

Quaker Institute for the Future 2003-2022

A Memoir and an Appreciation

Keith Helmuth

Dear QIF Board Members,

May 2022

The time has come for me to conclude my participation in Quaker Institute for the Future as a member of the Board of Trustees. My term expires at the 2022 annual meeting. In taking this step, I would like to pass on a cultural memoir and a statement of appreciation from my nearly two decades of association with QIF.

It will be nineteen years in June that Ed Dreby and I convened the weekend gathering of Quaker economists, ecologists, and public policy professionals at Pendle Hill that led to the formation of Quaker Institute for the Future. The theme of the gathering was the increasingly catastrophic conflict between the economic behaviour of our society and the integrity of earth's ecosystems. We asked what witness and testimony Quakers might bear for what amounts to an adaptational failure that is rapidly degrading the biotic complexity of the commonwealth of life and casts an ominous trendline of breakdown and collapse over the social relationships and institutional arrangements that sustain human communities.

In the face of this adaptational failure, we posed the prospect of a Quaker contribution to the policy dialogue on the creation of an ecologically coherent and equitable economy. In preparation for this gathering, I drafted a prospectus for a Quaker "think-tank" that was circulated to the thirty-nine invited participants. This effort was prompted by the idea of building on the legacy of economist and social scientist, Kenneth Boulding, who, in his latter years convened a project he called Quaker Studies on Human Betterment. A working group emerged from the Pendle Hill gathering to follow up on my proposal. The working group met in August in Bar Harbor, Maine, to set up Quaker Institute for the Future.

Ed Snyder, recently retired from twenty-eight years of service as the Executive Secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation, mentored our working group through the details of formally establishing QIF. Under the leadership of Leonard Joy as Clerk, QIF was subsequently incorporated in California as a non-profit, scientific and educational institute. In addition to Leonard Joy, current QIF Board members who were "present at the creation" are Gray Cox, Phil Emmi, and Elaine Emmi.

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From the beginning, the focus of concern that brought the original Board members together was the mounting conflict between the growth-insistent, capital-driven, extractive economic system and the ecological integrity of earth's life support processes. It was perfectly clear that an ecologically dysfunctional mode of human adaptation was progressively disrupting, degrading, and destroying the various terrains and ecosystem processes that made earth a hospitable environment for the flourishing of the commonwealth of life. In addition, it was also clear that the same extractive and exploitative mindset that was laying waste biospheric ecologies was being applied with increasing sophistication to what had come to be called "human resources."

QIF came into existence and developed at the time when the movement to stop the destruction of earth's life supporting ecologies merged with the social justice movement and has become the EcoJustice Movement. It had become clear that these movements were confronting two faces of the same economic system—a system designed to disregard the destruction of earth's ecosystems and to abandon the social mandate of equitable access to the means of life. This global economic system now functions primarily to sequester the control of resources and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small strata of elite operators.

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The earth science evidence for planetary degradation when QIF was established in 2003 was already ecocidal and had been for a long time. Numerous research organizations, educational efforts, and activist movements contending with this dire reality were already in play, some for decades, others newly emerging. None-the-less, we were led to a sense that the Quaker tradition of ethical guidance for the common good had a perspective and potential contribution to the EcoJustice movement that should not be neglected. QIF's early board meetings were exercises in discernment around program and process. At one point in our deliberations on the conflict between economics and ecology Phil Emmi was struck by the sense of an opportunity—a kind of opening. He sat up in his chair and said with emphasis, "We need Quaker testimonies for an organic world." I thought, yes; as savvy as we may be about "greening" our way life, the question of a fully rounded and deeply assimilated ecological understanding often remains unexplored. Friends testimonies, extended into the ecological worldview, offer an excellent opportunity to explore the concepts, relationships and behaviors that flow from a human-earth relationship centered in the integrity of Creation. I went home and wrote an essay that responded to Phil's insight that was eventually published in Friends Journal. ¹

¹ "Quaker Testimonies, Ecological Understanding, and a Moral Economy." Friends Journal, December, 2007. Full text access here: <https://www.friendsjournal.org/2007160/>

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At one of our board meetings held in Philadelphia, Phil was billeted, along with others, in the home of Patricia McBee and Brad Sheeks. He arrived after Pat had gone to bed, so he was a new face at the kitchen table when she appeared in the morning. Brad was serving breakfast. Pat, in her forthright manner, said, “Who are you and why are you here?” This, coming from Pat, who I knew well, was a genuine question. Without missing a beat, Phil looked up from his coffee and replied, “I’m Phil Emmi and I’m here because the economy is betraying the future and Quakers should do something about it.” Pat was pleased with the answer and it seemed to me, Phil had just set up the perfect context for our board meeting agenda.

