

## Book Review

Wayfaring: A Guide to Guidance

Reviewed by Adrian Skelton

### **Wayfaring: A Guide to Guidance**

**By Larry Lynn Southard**

**Self-published, 2023, 219pp**

**Available from Quaker Book Sales \$54 plus \$8 postage and packing**

<https://quakers.nz/deepen-ako-atu-an%C5%8D-%E2%96%BC/publications/quaker-book-sales>

This is an ambitious book, lavishly produced in a first, self-published edition of 450 copies. It references both the Christian gospels (including the Gospel of Thomas) and Daoist sources. Larry, the author, was raised in North Carolina and went to Ireland (Co. Cork) after being refused conscientious objector status during the Viet Nam War.

The book's central structure is *Advices and Queries*, with 107 of the former and 73 of the latter, together comprising just over half of the book. The Appendix (strictly speaking, six appendices) includes 'Was Jesus a Taoist?', an exegesis of John 14:6 (*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...*) and 'Quaker Business Meeting Basics' – doing business is doing God, apparently.

Although the author does not want to get in the way of *your* following The Way, he is still quite prescriptive. But then, as he says, we are 'possibly the only creatures capable of acting contrary to their Way'.

His early conclusion is that 'God' is 'Supremely Being rather than a Supreme Being' and we are continually urged to experience God as verb. 'Let life come to you' (Advice 27). I like his distinction between a 'routine' – which functions as a backdrop to life – and a 'rut', which 'streams activity through a runnel'. Nature encourages us to 'enter the flow'. Larry's poetical theology can sometimes get a little heavy: 'The Way is the Mother of eternal Light. The Light is a Teacher...'

The author covers traditional Quaker testimonies such as 'peace' and 'simplicity', but he has his own list of the Way's virtues: humility, compassion, non-attachment, non-interference, passivity, submissiveness. I'm not sure where that leaves social action... but then he also says that a 'confrontation is a dance'!

The Queries open with the God question – or questions: can we define God? who was Jesus? what are the sources of spiritual authority? From Query 55 onwards, I am increasingly aware of repetition, since the Queries pick up on the Advices.

All is fairly orthodox and generally theist. As with *Faith and Practice* this guide is unlikely to be read continuously: more of a lucky dip, carefully cross-referenced. 'Practical Wayfaring' – he writes in Advice 10 – 'is to flow like water'. He might be pleased to know that, in Aotearoa, we are long familiar with the image: that spirit, *wairua*, is a second incarnation of water.