

Faith Comment for 23rd October

Submitted on behalf of Petersfield Quaker Meeting

by Geoff Pilliner

Division Will Only Lead to Conflict

My grandson was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. He had no rash, no pain, no disfigurement. It was just that his social responses were not always classed as normal. The diagnosis was in fact helpful to my grandson, but it nevertheless illustrates an important point. There was a hard distinction between those with Asperger's and those without. Give it a name, a classification, and my grandson was divided off from those not classified as Asperger's. It created a division. There was no middle ground of those who might have a bit of Asperger's but not enough to note. You had it or you didn't. Giving something a name, a category, is divisive and polarises opinion, ignoring the middle ground, preventing negotiation, compromise, divergent thinking, all the tools that lead to a unification of approach. Nowadays we talk not about having Asperger's but being on a 'spectrum', which is much better, but with Remainers and Brexiteers we name and divide, creating a major issue in British politics.

But why should people of faith be concerned? Every major religious group, and others such as Humanism and Socialism, are concerned for the wellbeing of the whole of society. Christianity asserts that you should love your neighbour as yourself, making clear that your neighbour may be someone you might not like or respect. Everyone is precious, a child of God. It is not easy, as the Christian Church has proved, to put these principles into practice. But our humanity demands we keep working for a just society. So we need to forget the stereotypes, forget the classifications, forget Parties and Pressure Groups, and look more at people as individuals with individual needs. By doing so, we might just find it a lot easier to solve our differences and problems, to everyone's benefit