

Pierre Lacout and Quaker silence

"Pierre Lacout is probably the most famous of Swiss Quakers, he is, however, one of the least known among the Quakers themselves." (Edward Dommen)



Pierre Lacout was born in Rodez in 1923 and died in Lausanne in 2009. His father was a blacksmith, and a poet. The family was very Catholic, two uncles were priests (one of them a teacher). Two other uncles were killed during the First World War. Pierre was the last of five children. His oldest brother died of diphtheria; Pierre also caught it and his health remained fragile throughout his life.

During World War II, he made gunpowder for the Germans in one of the Vichy Régime's compulsory "youth camps" (which the Germans simply called "French labour service") When the powder magazine was bombed by the British, he sheltered under a bridge, then hid in a Trappist monastery to escape the Germans who were after him.

In 1946, he did his novitiate at the Carmel of Agen. In 1951 he was appointed professor of dogmatics, then spent a year in Rome at the Teresianum (a theological college).

After returning to the south of France, with the agreement of his superiors he began a psychoanalysis in Geneva with Charles Baudouin (at the *International Institute of Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy* which Baudouin had founded in 1924, after having taught at the *Rousseau Institute* headed by Pierre Bovet, a close friend of the Quaker group in Geneva. Charles Baudouin was well known in French Catholic circles).

In 1956, he reconsidered his vocation and left for Paris. He worked at the *Maison du livre français*, then for two years in an institute of psychotherapy.

We then find Pierre Lacout in Lausanne, where he marries Marianne, who already has a daughter. He will bring her up as if she were his own daughter. He taught French literature and Latin at the Collège Pierre Viret (a distinguished private school) for about fifteen years. Pierre took Swiss nationality in 1969.

Soon after settling in Lausanne he established close relations with Swiss Quakers: in 1962, he was the speaker at the Quarterly Meeting in French-speaking Switzerland. His talk was entitled "From the Carmelite Experience to the Quaker Mystical Experience".

He became a member of the Lausanne Quaker group at the Yearly Meeting of May 1964. In 1967 he participated in the World Assembly of Friends (another name for Quakers) in the USA

He often spoke to Quaker audiences. In 1966, he spoke at the Swiss Yearly Meeting on "Teilhard de Chardin, a seer" (the Geneva Quaker group had organized a series of lectures on Chardin in 1963). In 1967 he gives a lecture at the Yearly Meeting on "The mystery of Jesus"; in 1968, he spoke on "Quakerism in a changing world", basing his talk

on the experience of George Fox. In 1969, at the Conference of European and Near East Friends in Birmingham, UK, he speaks on "What does worship mean for me?" At the FWCC (Friends World Committee for Consultation) Triennial in Sweden in 1970, he spoke on "George Fox: A Prophet for the Twentieth Century". In 1976, he spoke on the Quaker Robert Barclay, at a Quarterly Meeting in Lausanne.

Several of Pierre Lacout's writings were published in Quaker journals (*Entre Amis, Vie Quaker, Friends Quarterly, Quaker Monthly*), but the two little books that made Pierre Lacout famous, *Dieu est silence (God Is Silence, 1969)* and *Souffle que me veux-tu ? (1977)*, he chose to publish with *Éditions Ouverture*, a Protestant publisher founded by a former pupil of his.

His texts are inspiring. *God is silence* is widely read within the Quaker movement and beyond. It has been reprinted in French many times (6th edition 1997), translated into English (1970, 1971, reprinted in 2001 and 2005), Spanish (1970), German (1975), Esperanto (1987), Dutch (in the 1970s, 1985, 1988), Danish and Norwegian (1990), Russian (1995), Swedish and Polish (2019).

Pierre Lacout wrote in the *Semur Vaudois* in 1963-1966 a series of articles, some of them on the theme of myth. He spoke on "Community" during a retreat at Grandchamp in 1965 on the diaconal ministry. His manuscript of a "Pedagogy of the Heart", written in 1973, is still unpublished. In 1976 he published an article in *L'Essor* entitled "Saint Copernicus". He wrote the accompanying text for a publication of illustrated texts and poems by children and adolescents of the *Groupe romand de l'école moderne* in 1978.

If *Dieu est silence* and *Souffle que me veux-tu?* are well-known in circles engaged in spirituality and mysticism, they remain little known to the general public ... and to Quakers!

Michel Mégard, 2009-2019 (with help from Marianne Lacout)
English shortened version by Edward Dommen, 2019