanies, and if the poem does its job well, readers not only understand the account presented but have an insinuation of the epiphany itself. One needn't hold particular—or, indeed, any—religious views to appreciate the poem as a piece of art that relates an experience the speaker perceives as an appearance of God. But I suspect that poems with the quality of epiphany are most easily enjoyed by people who themselves have some belief in the possibility of divine encounter.

It may seem that epiphany poems would be extraordinarily rare. And if the only poems we could classify as *epiphany* were those relating the first-person experiences of wrestling with angels, such would be the case. But that's not quite what I'm suggesting. Think of Ralph Waldo Emerson suddenly feeling at one with the universe while stepping in a mud puddle on Harvard Square, Walt Whitman seeing the mysteries of the universe displayed in a spear of summer grass, or Mary Oliver hearing a perfect prayer in a flock of terns. These things fall under my category of epiphany—a deep-felt experience of the Divine in the commonplace.

In summary then, these are three ways I believe that the Quaker who ministers through poetry can serve her communities:

(1) She can, if her gifts allow, use the powers of poetry to teach people new and expedient ways of wisdom-nurturing self-exploration and healthy self-expression;

(2) She can, if her gifts allow, take her place in the "high art" world of serious poetry and do so with a Quaker sensibility that bears weight in intellectual culture; and

(3) She can, if her gifts allow, speak to a popular audience with good, gratifying, accessible poems.

Through creative work that offers delight and that faithfully offers the experience of identification, transcendence, or epiphany, the Quaker poet can minister to a community or communities. We will never have Whittier's broad audience, but there's nothing *frivolous* about our work—despite the fact that it doesn't give anyone the news. For some of us, it's even a calling.

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Performance of Faith and Practice

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This article looks at current Quaker contributions to the theatre as a striking contrast to early Quaker rejections of the theatre. The Quaker experience with the arts—and theatre specifically—can be viewed as "a turning of seasons" from a three-century-long winter of brittle schism to a contemporary spring of budding promise, bearing significant artistic fruit. With mindful applications, theatre has the potential to connect students and university departments across the campus and curriculum, as well as provide communication bridges from the institution to surrounding neighborhoods.

After outlining the Quaker antagonism toward theatre and then presenting the occurrences which led to healing the rift between Friends and the arts, I will explore some attributes of Quaker faith and practice which actually inspire and support a style of creative drama. Finally, I propose that these same practices may guide traditional theatre production toward developing a more satisfying artistic process and product as well as inform educators and group leaders working in any community process.

In her article *Art and Integration*, Katherine Lesses noted that at the beginnings of the Quaker movement in the 17th century there were many reasons for a suspicious attitude towards art, since usually "works of art were financed by established political and religious institutions and used to legitimize them. In this connection, the arts took on a tinge of immorality. The appreciation of artistic products on purely aesthetic grounds, unrelated to any serious content, led to the belief that art was frivolous, and the practice of the arts, other than for specific religious purposes such as journal writing, occupied time and energy that should be devoted to other causes" (128).

Quakers were serious and forthright particularly in their early rejection of theatre. Robert Barclay roundly condemned the theatre in his influential *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, first published in English in 1678, when he asserted: "These games, sports, plays, dancing, comedys, etc. … were invented to pass away the precious time, and divert the mind from the witness of God in the heart. . . they do naturally tend to draw men from God's fear, to make them forget heaven, death, and judgment, to foster lust, vanity, and wantonness" (343).

That this general antagonistic attitude toward the theatre continued among the Society of Friends for at least two more centuries is evident in the comment made by Henry Ward Beecher, as published in an 1857 edition of *The Friend:* "If you would pervert the taste—go to the theatre. If you would imbibe false views—go to the theatre. If you would efface as speedily as possible all qualms of conscience—go to the theatre" (Found in Eddington, 14).

Even in the early blush of the twentieth century, it was evident that Quakers still

held a certain contempt for the theatre and its conceded power to draw pure minds toward vice and vanity. This attitude is reflected in the following quotation found in the 1908 *Principles of Quakerism* drawn up by the Friends in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware:

> Friends believe that Christians should not go to see theatrical performances, first, because acting is essentially demoralizing to the actors...Secondly, Friends are opposed to theatre-going because of its effect on those who go…Add to this the unwholesome artificial mental excitement produced by watching plays, and the questionable associations into which play-going leads, and it becomes sufficiently evident that the practice is adverse to spiritual growth. (194-195)

Historically, however, early Friends were eventually open to some social adjustments to the arts in general. In the first part of the twentieth century, Friends began to reflect on other changes in the surrounding British and American cultures, which led, subsequently, to a relaxation of Quaker rejection of music as an initial step. In addition, Quakers eventually developed and supported their own liberal arts and Bible colleges in America. It appears the institutions of higher learning thus provided centers for intellectual and cultural debate, which ultimately relaxed the fierce Quaker opposition to the arts as a whole and encouraged a glance in that direction with an altered eye.

A broader intellectual dialogue within the Society of Friends, which eventually sparked a focused concern on the potential redemption of the arts, began with a series of "Swarthmore Lectures" delivered in England. Kenneth C. Barnes, a respected Quaker scientist and artist, lectured in 1960 on *The Creative Imagination* and prodded the Society's concern about the arts with the notion that "if we have faith in the unity of God and Truth, we should have the courage to follow where Truth leads" (27). Almost two decades later, in 1978, J. Ormerod Greenwood presented a Swarthmore Lecture published as *Signs of Life*, in which he also argued that denying the range of experience found in the arts involved a denial of part of oneself. Moving forward, Laurence Lerner's 1984 Swarthmore Lecture, *The Two Cinnas*, postulated that the artist is a kind of prophet. Thus, a wide swath of acceptance was made in a rather short span of time, considering the previous sluggish history of rejection. During that same period, Pleasaunce Holtom also heralded an opening to this sense of fresh illumination by calling other Quakers to "regard art not as an escape from reality, but as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, whose power can shape our lives . . . as an instrument in our search for Truth" (1).