At another point, Gray Cox observed that Friends have a Meeting for Worship and a Meeting for Worship for the conduct of business; how about, he asked, a *Meeting for Worship for the conduct of research*. The concept struck a chord out of which QIF developed a method of collaborative practice and a discipline of communal discernment. Gray’s 2014 QIF Focus Book, *A Quaker Approach to Research*, reflects on the philosophy of this practice and on QIF’s first ten years of experience with its exercise.

In 2006, founding Board member Peter Brown—professor in the School of Environment, the Department of Geography, and the Department of Natural Resources Sciences at McGill University—obtained a private grant to fund a three year Moral Economy Project (MEP) for QIF. Peter retired from the board and took on the organizing and conducting of this project, which included weekend workshops that brought together groups of participants drawn to the concept of the project’s theme and its Quaker ethos.

Ed Dreby participated in one of these workshops as did Tom Head, professor of economics at George Fox University and a QIF board member at the time. If my memory is correct, it was through participation in the MEP, that Geoff Garver became a member of the QIF Board.

By the summer of 2007, Peter had taken the material contributed to the collaborative discernment of the workshops and created the first draft of a book. It was structured around five basic questions about the economy: What is the economy for? How does it work? How big is too big? What’s fair? How can it best be governed? All this, Peter had packed into a long first chapter and then proceeded to a detailed discussion of various related issues and themes in subsequent chapters.

With this manuscript in hand, Peter convened a series of focus groups from his professional contacts and gave the draft a test run. This is where I entered the MEP process. I attended the focus group convened at the University of Maryland where Peter had been a Professor of Public Policy in the School of Public Affairs, and had established the School’s Environmental Policy Programs. In addition, he had the distinction of having recruited Herman

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Daly, a senior scholar in the field of ecological economics, to the University of Maryland, which, of course, meant this august personage was sitting at the table when our focus group convened.

Each of the eight participants provided their assessment of the manuscript, which was mostly positive but with some reservation about the density of the writing and a question about the audience for whom it was being written. One respondent said that in revising the manuscript we should think about writing it for first year university and college students. If we used that audience as a guide, the book would be accessible to the general reader. That proved to be excellent advice. A professor of law said she has been looking for a book like this for her course on International Environmental Governance and if we get this book published she will use it. That was encouraging.

Herman Daly spoke last. He looked at Peter and said, “I think the manuscript should be shredded.” Peter, who knew Herman well, didn’t know what to say, but something in the manner of how this blow was delivered signalled there was more to come. Sure enough, Herman followed up by saying, “This book is so important you should start again and rewrite it.” So the focus group was a success and we had our marching orders.

I had my reservations as well, which I now shared with Peter after the focus group concluded. He was a good writer but had a penchant for acerbic phrases when he wanted to give particular emphasis to the wilful stupidities and criminal greed of capitalism’s worst excesses. I told him I didn’t disagree with anything he’d written, but in the interest of appealing to the range of readers we want the book to reach there are ways of saying what you want to say that will come across better than the sharp rhetorical jabs populating the current manuscript.

I wasn’t sure how he would react, but he was grateful I had brought this up. “OK, Keith, he replied. “You take out all the burrs and thistles.” With this, I had my editing orders and didn’t hesitate. Thereafter, Peter and I worked closely, along with Geoffrey Garver, Robert Howell, and Steve Szeghi on rewriting the manuscript. (Robert Howell is a Quaker from New Zealand and an ethical investment professional. Steve Szeghi is a professor of economics at Wilmington College and an eco-justice activist.)

Meanwhile, Peter had found an interested and responsive editor at Berrett-Koehler Publishers in San Francisco, Johanna Vondeling. She was so responsive that she gave us an editorial directive that changed the structure of the book in an important way. After reviewing the manuscript she gave us these instructions: “Your five questions about the economy are the heart of your book. You have dealt with all of them in the first chapter. If you can write a chapter on each question, and do it in 200 pages, that’s the book I want to publish.” Her enthusiasm for our

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project was encouraging. Her editorial advice was clarifying. It gave us a simplified work plan that made sense.

