



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
SECTION OF THE AMERICAS

Comité Mundial de Consulta
de los Amigos
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ABOUT THE WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP

The Wider Quaker Fellowship is a program of Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas. Through our mailings we seek to lift up voices of Friends of different countries, languages, cultures and Quaker traditions, and invite all to enter into spiritual community with Friends.

The Fellowship was founded in 1936 by Rufus M. Jones, a North American Quaker teacher, activist and mystic, as a way for like-minded people who were interested in Quaker beliefs and practices to stay in contact with the Religious Society of Friends, while maintaining their own religious affiliation, if any. Today, WQF Fellows live in over 90 countries, and include non-Friends, inquirers, Quakers living in isolated circumstances, and active members and attenders of Friends meetings and churches. Wider Quaker Fellowship depends on the financial support of its readers to provide this service.

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a program of Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas
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Learning to Go in Peace

COLIN SAXTON



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out. Yes, there are dangers inherent in this. But let me say from my own experience that many of us need help in our search for peace. Think about how long George Fox labored to hear Christ speak to his condition, almost longer than he could bear. All around him, seekers were waiting to find something that they could not find on their own. It was only as he and other Friends had the courage and humility to share their experience with others that they found a love, grace and peace that would not let them go. I speak to you as a person who longed to know the love of God, who was dying to find it. Along the way, I endured a suicide attempt, a drug overdose and a deep depression in my search for what turned out to be God. But for whatever reason I couldn't find God on my own. I needed a life lived before me, someone who incarnated the love of Christ AND who was willing to speak to me, to tell me where I might find this love.

- At different times this week I've heard you talk, sometimes seriously, sometimes in jest, about how to share who you are with a watching world. May I just say that signs, pamphlets, skywriting and spruced up Meetinghouses may have their place. The best means to convey God's Good News, however, is still this: incarnation. That is your work and call to continue to flesh out and embody the love and peace of God that has been revealed in Christ.
- Friends, the gospel of peace is Good News. It is life-changing! It is world-transforming! And it is worth sharing! As we go into the world as messengers of peace, what is our message and will we share it?

Bless you as go back to your homes and Meetings tomorrow. As you do, may you go in peace.

INTRODUCTION

This plenary address was given at the annual sessions to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) in August, 2008. We have edited it lightly, trying to maintain the sense of a talk rather than an essay or article.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Along with his work for NWYM, Colin spent sixteen years in pastoral ministry and seven years as an Adjunct Instructor at George Fox University. He has served on the boards of several non-profits including Right Sharing of World Resources, George Fox University, the Center for Peace Learning, Love INC., Yamhill County Christian Peacemakers, Peace and Social Concerns (NWYM), and Friendsview Retirement Community. Colin has had the privilege of traveling among Friends throughout the US and across the globe.

His educational background includes an undergraduate degree in psychology, a master's degree in theology/church history, and a doctoral degree in leadership/spiritual formation.

one to another? Do we confess our faults and offer genuine forgiveness when needed? Do we give preference to others over our own way?

- If we are as committed to integrity as we are to peace, and for the sake of newcomers who appear in our gatherings attracted by our message of non-violence, it is right to ask: *Are we at peace with one another?*

Finally, as we go into the world as messengers of peace, what is our message and will we share it?

- Is it simply a social strategy? A political ideology? A methodology for reducing violence? I hope it is all those things, but maybe it can also be much more.
- When Jesus said “blessed are the peacemakers,” he did not limit the peacemaking to only one kind. Neither did his disciples. For them, the message of peace included restoring the relationship between God and humanity. It meant leveling the many barriers we prop up between each other. It included the restoration of the creation as it states in Colossians 1. This message is shared, of course, not through coercive power or manipulation, but with great humility and great courage, through sacrificial self-giving, through our willingness to lay down our lives for others and by the proclamation and demonstration of our lives. And, yes, with our words.
- Friends, I know you are not “evangelical” by definition. Frankly, neither would I be if we are talking about the kind of evangelicalism bastardized by the religious right or caricatured through the narrow lens of our media. I am not asking you to be like that or to call yourselves “evangelical.” But may I implore you to consider being evangelistic? Share your good news! Tell your story of coming to peace, of that Life and Power that has turned you upside down and inside

my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I want comfort, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.”