Decidedly, threaded through the remarks of these Quaker scholars and artists is an emerging pattern borne of interweaving art's potential transcendent nature into the fabric of Friends' belief and discipline. It seems Quakers could now recognize the arts, and particularly drama, for its potential as a channeled expression of their faith, rather than as a deviant deflector from fellowship with God. It is with this perspective I propose a mindful application of Quaker faith and practice for the use of the arts and theatre in the integration of faith and learning across the curriculum and toward purposeful healing in our communities.

As a drama director, university educator and member of the Religious Society of Friends, I have reflected on how an integration of Quaker principles naturally affected my consciously-defined behavior and attitude throughout the process of dramatic exploration and performance. After having directed more than 50 theatre productions and facilitated 15 touring theatre troupes, I noted how my faith and practice were integral to the artistic collaborative process. My ensembles created dramatic vignettes to speak to issues of faith, social awareness, peace-making and community healing. We called ourselves *Inter-Mission-Thinkable Theatre* and functioned first out of George Fox University. The performances emerged out of deep discussion and reflection on current interpersonal and social concerns and then transformed into short provocative pieces. Avoiding didacticism the pieces capitalized on visual imagery and presentational theatricality with minimal verbiage. Since truth can be more gently slipped into a laughing mouth with an open mind, many of the pieces were dipped in tasteful humor. Others were performed in profound silence and went gently into rugged territory cloaked in metaphor and analogy, which produced perceptual shifts and a form of "aha" awareness in the viewers.

Additionally, in the more traditional productions with published scripts I asked whether each would be an opportunity for reflection and connection to spiritual truths for both the cast and the audience. Furthermore, if the play never saw the celebration of a final staged performance would the extended *process* of creating it still have been good stewardship and worth the effort for the cast?

While presenting many of the key Quaker concerns for spiritual life in the following section, I concurrently note how these cast a certain guidance and illumination upon the motivations and actions of the Friendly director, actor, and designer if they are mindful of using them. I also assert the practices are relevant to many other contexts outside theatre venues such as mission, business, and educational group projects and can become a positive template to work for a more effective and healthy community process.

Many of the Quaker disciplines focus on a style of worship that celebrates waiting, looking inward, receiving inspiration and responding to spontaneous insight. These attributes are characteristic of Creative Drama productions, ensemble improvisations, and role-playing exercises, which depend primarily upon group interaction. However, most of the Quaker principles are also founded in a basic respect for the individuality of each member of the group, echo the notion that there is "that of God in every man," and should have a direct impact on any theatre production, class exercise or group meeting involving Friends. I find them completely central to my own "theatre of the classroom" as an educator as well as during my roles as workshop and seminar facilitator, so I suggest they be used in multiple contexts and not limited to the theatrical process.

In the following annotated list, I offer the parallels I notice between Quaker practice and the dramatic (and educational) process. For the sake of

focus, the guidelines at the beginning of each section are taken from the Faith and Practice of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (Book of Discipline) which was adopted in 1985. These disciplines are typical of most yearly meetings of Friends throughout the world.

> When we gather together in worship let us remember that there is committed to each of us, as disciples of Christ, a share in the priesthood. We should help one another, whether in silence or through spoken prayer or words of ministry (105).

The Quaker director likewise maintains an expectation in the performance ensemble that all individuals are equal. While individual talent and personality vary, each has an equal position in community and, likewise, in ministry. Therefore, each member supports the others.

> If the call comes, there should be no quenching of the spirit; the sense of our own unworthiness must not exempt us from this service, nor the fear of being unable to find the right words (105). A gathered meeting is no place for the enhancement of private reputations, but for self-effacing pliancy and obedience to the whispers of the Leader (108).

The friendly director encourages the inspiration and input of each performer, recognizing that great insight may come through the seemingly least of performers and that—when it does come and is revealed through inspired performance—it is a gift from above to be received and celebrated, but not to be lauded or revered as more worthy than that from others.

> In the earliest period of the Christian Church His Spirit was, agreeable to ancient prophecy, poured upon servants and upon handmaidens; and we believe He continues to call from the young and from the old, from the unlearned and from the wise, from the poor and from the rich, from the women as well as from men. (106).

In the Quaker-driven theatre (or ministry), there should be no celebration of "star" performers or servility to directors or perceived prima donnas. Likewise, there should be equal recognition of technical personnel and other usually labeled "subservient" positions.

> True ministry comes from life. . . the cooperative team work of the entire assembly . . . tend to heighten the spiritual quality of the person who rises in that kind of atmosphere to speak. But that group situation, important as it is, will not work the miracle of producing a message for the hour in a person who is sterile and has nothing to say. Even the miracle of feeding the multitude in Galilee needed at least a nucleus of loaves and fishes to start with (107).

The Quaker performers/students must accept the personal responsibility of preparing their hearts, minds, imaginations and bodies for the performance/classroom, as well as prior to all the rehearsals and meetings. While each may spontaneously draw upon the reserve of creative imagination in creating an ensemble piece, he or she cannot expect to draw deeply from a reservoir which is running dry from lack of input from observation, applied imagination, study or prayer.

> One never brings anything to meeting with the certainty of giving it there, but one tries not to come empty (108).

Each Quaker performer recognizes responsibility as an active member of a community, one that requires the conscientious preparation and participation of each distinct part of the

whole. Each concentrates on the intention of the ensemble and therefore makes a concerted effort to locate materials, gather information and ponder the universal truths of the piece the group is constructing.

> Friends should promote high standards of quality and moral influence in all forms of entertainment. . . . Friends seek to live in the world, to be a part of it, and to be a leaven to its standards of daily conduct and custom (145).