With this structural reorientation in mind, Geoff and I joined Peter at his farm home in Quebec on a snowy weekend in January of 2008 for a working session to begin revising and compiling the new chapters into a new manuscript. I had already written most of a new Introduction and had started a new draft for the first chapter—“What’s the Economy For?” I was also working on a revision of the second chapter—“How Does It Work?” that Peter had drafted. (Remember the “burrs and thistles.”)

We started our working weekend with a time of centering and proceeded under what felt to all three of us like a covering of guidance. I spent most of Saturday night sitting up in bed with my IBM ThinkPad composing from a context of collective discernment that rolled so easily onto the keyboard that it was nearly rooster time before I turned off the light and rolled into the down comforter to catch a couple hours sleep. By morning light, the snow was even deeper and Peter’s coffee seemed even stronger.

We shared what we had accomplished, reviewed what had yet to be done, and by Sunday afternoon had allocated assignments and laid out a plan for finishing the book that included Robert Howell and Steve Szeghi. The rest happened by email communication. Peter and I collaborated on finishing chapter two, which is where the earth systems science and the ecological context of human adaptation come in. Geoff, with Peter’s assistance and with input from Robert and Steve, took control of much of the rest of the book: chapter three on scale and boundaries (How Big is Too Big?); chapter four on equity (What’s Fair?); and chapter five on governance (How Should the Economy be Governed?). Leonard Joy participated in this last stage of manuscript preparation in a consultative capacity.

Johanna was happy with the result. But we had not yet settled on a title and B-K was ready to go to print. She set up a conference call in which we all participated. We had to come up with a title. After considering several unsatisfactory options, she consolidated our attention by saying, “All the way through this book you repeatedly refer to the concept of ‘right relationship.’ It’s central to your whole way of thinking about what makes for a moral economy. How about using it for the title of the book?”

A silence ensued, but it was not an uncomfortable silence. I guess you could say it was a “pregnant silence”. Another stroke of editorial genius had been offered. I was the first to speak. “That’s perfect, but we need a subtitle that’s equally prominent on the cover to let people know what the book is about. Otherwise, it may be shelved in the marriage counselling section at

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bookstores.” From five phones, laughter; I then said, “How about ‘Building a Whole Earth Economy’ for a subtitle? Unanimous assent rolled in. We had our title and subtitle.

One detail remained to be approved—cover design. After a several rounds of email attachments for our consideration, we had another conference call with Johanna and agreed on the cover. The designer had gotten the message; the subtitle was displayed in only slightly smaller font than the title.

I intervened on one more detail; put the names of the two lead authors on the cover and all of us on the title page. Putting all five authors on this cover would be a graphic *faux pas*. In addition, it would create the impression of a book written by a committee, which, from a marketing point of view, weakens its display presentation. It was not a book written by a committee. It was written under the guidance of a collaborative discernment process and assisted by excellent editorial advice.

My suggestion was agreed to and *Right Relationship* went to print with Peter and Geoff’s names on the cover, plus an endorsement by Jimmy Carter. Endorsements by Gus Speth, Steven Rockefeller, and Elizabeth Dowdeswell appeared on the back cover. Inside the front cover it carried four pages of ringing endorsements from Richard Norgaard, Herman Daly, Maurice Strong, Curt Meine, John Ehrenfield, David Orr, Peter Barnes, Nina Leopold, and Shelia Abed, among others. Tom Lovejoy, founder of the PBS documentary series, *Nature*, wrote the Foreword. Peter Brown was well connected in the world of ecological economics, environmental activism, and public policy and he drew on his connections for these endorsements. Herman Daly must have considered his advice well taken; his accolade trumpeted, “This book should sell a million copies.”

Berrett-Koehler did an initial printing of 7500 copies, which is not a big number, but respectable for a book of this type. They did a second printing and the book remains in print. *Right Relationship* was picked by a number of study groups and was chosen by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for its “One Book One Yearly Meeting” reading program for 2009. It was reviewed favourably in several journals and by a few online bloggers that we happened learn about. These are just what came to our attention. Peter did a series of radio and newspaper interviews.

I spent the spring and summer of 2010 making presentations at six Yearly Meetings, which were as many as I could work into the seasonal schedule of sometimes overlapping Yearly Meetings. One of the most touching appreciations we received was from a young woman at the annual gathering of the New York Yearly Meeting. Geoff Garver had joined me for this event. After we completed our joint presentation, she stood up and, with tears in her eyes, thanked us for writing such a positive and hopeful book. She said she had been struggling with whether or not to have children and our book had made her more hopeful about the future.