- What we need—what the world needs—are not people of comfort but people who are being transformed. Not people who try to fit God into their lives but rather are willing to be re-fitted around God’s life in order to know the peace that frees us to be abundantly joyful, entirely fearless and always in trouble. *So, do we live in the power of that Life and Spirit we’ve been considering tonight?*

Second—Are we at peace with one another?

- I have been impressed with the spirit in which you have labored together this week. I know, too, that sometimes those of us who are most concerned about peace, especially issues of war and violence, often struggle mightily at home and in our meetings with being peaceable. I have heard this excused by Friends sometimes as a by-product of being impassioned, prophetic people; but I wonder...
- Our Mennonite friends sometimes use a discipline of elders speaking the words, “Are you at peace with one another?” in worship during the weeks leading up to the celebration of communion. I’ve always liked that tradition because it takes seriously Jesus’ words, “If you come to the altar and realize a brother or a sister has something against you, first go make it right, then come to worship God.” As a people who profess an ongoing experience of communion with the Living Presence, is it proved by what we possess in community? Do we take seriously the call to be reconciled

I want to thank you for the kind invitation to be with you this week. Northwest Yearly Meeting just finished its 116th annual sessions. We are mere *toddlers* compared to your long history and so it has been a joy and a learning experience to be among you.

I am particularly grateful for your willingness to wrestle with the peace testimony both this week and through your initiative with the gathering in January. Over and over in my travels, I run into people who have been inspired by Friends’ commitment to non-violence and our past efforts to make peace. But now in this season of world history, our peace testimony needs re-visioning, to be embodied in new ways and re-articulated to speak to the spiritual hunger and deep longing that so many non-Friends feel. It is nice to be able to say to others what Fox, Fell and Fry did; what Woolman did; what the American Friends Service Committee did during WWII. But what the world needs from us now is not a lesson in history, it needs us to **make** history, and show again that the Light really is the only power able to dispel the darkness. PYM’s work in this area has been and is vital.

You now know that I come from the evangelical/pastoral branch of Friends. Contrary to what you may have heard about us, I have only one (not three) heads, no fangs, and I have not thumped even one of you with my Bible in four whole days! That’s pretty good, wouldn’t you say? I will confess to you that I’ve lived awkwardly with those two words, “pastoral” and “evangelical,” since my involvement with Friends. They carry so much baggage, just as “liberal” and “unprogrammed” do in other places. But that’s not our topic tonight and you have welcomed me as a Friend. I am very grateful for that kindness.

One of the weaknesses of evangelical Friends, from my perspective, has been in this area of peacemaking. To our shame,

some in Evangelical Friends International (EFI) have jettisoned the peace testimony, which I find to be the ultimate irony. The group of Quakers that most strongly identifies with the Jesus of the Bible — the Prince of Peace, the One who sets us loose in the world to serve as ministers of reconciliation — it is those Friends who have sometimes lost sight of this spiritual truth. Tonight, I would apologize for all of us if I could. Instead, all I can tell you is that many of us are working diligently to see evangelical Friends reclaim the joy and burden of our shared call to make peace.

I came to Quakers partly out of the profound, experiential conviction that followers of Jesus are called to non-violence and active peacemaking. As a young adult I checked out both the EFI and Friends General Conference meetings in my area. I knew I desperately needed a spiritual home to help me live up to the Life I was coming to experience inwardly and found so richly described in the New Testament.