This discipline has direct and pointed implications for the process and product of theatre. Therefore, the selection process in the preparation for performance and the motivation for all who are involved in producing the event is carefully considered. The apparent needs and concerns expressed in the community of participants as well as the anticipated community of spectators is a matter of meditation for insight. The intention for each Quaker director and actor is for the receiver to be moved by the presentation, rather than for the performer to garner the glory—and for the performer to be changed by the process rather than be prostituted for the product.

Of course, all of these concerns gave me pause and set me to a time of centering and waiting on the Spirit both during the selection of the script, the casting of the actors, the engaging of the production team, and the presentation to the audience, as well as during a time of post-production reflection with the cast. While my process was personally satisfying, others might find it cumbersome and time-consuming. Yet I perceived it as worthy foundation-building which had a significant pay back. Furthermore, no production was ever late or diminished.

I have enjoyed producing dozens of such "friendly" productions, and examples of a few may stimulate some insights. A production of Archibald McLeish's "J.B"—a contemporary theatrical rendition of Job—brought campus Psychology and Counseling departments together to provide a post-production open forum with the cast and community discussing the concerns of personal suffering. Another production brought the journals of Quaker martyr Mary Dyer and others to life in an original readers theatre called "Hanging Like a Flag on Boston Common." Communication, Literature, Music and Art departments collaborated to produce and present a public performance of Civil War letters, music and art in a Southern community.

I also encourage the readers to investigate the work of the British Quaker Theatre Company, *The Leaveners*, in their ongoing application of the theatre process with young people addressing such social concerns as peace, tolerance, bullying, and cross cultural communication. Finally, as with Friends of old, I maintain that a good measure of reticence should still be expected of a society that sees itself called to address issues of cultural darkness with purposeful light. When it comes to addressing the wholesale abuse and violence seen in a considerable amount of contemporary films and theatre, Quakers can stand against such, taking a mindful and active role to produce theatre which brings light into the darkness and which clearly reflects the Quaker principles of "community" throughout the entire process of its

preparation, while speaking to the specific *needs* of the community in the purpose of its presentation.

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Teaching Forensic Anthropology at a Quaker School: Connect or Disconnect?

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In my years of teaching in the biology department at Guilford College, I routinely get asked the question, "What are you doing teaching about crime scenes at a Quaker school? Isn't Quakerism the religion of pacifism?" The question is a startling one to me since I would, of course, much rather live in a peaceful society than in a violent society. However, there is simply no way to deny that our country and our world is a violent one. Some ascribe such events to sin, to evil, to psychological trauma, or to difficulties in the formative years. Such discussions are beyond the scope of my paper here. The simple fact is that crimes are committed. People kill, steal, rape, assault, and burn. The Quaker commitment to justice is the driving force behind all of the forensic classes that I teach at Guilford College. The college also specifically lists "justice" as one of its core values.

Since 2000, Guilford College has offered a major in Forensic Biology that is housed within the Biology Department. While I regularly teach classes like introductory biology, I also teach classes that are geared specifically towards Forensic Biology majors. One of these classes is entitled Forensic Anthropology and currently serves as the capstone class for the major. In order to take this class, a student must have completed multiple lower-level courses including two semesters of Human Anatomy and Physiology. Forensic Anthropology combines the study of the human skeleton with the understanding of forensic science that culminates in a final project in which the students are responsible for excavating a mock clandestine grave.

Humans have always looked to bones to answer questions about life and death of other civilizations and of events in the past. In more recent times, those with expertise in the study of bone have turned their skills towards human remains in order to assist law enforcement in bringing justice to the guilty. In the past a clandestine grave would be of little use to the police, but now forensic anthropologists can essentially rebuild a body and answer questions that are written in bone – questions about life and death. Questions about method of death, time of death, age at time of death, ancestry, sex, and stature of the deceased.

As one can well imagine, I walk a very interesting line between theory and practice in the classroom and in the laboratory. On one hand I discuss individual bones and how to assess ancestry, sex, stature and age. On the other, I discuss how to interpret trauma to bone, pre-death and post-death indicators, and how to learn about a crime from pollen, insects, soil, and diatoms!

One of the major themes that I weave into my classes is that professional forensic scientists cannot prevent the crime from happening. Our quest as

scientists is not to "put" anyone in jail. Granted, some of my students may pursue careers in law enforcement, law, or another position in the criminal justice field, but I continually teach that we have to operate in a sphere independent of the prosecution and the defense. All we can do is to report on what we discover when excavating a clandestine grave or when studying marks on individual bones.

Unfortunately, television shows have shown the forensic scientist as someone who works intimately with (perhaps even for) the police, the FBI or whomever. Often the scientist ends up in running gun battles, performing high speed chases, or even questioning the suspect in an interrogation room! This is not an accurate picture of the job of a forensic anthropologist. Students are trained to let the evidence speak and to report, not a story, but only the facts. Forensic biology students very often bring me their initial draft of their mock clandestine grave report and attempt to weave a fascinating tale of fiction into their conclusion. I remind them that all they can do is to report on what they find and that their report is not an exercise in creative writing.

While it is relatively easy to teach students the names of bones and the processes by which one maintains control of a grave, it is more difficult to teach about the Quaker concepts that overarch the course. To move students from fact-driven knowledge to concept-driven thinking, I begin each semester with an overview of the Five Academic Principles that are developed anew for every class at Guilford College. Mine are listed here:

Innovative, student-centered learning: The very nature of this course illustrates this principle. I treat the course as the place where you make a major step toward lifelong learning. That involves being able to integrate your Guilford education, both in the class specifics and the general concepts represented by these academic principles, with other knowledge and skills that you must acquire on their own. I expect you to make a considerable effort in understanding new and unfamiliar material and applying it to the subject of the course, a subject in which you should have considerable interest. You will have to apply concepts from your other forensic biology courses to this course on a weekly basis. My expectation is that you will be have to do this kind of integration many times in your life after Guilford, and I believe that this course provides an ideal place for you to start. Activities such as the "dig" and the Sherlock Bones will allow you to work as a "real" forensic anthropologist.

