

Quakers and Redemption December 2022

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Peterson Toscano, Adria Gulizia Aiham Korbage, Lisa Graustein, Jennifer Higgins-Newman, Adria Gulizia

Peterson Toscano 00:00

In this episode of Quakers Today we ask, "What does redemption mean to you?"

Peterson Toscano 00:05

Attorney, Coach mediator, and Quaker thought leader, Adria Gulizia speaks with me about evil. That's a word not often spoken among my friends. We hear from a group of Quakers in New England. They decided to meet regularly online to talk about white supremacy and the sin of separation. We also look at a new memoir by longtime peace activist George Lakey. I am Peterson Toscano. This is the second episode of Quakers Today, a project of Friends Publishing Corporation. The first season of Quakers today is sponsored by Quaker Voluntary Service.

Peterson Toscano 00:45

Adria Gulizia has served in various roles ranging from children's religious education to Earlham School of Religion's board of advisors. She's a member of Chatham Summit Friends Meeting in New Jersey. Adria's article "Facing Evil, Finding Freedom: How Christ's Victory Over Sin is Ours to Share Today" appears in the December 2022 issue of Friends Journal. After reading it, I had to speak with Adria. Sin and evil are words I left behind when I fled from anti-LGBTQ+ Evangelical churches. I was curious to chat with Adria. And to be honest, I was a little anxious about stirring up the past. We had a great conversation that lasted an hour. After telling Adria a little bit about my own past, I asked her about her religious background and the identities that are important to her. I also wanted to know what led her to write the article.

Adria Gulizia 01:46

Quaker is important. Christian is important. I think that being Black has been more important. I was raised Baptist. People say "Southern Baptist," and I just chuckle because people don't necessarily always know unless they happen to know that Southern Baptist splintered off because they insisted on maintaining slavery for as long as possible. And then segregation and all of that fun stuff. So no, not Southern Baptist.

Adria Gulizia 02:15

I facilitated two workshops. One was called "The Lamb's War for Racial Justice," and the next was called "The Lamb's War for the Soul of our Nation," which was scarcely a month after the Insurrection

on January 6, right, the encroachment on the Capitol and attempt to disrupt the certification proceedings for the presidential election. I wanted to talk about the Lamb's War, about what does it mean to be a people who as the Bible verse goes, you know, "don't fight against flesh and blood, but against the powers and principalities?" What does that actually mean in a context where there are forces that are in opposition to each other? Where should we stand? And how should we think about that as Friends? And someone asked a question, you know, "Why does it have to be a war at all? I don't want to fight anybody. Why can't it be the Lamb's Garden?" And I realized in that moment, I had started the conversation in the wrong place, that you can't actually talk about the Lamb's War, until you can talk about evil. And it's hard to talk about evil unless you can talk about sin.

Peterson Toscano 03:22

So yeah, so when I got involved with Quakers, I heard this phrase over and over and over again, "That of God in you," and that people are inherently good. And we just have to get past all the little blockages in the way to get this like, wonderful little nugget of goodness on the inside. And that no one actually is bad or evil.

Adria Gulizia 03:44

To start with "That of God in every person," is a very hopeful and lovely idea that people really just want to be good. And that if only we could just enlighten everybody, then all of our problems would be solved. That that's not the message that drew me to friends. And it doesn't really match up with my reality, unfortunately, though, I wish it did. I went through a long period of searching growing up. Like I said, I was raised Baptist. I was turned off from my Baptist Church because there was a lot of culture war type preaching. You know, and I'm sure you've heard it, and I'm sure you know exactly what I mean, when I say, you know, "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." And that was what was coming a lot from the pulpit, rather than what I saw as the priorities of Christ in His ministry. But I did my own period of spiritual searching. I tried for a while to be agnostic, because it seemed more urbane. That was my black turtleneck phase. And yes, I actually did have a black turtleneck phase. As I was doing my search, and one of the things that I realized that kept me self identifying as Christian was the reality that Paul says in one of his epistles that, you know, I don't do the good that I want to do. But instead I do the evil that I don't want to do. I want to be good. I want to be patient. I want to be generous all the time. I don't want to be lazy. I don't want to be angry. And yet I am. And I couldn't, quote enlightened myself out of that.

