Bearing one another: *Alastair McIntosh's* Thought for the Week

'The polarity has reversed.'

I am grateful to The Friend, a Quaker weekly, for republishing this piece, originally a BBC Radio Scotland Thought for the Day broadcast 12 June 2025. However, presumably to pad it out to fit the page, two sub-edits were made that I feel changes the mood in ways I'd have preferred not. A NASB Bible translation referring to "slaves" (rather than "servants") has been added, and a the end "...I can offer you" may read a little patronising. Otherwise, I am very appreciative that they made known Ella Carmichael's portrait. This is from Vol. 3 of the Carmina Gadelica, p. xxi, free download: https://bit.ly/CarminaGadelica3

Ella Carmichael, pictured in the Carmina Gadelica, published 1940

I have in my hand a magnetic compass that has lost its bearings. Last Sunday, while my wife and I were out walking in the hills above Glasgow, we noticed that the North had become South, and the South had wandered off North!

Probably, we'd left it too close to some electromagnetic field. The polarity has reversed, and apparently the only remedy is to stroke it gently with a powerful magnet, and remagnetise the needle back into the right alignment with reality.

I thought about that compass after the terrible school shooting last week in Austria.

One can only wonder what made that young man take the terrible decision to wreak such violence on his old school, and the pupils and teachers therein.

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Some would say: the threat of punishment. But like most readers of *the Friend*, I'm a Quaker. We call ourselves the Religious Society of *Friends*. John 15:15 comes to mind, where Jesus says, 'No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you' (NASB translation). It is as friends that we grow together into right relationships.

On such account, I've been reading a century-old obituary of Ella Carmichael, the Isle of Lismore scholar who helped her father, Alexander Carmichael, to edit his wonderful collection of old Gaelic incantations, the *Carmina Gadelica*, which was gathered in the Gàidhealtachd regions of Scotland between 1860 and 1909.'

The obituary describes Ella as having been: 'One of those people with whom it is easy to keep one's friendship in good repair.'

It made me think: you or I might lack the power to halt the senseless violence of the world. But each of us moves in, and helps create, the mental fields of those around us.

And so, perhaps I can offer you a compass bearing for the week: what best can we do, to keep in good repair, our friendships? ●

Alastair is from Glasgow Meeting.