Challenge to engage in creative and critical thinking: You are encouraged to both evaluate the readings from the perspective of all the disciplines you have been exposed to in your Guilford education and to place yourself into a position where you can at least consider how other disciplines perform this evaluation. Critical thinking is the hallmark of a crime scene evaluation. When you discover and process a clandestine grave, you will have to speak for the victim. You will have to discern what happened at that grave. You will display your critical thinking in class discussions and in your papers.

Cultural and global perspectives: Forensic anthropologists work all over the world investigating human rights violations. Genocide has occurred, and

is still occurring, all over the world. We will place some emphasis on how forensic anthropologists speak for the victims, provide closure for families, and call governments to be accountable for their actions.

Values and the ethical dimension of knowledge: The forensic anthropologist will have to deal with, by necessity, gruesome specimens and sites. Most people will feel natural revulsion and will want to "put the bad guy in jail." It is important to let the bones speak, and for the anthropologist to only relay what they can learn from the bones. Bias has no place in the courtroom. Ethics in forensic biology classes cannot be stressed enough! We are placing a tremendous value on human life and are taking our job very seriously. Sometimes the bones are the only clues that remain to solve a murder.

Focus on practical application—vocation and service to the larger community: I think what we have already covered in the previous four principles show that this class is completely centered around problem solving. Forensic anthropologist are of great service to the world, responding to disasters such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. In addition, scientists with skills in anthropology provide invaluable aid to law enforcement officers at federal, state, and local levels. Each and every crime scene is a problem waiting to be solved … by you!

At first, the students hear these concepts as instructor "babble" and quickly realize that this material won't "be on the test." However, as I continue to reinforce the last three Principles, they slowly understand that the forensic sciences do not exist in a vacuum. Cultural and global perspectives are reinforced in many ways. Some classes I am able to invite a guest speaker from one of the United Nations recovery teams who excavates mass graves in Iraq. The students are able to discuss the horrors hidden under the desert sands and to taste the acrid smells of decomposition. In the event that the speaker cannot come to Guilford College, the class watches and discusses a film on the Guatemalian forensic anthropologist Fredy Peccerelli who founded the *Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala* in 1997. The Foundation has excavated over 1400 graves and recovered the remains of over 6500 victims of a violent government genocide campaign. My students usually empathize with Peccerelli, who, after all of this work, has only seen three of his cases go to trial. This lone man has built a force for dignity, community, and justice in a country that has suffered many years of civil unrest and violence.

Clea Koff is another forensic anthropologist who has transformed the field. Koff has assisted the United Nations in the excavation and the recovery of bodies from mass graves in Africa and in Europe. Her story, told in the book The Bone Woman, takes the reader on an incredible journey of the pursuit of justice for victims of genocide. Why do I take the time to discuss Clea Koff in class? I am driven to teach my students more than just how to excavate; they have to know why they excavate. Koff has worked in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Croatia to catalogue those savagely killed by hate-fueled radicals. My students need to feel the passion that drives people like Clea Koff in order to fully appreciate the field of forensic anthropology. Guilford College fulfills a

unique niche in the field of forensic science; we teach both the science and why we learn the science.

I believe that one can be an outstanding forensic scientist without a moral and ethical compass. But my intuition tells me that person will not last long in the field. Certainly there may be exceptions, but, given the chance, I will make time every semester to discuss ethical Quaker ideas with my classes. Students at Guilford College, while they might not become Quakers personally, will still be exposed to a moral compass that will help them in understanding their passion for truth. Quaker principles can guide how forensic scientists pursue the truth behind crimes.

In conclusion, I'd like to share two brief stories about some of my graduates. Betty (not her real name) was from Massachusetts and returned home after graduation. A few months later she called me to tell me that she was hired by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Boston. She was excited to share that once she told the interview panel about her experience with the mock grave recovery they essentially hired her on the spot.

Another student, to whom I'll refer as Clara, was completely and utterly sold on forensic science. Due to the fact that her mother was a convicted drug dealer, it was difficult to get interviews in the forensic community. She and her husband had a wager that he'd have to buy her a watch if she received over 100 rejection letters. Once she hit 133 rejection letters, she landed a job. And a new watch by that point! She has received nothing but accolades within her department and was recently promoted to forensic supervisor of the city's forensic unit. Both of these students have been back to share their powerful experiences with current Guilford College students.

As I look back over the last twelve years at Guilford College, I am pleased that so many of our graduates are carrying strong ethical foundations into the forensic community. They have been taught how to strive for truth. They are making a difference.

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Empowering Students to Speak Their Truth

Kelly Burk & Trish Eckert
Earlham College

Can you remember the first time you spoke your own truth? Where were you and who else was present? How did you know you needed to speak up? What did you say? Most importantly, what made it possible for you to feel empowered to speak your truth?

We realize that the word, "truth" is loaded with meaning, and this entire article could be solely about what is meant by the word, "truth". However, as campus ministers who have the honor of spending every day interacting with and guiding students at Earlham College, we chose to focus this article on the programming and interactive tools we use to guide and support students to be self-aware and reflective as they pursue being positive agents of change.

What does it look like for students to speak their truth? Last year, student government leaders at Earlham asked that the two of us facilitate a forum for students on the topic of the tension between athletes and non-athletes on campus. For the first hour of a ninety-minute forum with approximately 100 students in attendance, the sharing seemed tentative and vague. It wasn't until the last thirty minutes that a student felt safe enough to name the conflict about which the forum was taking place. The conversation suddenly went deep and poignant and for the next twenty minutes, we knew that we were on holy ground.