Adria Gulizia 05:26

So sometimes people think that by acknowledging the reality of sin, that what you're saying is somebody is terrible all the way through, oh, you're a bad person. And I shouldn't have anything to do with you. And I think that that is a big part of why it's so hard for us to confront sin in our meetings and in ourselves. What do we do when lines are crossed in our meetings where it's clear that evil is at work, that gossiping and backbiting that happens after meeting for worship with a concern for business, sometimes, the talebearing that happens when there's a big dispute, you know, at a yearly meeting annual gathering? That's all evil. And I think sometimes we hesitate to say that because we want to be loving to each other. And we feel like by calling that out, we're saying you're bad person all the way through.

Adria Gulizia 06:20

The work that Kody Hersh and Windy Cooler have done, and Jade Rockwell have done around abuse in our Quaker spaces. A big part of the struggle in dealing with abuse and keeping our community safe

is that we don't know how to hold the intention be I love you, I respect you, I admire you, AND what you're doing is wrong. That's a big problem in the conversation around white supremacy. People feel that I don't want to be racist. So there can be a lot of defensiveness when somebody calls out or lifts up, hey, you know, this thing that you did wasn't okay, this thing that you said wasn't okay. People hear that they say, but I'm not a racist. What they're really feeling is, but I'm not a bad person. We need to get rid of that binary and be able to say you're a wonderful person, and you have a struggle. But of course, you have a struggle, like we all have struggles. And that struggle in particular is like is baked in to the American project. That doesn't mean you're a bad person. But let's sit with that and see you know, where God is calling us in that.

Adria Gulizia 07:29

But in order to be able to have those conversations, we really need to know each other. We need to go beyond superficial chat in our fellowship time. If we want to create communities where people can be honest with each other about their struggles, we have to one be really mindful of our language, the way that we talk about things that we are just saturated and compassion and tenderness for one another. And we have to be willing to trust our communities, to boy us up and to help us out of some behaviors and some attitudes that are not of God.

Peterson Toscano 08:10

You can hear a longer version of my conversation with Adria Gulizia. I have a link for you in our show notes over at Quakers today.org You will find Adria's essay "Facing Evil, Finding Freedom: How Christ Victory Over Sin is ours to Share Today in the December 2022 issue of Friends Journal. To learn more about Adria Gulizia, her ministry, and her writing ,visit shadow of babylon.com.

Peterson Toscano 08:39

A group of Quakers in New England decided to meet regularly online in order to get to know each other and to go beyond superficial chat. With the support of Beacon Hill Friends Meeting, they created a community where they could be honest with each other.

Lisa Graustein 08:54

I've been hearing these different calls to challenge white supremacy to address climate change. To begin the work of reparations and apology is all part of a greater whole.

Peterson Toscano 09:03

That's Lisa Graustein. She and Aiham Korbage, Emma Turcotte, Jennifer Higgins-Newman, and Briana Halliwell talk about this experiment in community conversations.

Lisa Graustein 09:15

So New England yearly meeting several years ago, approved a minute saying that we were committing as a whole body to challenging white supremacy. That a lot of times I think we think of racial justice as this thing and climate change is this thing. And maybe those of us who aren't native are paying attention to Native issues or not. But to me, they're all about how is God calling us to live into relationship with each other. I wanted to pull them together so that we weren't seeing them as separate things. But part of the greater healing work and justice work were called to write now, when I thought about what's at the core of all of these different issues. To me, what is separation? How do we start to heal that? I put together a workshop called responding to the call healing the sin of separation.

Aiham Korbage 09:58

There was an opportunity to to engage with the work on a personal level, on a small group level and a in a large group level, we usually had some sort of framework coupled with like a personal anecdote from one of the facilitators to help explain that and give meaning and real life example to what we were framing for people. Our role was to usher people in in a safe space where they can engage with the material at a level that was comfortable for them.

Jennifer Higgins-Newman 10:29

In this wild time where we're all wrestling with so much and there's so much collective trauma happening, it just became clear like this is a way that people can connect.

Aiham Korbage 10:42

What would be so lovely is to see this work being done all around Quaker communities.

Peterson Toscano 10:58

That was an excerpt from the QuakerSpeak video entitled "Healing from the Sin of Separation." You will find this QuakerSpeak video and the QuakerSpeak channel on YouTube, or visit Quakerspeak.com. The series is produced by Rebecca Hamilton Levi. New videos come out every other Thursday.