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The Justice and Peace Commission of the Canadian Council of Churches—of which I was member representing Canadian Yearly Meeting at the time—invited me to make a presentation on *Right Relationship* at a meeting convened in Ottawa for Parliamentarians and their legislative assistants. A colleague on the Commission, who was leaving for Mozambique and a teaching position as a professor of economics, told me he was taking an extra copy of *Right Relationship* with him for the college library. A contingent of Canadian Quakers presented Michael Ignatieff, the leader of the Liberal Party at the time, with a copy of *Right Relationship* following a meeting with him in Ottawa.

We learned that *Right Relationship* was being used in Poland as a text in an English language learning class. An enthusiastic Russian scholar told us he intended to translate the book into Russian, but this has not been confirmed.

I recount these efforts at promotion and the responses we know about to indicate something of the effect *Right Relationship* has had among people who read books. It's a small, random sample, beyond which we can reasonably imagine many more examples of readers who have been thoughtfully affected by the book—many pebbles, dropped in many ponds with ripples spreading to unknown shores. That's the pleasure of writing and publishing books. An early American New Jersey publisher and book peddler, Parson Weems (1794-1825) captured it well when he wrote: "I have burned ever brighter with a book vending enthusiasm."

The first QIF Focus book was also published in 2009. *Fuelling Our Future* rose from a series of consultations convened by Ed Dreby during 2007-2008 that brought together a variety of energy experts to dialogue and discern on our energy future. The research findings, expert opinion, and the detailed dialogue/discernment reports were assembled, edited, and compiled into a succinct presentation of the consultations by Judy Lumb. It was a project of extended discernment and now, some 14 years later, *Fuelling Our Future* still bears a cogent message in both its process and content. I think my chronology is correct when I say this project brought Judy into the QIF Board, and we all know what this has meant for the Institute's publishing program. Twelve Focus books later, Judy is still in QIF's publishing wheelhouse.

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It was in conversation on the drive from Ben Lomond Quaker Center back to Berkeley after a QIF sponsored weekend workshop on The Moral Economy that Charlie Blanchard used the phrase "the ethics of right relationship". This hit me like the throwing of a switch. It jumped the illumination of "right relationship" from 100 to 300 watts.

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When we tagged QIF's flagship book with the title, *Right Relationship*, we were, of course, thinking primarily of the subsidiary relationship of human economic behaviour to the terrestrial and biospheric boundaries within which it operates, along with the social context of equitable access to the means of life, which extends to the whole commonwealth of life—that structure of biodiversity which has emerged from earth process and functions as a self-nourishing, self-perpetuating, and self-governing of phenomenon of the planet.

That's a pretty broad sweep, but when Charlie spoke of the "ethics of right relationship" it tripped my consciousness of the expression into a new appreciation of its reach and its functional utility as a framework of guidance. The experience was on par with my long ago reading the philosophical works of Albert Schweitzer and encountering his articulation of "the ethics of reverence for life."

In his quest for the foundations of ethics, Albert Schweitzer conducted an exhaustive and unsuccessful search through all the cultural systems of the world seeking a coherent basis for ethics. He then moved on to a rigorous but ultimately negative analysis of the great philosopher's attempts to articulate a credible basis for ethical guidance. After being intellectually defeated by his efforts, he was opened to his cardinal insight while *not thinking*, but rather contemplating the teaming panorama of life before him on a river voyage from his clinic to another Congo village for the delivery of medical services. "Reverence for life" came to him as the state of consciousness in which a coherent and durable basis for ethical guidance can be found.

He wrote that the "iron door" blocking his efforts had "opened". His quest, thereafter, was in the field of articulation and application. In so doing he addressed the human appropriation of biotic resources—the taking of life for sustenance—with a masterstroke of guidance. He wrote in his autobiography, *Out of My Life and Thought*, that a farmer who has spent the day mowing down a field of hay (in those days that meant with a scythe) should be careful on his way walking home to not idly and unnecessarily strike off the head of even one wayside flower. This is mindful living.

We live in a mutually nourishing biotic system. The ethics of reverence for life, as articulated by Schweitzer, cautions us—no more than needed. "No more than needed", indeed! Try lining that guidance up with the growth-insistent economy and the destruction of earth's biodiversity that "normal" living now routinely requires. It's enough to make one weep.