Last semester, Earlham students from Nepal contacted the Office of Religious Life for support in organizing a candlelight vigil to honor the victims of the tragic earthquake that had occurred earlier in the week. The vigil was well attended. Later that afternoon, several African American students approached a faculty member asking why no such vigil had been planned honoring the African Americans experiencing violence at the hands of police officers across the country. A second vigil was planned for the week and again, was well attended.

There are many requests for consensus training on campus, especially from our student groups that strive to use consensus within their governance practices. The Newlin Quaker Center staff was responding to requests as quickly as possible, but it became apparent that we could not keep up with the need for training. Quaker Fellows Scholarship participants saw a need to provide other students with more training in consensus, and requested support to develop a workshop that they presented to the rest of the student body.

What made it possible for the students to feel empowered to speak their truth? At Earlham we utilize several tools, which when implemented consistently, create a climate for students to take initiative and practice leadership skills. Such tools include structure, playfulness, relationship building, and leadership development.

Providing structure is an important first step toward empowering students. Designating a physical space that is comfortable to students, establishing a clear time frame, providing skilled facilitation and pursuing agreed upon goals and outcomes all contribute. The earlier example of the student forum between athletes and non-athletes illustrates our use of structure. The forum took place in a room of the students' choosing. It was a familiar space located in the student union. There was a clear time frame for the gathering. We provided facilitation at the students' request and met with the leaders of student government several times beforehand to articulate the goal for the forum as well as the overall format. Careful behind-the-scenes planning contributed to a climate where students engaged in authentic dialogue about a difficult topic.

Humor and playfulness are helpful tools when exploring complex concepts and are an important part of group formation. Playfulness keeps things in perspective and allows students to relax, making them feel more comfortable and welcoming a wider range of emotions. As described previously, when Quaker Fellows participants recognized the need to teach others on campus about consensus, they were excited and anxious. It was important to help the Quaker Fellows explore the most effective approach for presenting the complex practice of consensus while also making it engaging and relevant. The Quaker Fellows developed a role-play that enabled workshop participants to practice consensus by pretending that the issue up for discussion was whether Earlham's library should sell all of the books in their collection (as a fund raiser) and only utilize digital versions of texts. The students developed an elaborate plot that included humorous anecdotes, and this was highly effective during the workshop when those learning about consensus could explore such an offbeat scenario.

Building intentional interpersonal relationships is another important tool that engenders a culture of trust where students can practice articulating their perspectives. When African American students on our campus approached a colleague to ask about honoring African Americans who were experiencing violence nationwide, that request was rooted in relationship. The students perceived this faculty member as approachable and caring and thus took the risk of revealing their true feelings. An important facet of building relationships in a higher education setting is recognizing the developmental stages of young adults. Young adults are developing a greater complexity of thinking, integrating cognitive and emotional ways of being, and engaging in relationships based on shared values and mutuality. Supportive responses to these developments include modeling authentic relationships, supporting students in articulating needs, and challenging students to problem solve and discern approaches that will address complex concerns.

And finally, leadership development plays a pivotal role in empowering students to speak their truth. As faculty and staff, we strive to model healthy leadership behaviors and ways of communicating that engender vulnerability, openness, presence, not

jumping to solutions, ensuring that everyone is heard and determining a pace that is comfortable for all participants. When the students from Nepal named their desire for a candlelight vigil to honor the victims of the tragic earthquake, we met with the students on multiple occasions to guide them in their planning and provide resources, but the vigil itself was led entirely by students. Equipping students to take on leadership roles requires more effort in the short term, but is at the core of educating emerging leaders.

Earlham College aims to develop "morally sensitive leaders" who "have a concern for the world in which we live and for improving human society."[1] In this context, the Newlin Quaker Center and the Office of Religious Life collaborate with teaching faculty as well as with other departments and divisions, such as Earlham's Center for Integrated Learning, Office of Residence Life, and Student Government.

The Newlin Quaker Center connects the college to other Quaker institutions and organizations, nurtures the Quaker ethos on campus, and facilitates the Quaker Fellows Scholarship program. The Quaker Fellows Scholarship program is "designed for young adults who are serious about sharing in a community, living a life grounded in the Spirit, and being leaders at Earlham and beyond."[2] Quaker Fellows emphasizes community building, spiritual formation, and leadership development.

The Office of Religious Life "assists students by providing guidance in contemplative inquiry, opportunities for interfaith dialogue, sponsoring celebratory communal events, and supporting a host of opportunities which enable students to put their most cherished beliefs into daily practice."[3] Programs of the Office of Religious Life include: College Meeting for Worship, Christmas Candlelight Service, Religious Emphasis Week, Muslim Prayer, Jewish Shabbat Dinners, Buddhist Meditation, interfaith service projects as well as supporting ten religious life groups and four religiously themed houses.

Earlham College's mission states that "A basic faith of Friends is that all truth is God's truth; thus Earlham emphasizes: pursuit of truth, wherever that pursuit leads; lack of coercion, letting the evidence lead that search, respect for the consciences of others; openness to new truth and therefore the willingness to search; veracity, rigorous integrity in dealing with the facts; and application of what is known to improving our world."[4]

While we at Earlham aim to empower students to speak their own truth, in practice we sometimes wonder if maybe we do that too well. It is one thing to learn to speak your own truth, but one also needs to learn to make room for others to speak their truth.

Recently, African American students held a community convocation panel to articulate their perspectives on racial

[1] Both quotes are sections from our mission statement
[2] This quote comes from our webpage
[3] Quote from webpage: A Model of Religious Life
[4] Quote comes from webpage: Earlham's mission statement

inequalities in the United States. When asked how white allies could be supportive, the students voiced the importance of having allies first listen to those who are suffering, rather than trying to speak truth for another.