Peterson Toscano 11:26

What if you are a young person with a heart for justice growing up in a country where there is a lot of injustice and violence? What would you do if you had over 60 years to take on these issues?

Peterson Toscano 11:47

Turns out, an awful lot, especially if you are sociologist and activist George Lakey. In his new memoir, *Dancing with History: A LIFE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE*, Lakey unpacks his many experiences of nonviolent direct action organization. Doug Gwyn reviewing Lakey's book in *Friends Journal* writes, "More recent projects that Lakey has been involved in, such as helping to found Training for Change in the 1990s and Earth Quaker Action Team in the 2000s, may be more familiar to Friends today. But Lakey reaches back to credit the friendship and mentoring of earlier generations of Quaker activists such as Bayard Rustin, A.J. Muste, Larry Scott, and Charlie Walker, as well as James Farmer, director of the Congress of Racial Equality."

Peterson Toscano 12:25

Valerie Brown, the author of *Hope Leans Forward: Braving Your Way toward Simplicity, Awakening, and Peace*, shares high praise for George Lakey's memoir. "Dancing with History packs a powerful, honest, and deeply personal account of George Lakey's remarkable life and legacy of family building and movement building, honoring identity and liberation for all, 'raising the temperature' on what it means to live a life of social action and bearing witness. This book is a stunning testimonial, like walking through a historical landscape of a life of turning courageously to meet what's next." To learn more about Lakey's book, read Doug Gwyn's review in the October 2022 issue of *Friends Journal*. Purchase your own copy of *Dancing with History: A LIFE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE* at [QuakerBooks.org](https://quakerbooks.org). While there you can also buy *Hope Leans Forward: Braving Your Way toward Simplicity, Awakening, and Peace* by Valerie Brown

Peterson Toscano 13:41

Thank you for joining me for episode two of Quakers Today. If you like what you heard today and you listen on Apple podcasts, please rate and review our show. Many thanks to everyone who has been sharing Quakers Today with their friends and on social media. Quakers Today is written and produced by me, Peterson Toscano. Music on today's show comes from Epidemic Sound.

Visit QuakersToday.org to see our show notes and a full transcript of this episode. And if you stick around after the closing, you will hear listeners' responses to the question, "What does redemption mean to you?"

Season One of Quakers Today is sponsored by Quaker Voluntary Service. If you are a young adult between 21-30 years old, and you are looking for community and purpose driven work. Or you know of a young adult who is on that quest. I encourage you to check out Quaker Voluntary Service. QVS is a year-long Fellowship for young adults. Fellows work at nonprofits while building community and exploring Quakerism. Visit quakervoluntaryservice.org or find QVS on Instagram @quakervoluntaryservice. Thank you for listening to Quakers Today. Feel free to send your comments, questions, and requests for our show. Email podcast@friendsjournal.org. Thank you Friend I look forward to connecting with you soon.

Peterson Toscano 15:27

Not sure if you can hear the train going past as I'm in the studio today. We asked listeners to share with us their thoughts about the topic of redemption. What does redemption mean to you? Thank you for the many voicemails. I will share some with you in a moment, but first, here is our question for next month's Quaker's today. Our question is inspired by Jeff Hitchcock's essay Quakers and Reparations for Slavery and Jim Crow. It appeared in the June 2008 issue of Friends Journal. Hitchcock opens his article, Out of the silence a woman asked, "Why don't Friends take reparations more seriously? It's the kind of issue Quakers take on." In his piece Hitchcock asks more questions about reparations. What are Reparations? Why are Reparations a Quaker Issue? How Does Reparations Work Benefit Quakers? What can Quakers do? What about you? What are your thoughts, feelings, and understandings about reparations? I'd love to hear and share what you have to say. Leave a voice memo with your name and the town where you live. The number to call is 317-QUAKERS, that's 317-782-5377. 317 Quakers. +1 if calling from outside the USA. You can also send an email. I have these contact details in our show notes over at QuakersToday.org Now we hear answers to the question: "What does redemption mean to you?"

Quakers Today Episode 2 voicemails

What is Redemption to You?