The ethics of *reverence for life* and ethics of *right relationship* together lift the veil on a flowering landscape of readaptation in which a social economy of adequate access to the means of life under the governance of "no more than needed" provides a bountiful and satisfying way of life. This is not fantasy. We know this kind of readaptation works because there are examples of it that are flourishing and a movement for scaling up is underway. It's not about "simple living".

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There is nothing simple about it. It's about discipline and hard work. It's a calling to solidarity with the commonwealth of life in the interests of survival.

What comes after the digital era when the server "farms" of AI have all gone silent? At the heart of the biosphere photosynthesis and metabolism and a resurgence of earth process are sure to flourish. It may not happen in ways that make life easy for humans, but that's adaptation for you.

Earth process is not necessarily our friend. But humans have been mostly very smart for a very long time about adaptation. There have been failures that we know about, and we are in the middle of one now. But the more we tack with the guidance of reverence for life and right relationship, the better it's likely to be for our descendants as they navigate the storms of collapse and the choppy seas of recovery, which is the best scenario I can envision.

My experience, triggered by Charlie's speaking of the "ethics of right relationship", was not so dramatic as Schweitzer's opening to "reverence for life, but it launched me into a realization that the concept QIF had put forward in its new book translated into a lens of consciousness and a tool of analysis that had the potential to become a cultural meme.²

I have considered carefully whether this is an exaggeration, but I think not. Although I have no recorded statistical evidence, I have kept a mental score card for the frequency with which "right relationship" has been used, 1) in the writing by Quakers I have seen in the last decade or so, and 2) in the literature of the eco-justice movement generally. Obviously, I have seen but a small portion of Quaker and eco-justice literature during this time, but in what I have seen I know the use of "right relationship" has definitely increased.

Now it would be a monumental exaggeration to think the spreading adoption of our book's key concept could be attributed to its publication, but it is not farfetched to understand that QIF and its Moral Economy Project picked up on the ambiance of a new and more comprehensive way of understanding and addressing the human-earth relationship, and that the emergence of "the ethics of right relationship" is one of the flags being flown ever higher over the consciousness of the readaptation required to stop the destruction of the commonwealth of life and create new

² At the end of his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins introduced the concept of the "meme" as a step in understanding the uniqueness of human culture. Dawkins proposed the "meme" as an analogy to the "gene" as a way of helping to understanding the dynamics of human cultural evolution. A meme is to cultural life as a gene is to biological life. A meme is a unit of self-replicating cultural guidance that spreads, viral-like, from imagination to imagination. A meme is a discrete package of cultural information, insight, and understanding that, in story form, replicates specific elements of culture within populations, between populations, and from generation to generation

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systems of biologically coherent and socially equitable human settlement at sustainable scales in appropriate terrestrial habitats—a tall order, but nothing less will do.

With that sentence, I should probably stop writing, but I hear Ellen in the kitchen preparing a fresh pot of morning coffee, and I have a few more observations on my theme.

From my monitoring of both activist and academic literature, I think it fair to say that “right relationship” has turned into a cultural meme and that is why its use is significantly spreading. But more than this, “right relationship” is also a central concept in Confucian and Buddhist traditions, and is strongly evident in the respect with which many Indigenous peoples honour the whole Creation.

Within the Judeo-Christian-Humanist tradition, Quakerism uniquely seized on the “ethics of right relationship”, which was brought to a fully rounded expression by John Bellers³ and John Woolman. John Bellers’ economic and social justice thinking powerfully influenced Robert Owen, the founder of the Cooperative Movement. Bellers was cited by Karl Marx “as a veritable phenomenon in the history of political economy”. John Woolman was also an observer and analyst of economic behaviour and a proto-ecologist who saw and called out the wrong relationship of not only slavery but of landowners who degraded the fertility of the soil by maximizing short-term wealth accumulation.

So there is lot behind and surrounding the rise of “right relationship” to the status of a cultural meme. It did not come *sui generis* into the Quaker lexicon. It is rooted in a variety of contexts, which extends the range of its recognition and increases the subtlety of its penetration to both the cognitive and emotional levels of assent. I think it fair to say the way “right relationship” rose within QIF’s Moral Economy Project and became focused in the project’s book, appears to have helped stir a remembrance among Friends and seed a resonance that is now self-propagating, which is what an effective meme does.