Student groups at Earlham often initiate student forums because they find this format enables students to both speak and listen while exploring difficult topics. Staff from the Newlin Quaker Center and the Office of Religious Life, when invited to facilitate these student-planned discussions, begin each gathering by establishing communication guidelines that all participants affirm:

- I agree to listen respectfully and sincerely try to understand others
- I agree to take turns speaking and not interrupting others
- I agree to ask questions for the purposes of gaining clarity and understanding without blaming or attacking others
- I agree to speak for myself and not assume that I can speak for others

In addition to addressing communication guidelines, we remind students that speaking your truth is only the first step. We have found Singleton and Linton's "4 Agreements for Courageous Conversations" especially helpful:

1. Speak Your Truth
2. Stay Engaged
3. Lean into Discomfort
4. Expect and Accept a Lack of Closure

The ability to engage in and lead courageous conversations is one approach Earlham College takes toward developing those "morally sensitive leaders" mentioned earlier. Our efforts in this regard are evolving and imperfect but each time we learn about the meaningful impact an Earlham graduate makes in the world, the more convinced we are that graduating students who feel empowered to speak their truth has the potential to change the world.

As professionals working with students in higher education, we offer the following queries:

- Is it important to empower students to speak their truth?
- How are you and your campus supporting students to speak their truth?
- What are some topics that are specifically hard to speak truth about on your campus?
- Are there populations on your campus for whom it is particularly hard to speak their truth?

References

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Figs, Pigs, and Imperial Rome: Jesus and the Barren Fig Tree in Mark 11

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The long-troublesome account of Jesus cursing the fruitless fig tree in Mark's gospel directly follows the story of Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem. While Mark splits the story into two parts to frame the well-known account of Jesus' demonstration against the money changers in the Temple, Matthew locates the same story as a single narrative unit after the Temple incident, while Luke omits the story entirely. As Mark recounts the story:

> On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it….In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. Then Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Mk 11.12-14; 20-25).

Mark's story of Jesus withering the fruitless fig tree poses a host of serious problems. Why would Jesus curse a fig tree for bearing no fruit when it was not even the season for figs? In turn, even if this story serves to demonstrate Jesus' power and the power of faith in prayer, his seemingly capricious assault on an innocent fig tree hardly models the forgiveness he emphasizes at the end of Mark's account. Indeed, Jesus' outburst seems more at home in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, where Jesus as a boy does not limit his withering capabilities to trees, inflicting them on an unfortunate playmate as well (*Inf. Thom*. 3.2). Marcus Borg and John Crossan have recently argued that the "obvious contradiction between the two aspects of the incident is Mark's way of warning us to take the event symbolically rather than historically" (2006: 35).

Whatever the historical kernel of the story might be, however, it is easy to understand why many interpreters have chosen to focus on the more symbolic or figurative dimension of the story. In the Hebrew Bible, living, fruitful fig trees often signify God's blessing, while withered or barren fig trees signify God's judgment. Deuteronomy 8.8 lists fig trees among the many and abundant resources of the Promised Land; the prophet Micah, echoing I Kings' (4:25) description of the security and prosperity Israel enjoyed under King Solomon, promises, quoting the words of his older contemporary Isaiah, that God will bring a new era of peace out of the ruins of Jerusalem and its Temple:

> they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid… (Micah 4.3-4, quoting Isaiah 2.3-4).

Exemplifying the theme of God's judgment, Hosea warns unfaithful Israel: "I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, 'These are my pay, which my lovers have given me.'" (2.12) Similarly, Jeremiah writes: "When I wanted to gather them, says the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them." (8.13) Rabbinic sources also include legends about trees uprooting themselves or bearing fruit out of season when prompted by spiritually powerful rabbis (Telford 187-189).

In the Christian scriptures, fig trees are also associated with God's blessing and judgment. Luke, who presents Jesus in a strongly prophetic mold, records the parable of the barren fig tree (13.6-9) which Jesus recounts as part of his prophetic call to repentance repeated throughout the Gospel. In this parable, some version of which might have served as the basis for Mark 11, the gardener urges his employer to allow a fig tree, barren for the previous three years, one more year before chopping it down (Marcus 2009: 784-785). In the Little Apocalypse of Mark 13 and parallels, Jesus urges his audience to heed the lesson of the fig tree: In the same way that tender springtime leaves presage the coming of summer, so the travails of the present age signify that the eschatological Son of Man is "at the very gates." (Mk 13.28-29) As in the Hebrew Bible, fig trees, then, are associated with eschatological judgment, but also with the promise of a new era in which God's reign will be restored.

The close association of Jesus' withering the fig tree with his demonstration in the Temple suggests, however, that his action and the story about it constitute a critique focused primarily on the Temple itself rather than Israel as a whole. In their book *The Last Week*, Marcus Borg and John Crossan interpret the fig tree as a "cipher" for the Temple: Jesus' demonstration in the Temple symbolically shuts down—destroys—the Temple for its lack of fruit in the same way his curse destroys the fruitless fig tree (2006: 35-36). The fruitlessness of the Temple lies not in its system of animal sacrifice or even the institution of the priesthood per se, but rather in its neglect of social justice, and its intimate ties with the foreign domination system imposed by imperial Rome. In decrying the Temple as a "den of robbers," Jesus is quoting the prophet Jeremiah (7.7), who five centuries earlier, following an already well-established prophetic tradition which demanded justice and mercy over sacrifices, had denounced Temple authorities and aristocrats for exploiting the people and taking refuge in God's house (Borg and Crossan 2006: 44).