SPEAKERS

Marisa Johnson, John Jeremiah, Lucinda

Lucinda 00:01

Hi, this is Lucinda from Chicago, and I'm responding to the query, "What redemption means to me?" This is one that got me pondering, so it's taken me a few days. Redemption is kind of a whole package. It's setting things back to as they were intended to be. It can include grace and mercy and love and forgiveness. But also to you just going back; there's always a look back. It's like whether you redeeming a soul or a situation is looking back to what was intended or perhaps the good that was there, and then striving or purposefully working or acting to make it so not sure if like, that definition also applies to when I redo deem a coupon. But, but as far as social situations, I think I stick with that.

Marisa Johnson 01:17

Hello, my name is Marissa Johnson. I live in Cambridge, UK, Europe. Redemption for me, is someone or something set free, repurposed, transformed. It is a freely given gift, not earned not requested, the work of grace.

Marisa Johnson 01:37

Some traditional Christian theology, describes redemption as personal salvation from sin and sees Jesus. His death on the cross is the price God pays to satisfy God's own wrath at humanity sinfulness. This is known as penal substitution. Jesus paid the price of our wrongdoing. This theology does not speak to me, nor does it reflect appropriately in my view, the biblical concept of atonement, or at one moment, which is the restoration of the intimate relationship between the creator and the created, the harmonious wholeness of all life, the relationship that binds all to all. I like the idea that God's creative spirit restores and heals, that it brings out joy from sorrow, life out of death.

Marisa Johnson 02:33

Since last July, we have offered shelter in our home to a Ukrainian mother and her two daughters fleeing the horror of war being visited in their country. Every day that they are with us, we witness the work of grace in the deep affection that holds us together as a new family unit, without a common language, with no clarity as to what the future holds for any of us. Yet, we are free to love and cherish each other, and experience a sense of joy and peace that defies the dreadful circumstances that have brought us together. In this, I see the redeeming power of God that can transform, heal, and set free. The birth of Jesus, which this year we shall celebrate twice, on 25th December, and seventh of January, to honor our Ukrainian family's Orthodox tradition, is the incarnation, the revelation of human divinity, and by extension, the Divinity inherent in all life. At the moment of Jesus's death on the cross, the curtain in the temple that separated humanity from God was rent from top to bottom, as both Mark and Matthew tell in their accounts of Jesus's death. And God's Spirit was no longer contained, separate. This is the ultimate restoration, the promise that we are no longer separated from each other, or God. It is the good news that we have so utterly failed to recognize and live up to.

John Jeremiah 04:16

This is John Jeremiah Edminster. In Richmond, Indiana. What does redemption mean to me? In it's biblical usage, it means the same as your ransom . It means I'm a prisoner or a slave until someone else pays for my freedom. And this has been my experience. I was freed at the initiative of my savior, Jesus Christ. It's possible that if I grown up in a different culture, I might have called him Adonai, Allah, or the Great Spirit, for he is the uncreated, unchanging light that lights every soul coming into the world. So let's him telling you what to call him.

John Jeremiah 05:02

The point is he's the light and everyone's conscience that informs us of our duty and enables us to do it as William Penn wrote, "and I lived most of my life and disobedience to that right there in my mind slavery."

John Jeremiah 05:18

Harriet Tubman of the Underground Railroad said, I could have helped a lot more slaves escape, if only they'd known they were slaves. And that ignorance is what keeps us in bondage to sin. But it's willful ignorance; we're in denial, but we're in a state of shame over things we've said and done. We're in denial that we don't do what we ought, and do do what we hate, often addictively. Consume that food, waste fossil fuel, indulge adulterous fantasies, and cheer over the death and downfall of war victims and designated bad guys. We take comfort in the fact that everyone around us seems to be in the same condition. Though, to tell the truth, it's not really comforting. We sense that there may be a judgement to face after death. And if there is that we will flee from it screaming in terror from the unavoidable truth.

John Jeremiah 06:17

This is the condition of everyone who, like Adam and Eve, has chosen to follow their own will, rather than the one infallibly Good Will, the will of God, which is to say that we're fallen; we're sinners and are now powerless to pull ourselves out of sin. Fortunately, there is a Redeemer indwelling each one of us ready to respond when we're ready to give up self will and asked to be guided by the will of God. That Redeemer can and will teach us how to walk in the light