As we move this consideration into the wider contexts of the eco-justice movement and public policy dialogue, we know the influence QIF and its flagship book is likely small, but I keep two things in mind: 1) we can *never really know* the extent to which our work will continue to set

³ See my study, “John Bellers and the Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism” published as a chapter in *Quakers, Politics, and Economics*, edited by David R. Ross and Michael T. Snarr. Philadelphia, PA: Friends Association for Higher Education, 2018. A somewhat different version of this essay was presented in the Quaker Studies program of Canadian Yearly Meeting in 2008 with the title, “The Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism Revisited: From Kenneth Boulding to John Bellers”. The full text can be accessed at [https://quaker.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism Revisited.pdf](https://quaker.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Evolutionary_Potential_of_Quakerism_Revisited.pdf)

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up resonances that yield guidance; 2) we *do know* the outsize effect a small, continuing presence of Quakers has had in the world. There are good reasons to be assured this is still the case.

There is, however, a caveat that bears down on me as I step back; the wholesale destruction of earth's ecosystems and its commonwealth of life by the capital-driven, industrial-consumer economies of the world are like nothing we have ever encountered before. Over the span of QIF's nineteen years the crisis has only intensified and is now at the point where earth system scientists openly admit they are terrified at not just the prospect of the future but with the vortex of the present into which the elite operators of the global political economy are plunging the commonwealth of life in order to increase their accumulation of wealth and control of resources.

Three features of this entrenched and highly versatile transnational system have become especially evident in the last two decades.

1) The monetary system that enables the economy's operation is a debt trap flung like a net over every aspect of societal and commercial functioning; it is a trap that structures and drives economic behaviour into the quest for unremitting growth. The operators of the system literally have no choice. A monetary system in which legal tender is issued into circulation through a structure of debt sets up a logic of decision making from which the managers of finance can not deviate and to which economic actors must conform.

2) The top operators who control resources and direct the decision making that drives the economy have decided that sharing the wealth of the economy in a way that provides equitable access to the means of life is not in the cards for the future they foresee. They are not stupid about climate change and the prospect of ecological and societal collapse along with mounting civil violence. Control of resources and enclaves of wealth is their ticket to a triage system and fortress strategy with which they expect to weather the storm that is breaking over the viability of the human species. The rich are mounting their own "extinction rebellion" in which they plan to evade the catastrophe while a large segment of humanity, along with a significant portion of life's commonwealth goes under the gun of adaptation failure. Even the decision makers at various levels of economic behaviour who are not consciously thinking this way are constrained by the logic of the capitalist system to operate within this worldview.

3) The decision to abandon all sense of human solidarity, which is now increasingly evident in the cleavage the rich have thrust between their interests and the common good, is not unlike the mentality of organized crime as it has come to flourish across the planet in recent times. A nagging sense of linkage between organized crime and the top managers of the global economy, along with certain political operators, is being confirmed by serious research and the investigative

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work of journalists. Most notable, at the moment, is the case of Vladimir Putin and the Russian oligarchs. But across the planet, in various jurisdictions where organized crime has settled in, political corruption and economic behaviour that is essentially criminal is increasingly manifest. How many Indigenous activists protecting their home territory against the incursions of mining and hydrocarbon drilling have been murdered. Investigative journalists are now regularly assassinated.

The distinction between governance and criminal behaviour is eroding. The support for Trump is an ominous indication of the extent to which this malignancy has infected the U.S. political culture. From the time Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of the democratic government of Germany, it was only three years until the Nazi political party convinced the majority of the electorate to put it in power. German democracy disappeared overnight. Hitler told the German people what he was going to do about a failing democracy. They approved, and he did it. In their view, they were “taking their country back”. Sound familiar?

And so I end where I began, with a sense of unprecedented and inexplicable breakdown of ecological, economic, and social order—a failure of adaptation. Whatever this means for QIF, I can only say keep on doing what you are doing and do it the best you can. I say the same thing for myself. I long ago determined I would never give up the calling of care for the earth and human betterment. I used a quote from Vaclav Havel as an epigraph in my 2015 book, *Tracking Down Ecological Guidance* and it serves me well once again at this point in my determination to remain engaged in what Tom Berry calls, “The Great Work”. *Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.*

With all good wishes for QIF’s continuing work and a heap of appreciation for the nineteen years I’ve been on this Quaker ship. No better place to be in stormy weather.

Keith

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