Starting in 6 CE, Temple authorities became responsible for collecting taxes to pay the annual tribute to Rome (Borg and Crossan 2006: 18). The high priest himself was subordinate to the Roman provincial governor such as Pontius Pilate, and Herod the Great had installed a golden eagle on the gates of the Court of the Gentiles as a "symbol of Rome and its supreme divinity, Jupiter Optimus Maximus…" According to Josephus, the unfortunate young men who attempted to rid the Temple of such contamination were summarily executed by the Romans (Borg and Crossan 2006: 43). Some two centuries earlier, outrage over a similar "abomination that desolates" (Dan. 12.11; 11.31; Mk 13.14)—the contaminating statue of Zeus that the Seleucid emperor Antiochus IV Epiphanes erected in the Temple—had sparked the Maccabean revolt. Notably, when the emperor Caligula sought

in 40-41 CE to erect a statue of himself as Zeus in the Temple, this particular desecrating sacrilege by the Roman Empire was thwarted through direct, nonviolent resistance: Thousands of unarmed men, women and children offered up their lives, and refused to plant crops that year, rather than see the Temple defiled in this way (Borg and Crossan 2006: 42; Ehrman 2004: 242*)*. Similar nonviolent direct action in the form of sit-ins at the governor's residence at Caesarea in 26 CE had forced the newly-appointed Pontius Pilate to remove the Roman standards he had ordered erected around the city of Jerusalem by cover of night *(*Ehrman 2004: 242*)*.

Given the outrage many felt against the Temple's complicity in the system of foreign political and religious domination by the Roman Empire, it is not surprising to find anti-Roman sentiments reflected in early Christian sources. While the Revelation of John, with its fairly transparent characterization of Rome as the whore of Babylon (17.9), might be the most dramatic example, Mark's tale of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5.1-20, with parallels in Mt 8.28-34 and Lk 8.26-39), exemplifies anti-Roman sentiment in an exorcism story containing intriguing parallels with the story of Jesus' cursing the hapless fig tree. Encountering a violently-possessed man living among the tombs, Jesus forces the possessing spirits to identify themselves as "Legion," the designation for a division of five-thousand soldiers in the Roman army, subsequently casting them into an unfortunate herd of swine which careen headlong off a cliff to their deaths in the Sea of Galilee. Given that pigs were unclean animals according to kosher regulations (Lev. 11.7) but the preferred sacrificial animal offered to Zeus, the Gerasene demoniac story reflects not merely anti-Roman sentiment (as in the case of Caligula), but also anti-Seleucid sentiment since Antiochus IV had erected an altar to Zeus in the Temple two centuries earlier.

While previous interpreters have elucidated the biblical symbolism of fig trees and the anti-Roman dimension of Jesus' Temple demonstration, anti-imperial sentiments in Mark's gospel and beyond suggest another dimension of meaning in the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree which might have been at play for Mark and many in his audience. In his *Life of Romulus* (3.1-4.2), the first century historian Plutarch (c. 46-120CE) recounts the most well-attested version of the foundation myth of Rome. The tale begins with Amulius and Numitor, two brothers (recalling Jacob and Esau) in the royal lineage of Aeneas in competition for the throne. Amulius wins out over his brother through his superior wit and gains the kingdom, but fearing future rivals from his brother's line, he forces Numitor's daughter Ilea/Rhea/Silvia to become a Vestal virgin. Violating her vow of perpetual virginity, Rhea Silvia becomes pregnant with twin boys, but is saved from execution through the intercession of Amulius's daughter Antho. When king Amulius sees the superhuman size and beauty of the newborn Romulus and Remus, he orders his servant Faustulus to cast them in the river. Placing the infants in a trough, Faustulus goes to the river but finds it swollen and overflowing, and simply leaves the trough on the river bank, where it is swept up by the waters. As Plutarch continues:

> Now there was a wild fig-tree hard by, which they called Ruminalis, either from Romulus,…or best of all, from the suckling of the babes there.…Here, then, the babes lay, and the she-wolf of story here gave them suck, and a woodpecker came to help in feeding them and to

> watch over them. Now these creatures are considered sacred to Mars, and the woodpecker is held in especial veneration and honour by the Latins, and this was the chief reason why the mother was believed when she declared that Mars was the father of her babes. And yet it is said that she was deceived into doing this, and was really deflowered by Amulius himself, who came to her in armour and ravished her. (*Life of Romulus* 4.1-2)

In light of the close association between the fig tree and Mars, Jesus' withering of the fig tree in Mark 11 thus represents not merely his victory over the Roman Empire, but over its original patron god as well. To anyone familiar with Plutarch's account, Jesus' action would have recalled his earlier victory over the spiritual Roman Legion possessing the Gerasene demoniac. In both accounts, Jesus is seen not only to reject Roman imperial power, but to conquer it. Moreover, from a narrative and literary standpoint, Jesus' withering of the fig tree serves to frame his demonstration in the Temple, but also dramatizes in symbolic terms the challenge to Roman imperial authority and ideology embodied in his dramatic, nonviolent entry into Jerusalem the previous day. Arriving at the time of the spring Passover festival, Jesus, as Borg and Crossan observe, organizes a brilliantly-choreographed counterdemonstration to the virtually simultaneous arrival across town of Pontius Pilate, the Roman provincial governor, who every year processed with his military entourage into the city to maintain order and demonstrate Roman imperial power and theology (Borg and Crossan 2006: 2-5). Following Zechariah's prophecy, Jesus, on the other hand, intends to arrive in Jerusalem not in a battle chariot as a conquering warrior messiah in the Davidic sense, but as a peaceful messiah who will "cut off the war horse from Jerusalem…and command peace to the nations…" (Zech. 9.10). At least to Gentile members of Mark's audience, then, Jesus' cursing of the fig tree embodies a challenge to imperial Rome at its very roots: Jesus, the peaceful prophet messiah who dies "a ransom for many" (Mk 10.45) proclaiming God's imperial rule, is more powerful than Rome, its emperors, its armies, and ultimately, Mars himself, who had protected—or even fathered—the city's founders.

Whether in his conquest over the possessing Roman Legion or withering of the barren fig tree, though, Jesus also symbolically indicts, condemns, and destroys the premier tool of the Roman Empire and its original patron god: warfare and violence. Read in a literal sense, stories of Jesus withering trees and drowning swine, while entertaining, appear morally ambiguous and problematic at best, not least of all because such violent actions violate central teachings Jesus himself delivers in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, Jesus proclaims: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt 5.9). In the Antitheses (Mt 5.38-41), Jesus rejects the lex talionis, the law of revenge. Instead of loving your neighbor and hating your enemies, Jesus commands his audience to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…" (Mt 5.43). In his triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey and in his Temple demonstration, Jesus puts such prophetic teachings into practice, embodying the justice and peace of God's imperial rule as a radical alternative to the divinely-sanctioned imperial war machine of Pilate, Caesar Augustus, and Tiberius. Notably, the two primary examples of effective resistance to Roman imperial assaults on the Temple both owed their success to the nonviolent tactics the Temple's defenders practiced. Though it required—and still requires—many to

witness with their very lives, realizing the justice and peace of the divine empire Jesus proclaimed has transformed nations and empires.

Read in light of the Romulus and Remus story, however, Jesus' withering of the fig tree serves to challenge the power and legitimacy of the Roman Empire in at least one other way as well. Plutarch openly discusses doubts about the divine parentage of Rome's founding twins, suggesting that king Amulius himself may have fathered the twins through rape. Expanding on the question of the twins' ambiguous paternity, Plutarch adds the curious note that the Latin word "lupa" designates not only a she-wolf, but also a loose woman. Acca Larentia, the wife of Faustulus, the twins' foster father, was considered such a woman, and yet "in the month of April the priest of Mars pours libations in her honour, and the festival is called Larentalia." (*Life of Romulus* 4.3) Rome's complex foundation myth thus presents Rhea Silvia as the chaste virgin and victim of royal (sexual) violence on the one hand; and Acca Larentia on the other hand as the maternal, nurturing lupa/loose woman/prostitute who raised the abandoned twins under the fig tree. In this context, the fig tree itself takes on a maternal dimension: Like the she-wolf, the fig tree nurtures and protects Rome's future founders. While the fig tree might embody maternal protection and care, however, the woodpecker and the she-wolf of Mars recall the violence and bloodshed that lie at the very foundation of the imperial domination system. Early followers of Jesus in Mark's community, living in the immediate aftermath of the Neronian persecutions, therefore might well have applauded the Revelation of John's description of Rome as the "mother of whores and earth's abominations" who is "drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus" (Rev. 17.5-6). At the same time, to those who challenged claims about Jesus' divine parentage, early Christians could cite—and perhaps also identify with—the story of Rhea Silvia, mother of Romulus and Remus, and pawn in the dangerous game of royal politics.

In conclusion, taken literally, Mark's story of Jesus cursing the fig tree has posed serious questions from the very beginning. Even in the Hebrew Bible, fig trees carry a symbolic meaning, in their fruitfulness signifying God's blessing and provision, in their lack of fruit God's judgment against social injustice among the social and religious elite. Reading Mark's story symbolically in light of Rome's foundation myth highlights the extent to which Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem, and his subsequent demonstration in the Temple, targeted the divinely-sanctioned military power, theology, and legitimacy of imperial Rome. Proclaiming an alternate basileia not of this world, Jesus rejected the violence that continues to be the tool of empires in the world today, instead striving to realize the sweet fruits of justice and peace promised by Isaiah, Micah, Zechariah, and other prophets before him.

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Artist's Portrait: Ted Efremoff and The Healing Blues

Ted Efremoff is an artist and assistant professor of Digital Photo, Video and New Media at Central Connecticut State University. He is Russian/American, grew up in the Soviet Union, and emigrated to the US at age 16. In his artist statement he writes:

"I am interested in the kind of literal and metaphoric travel through space and time that storytelling allows us to experience. The stories I tell focus on the creative solutions people find in living their daily lives. My suspicion is that human creativity is not attached solely to the handle of art, but to ordinary activities that intersect every aspect of our lives.

Spurred by my personal interest in social justice, I envision collaborative activity as a social instrument that builds critical relationships between people. While the process of creating for (and with) others is a challenge, it provides stimulus for discovery and discourse. To facilitate dialogue, I begin by creating situations, spaces, or events that then engage people to question their relationship to the status quo."

He initiated The Healing Blues project in 2014 while he was teaching at Greensboro College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Efremoff explains:

"The Healing Blues is a social-practice art project that began as a response to an invitation to exhibit art in a downtown storefront to promote the annual blues music festival in Greensboro NC. I conceived the project in which homeless storytellers and musicians collaborated to create The Healing Blues album. The project invites people who are experiencing need such as homelessness, income inequality, PTSD or abuse, to tell a story of their challenges to participating blues musicians. The healing process of talking about and memorializing one's struggle in living music permeates this project as it has permeated the blues since the beginning of the genre.

I partnered with renowned jazz and blues musician, music professor Dr. Dave Fox, who produced the CD. The 15 songs relate the stories and struggles of the homeless population of Greensboro NC, and sales and donations raised funds for the Interactive Resource Center (a day center for the homeless). Local professional musicians donated their performances to the project. The homeless storytellers received a share of the royalties and an honorarium as cultural producers for the CD."

The project has been featured in The Blues Magazine, Free Speech TV and many other media outlets. DJ's are playing songs from The Healing Blues CD domestically and internationally.

Efremoff is currently directing a documentary video about the project. Dave Fox has started recording The Healing Blues Volume II CD that will feature spoken word recordings of homeless storytellers along with several musical genres.

To learn more about the project, get involved in The Healing Blues Community, get updates, and watch videos go to:

https://www.facebook.com/The-Healing-BLUES-630231080382299/timeline/