I knew myself well enough to know that I needed a community more vibrant and empowered than me — even just a little — if I was to have any chance of being transformed into the image of Christ or any shot at bearing faithful witness to the overwhelming mercy that had turned my life completely upside down. I cast my lot with NWYM, in part because I felt a very strong call to pastoral ministry and as far as I could see the unprogrammed meetings were not going to have a lot of job openings in the near future. So NWYM has been my spiritual home. They have loved me and my family, equipped me for ministry, listened patiently as I ranted and raved when we didn't quite live up to our own stated ideals, allowed me to fail and try again, and now have given me the privilege of serving as their superintendent.

I went to the PYM website this week to check out your queries on peacemaking. It is a great list of questions. Most of

longer his. He is dead to himself and now it is Christ who lives in him—fearless and free. He is at peace, able to face down a still violent world and not be afraid. I suspect Lazarus embodied the quality of life that Douglas Steere once described this way (I am paraphrasing a bit):

“Christians should be absurdly joyful, entirely fearless, and always in trouble!”

I don't know about you, but to me that sounds a lot like Lazarus.

I love all of our Quaker efforts to make peace—our legislative work, our public demonstrations, the training we offer in conflict resolution and mediation, the less obvious but equally important efforts in economic development, stewardship, medical care, and advocacy.

These are essential. My question, and again I aim it at myself more than any of you, is do I (do we) live in the power of that Life and Spirit that overcomes all war and, dare we say, all else that hinders us from God?

As you go from this place in peace may I offer you a few admonitions and queries?

Do you (Do I) live in the power of that Life and Spirit we've been considering tonight?

- As I was getting ready to become superintendent of my own Yearly Meeting, a Friend sent me a prayer she found in a book. It was her encouragement to me, to remind me that the best service I could offer our Yearly Meeting was to become who Christ is calling me to be. The prayer is a backdoor call to surrender ourselves to the Light. It says this:

“I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb

gathered around the table to enjoy a meal together. In verse 9, we find this:

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Folks, it seems, are eager to see Lazarus just as much as they are eager to see Jesus. No doubt some wanted to trust Jesus just as Lazarus trusted him. But then we get this other bit of news. It turns out many folks want to kill Lazarus just as much as they want to kill Jesus.

What is all this about? Is this a story gone horribly wrong, one where happily ever after fails? Or is there something wonderfully right about it, as Lazarus has finally become what we all are designed to be in Christ: truly at peace, a burning light, ready to go out into the world as an agent of change/minister of reconciliation just like Christ Himself?

Lazarus had been a friend and follower of Jesus for some time. But now, having faced death, his life takes on a new quality and character. Do you think he fears death or enemies or what others think any longer?

Or do you think, just maybe, he came through that experience with a new set of priorities? A new spirit of freedom? A profound sense of peace? An absolute confidence in the Life and Power of God who promises to be with us always? Of course he did!

Nietzsche once said something like this: If Christians wanted him to believe in Jesus, they'd have to start looking more resurrected. I think it is fair to say that Lazarus here is looking more resurrected, and people are noticing. You see, his life is no

them are strategic, asking Friends to consider the choices we might make in light of circumstances we are in. There is one query there, however, that is foundational (I think) to all the rest. You state it this way: Do I live in the power of that Life and Spirit that takes away the occasion of all wars?

Sit with that for just a moment again, will you? Do I live in the power of that Life and Spirit that takes away the occasion of all wars? Let's expand that just a bit. What about all fear? Do I live in the power of that Life and Spirit? Or how about all frenzy? All bitterness? All selfishness? All need to control? All need to be noticed? All need to get my way? All...??? Beyond how "I" am doing, how is PYM doing with these questions as a community of faith?

You know that the Hebrew Scriptures begin by picturing just such a life of freedom. "In the beginning" there was shalom, a way of life where all is well, where all is in right relationship, where there is enough. In this image, humanity is pictured walking in intimacy with God, like Friends going for a stroll in the cool of the day. Peace is seen in the complementary way that the man and woman relate to each other. There is such peace that each one even feels good about himself/herself, evidenced by the ability to be naked and unashamed. (Young Friends, don't try this at home or school; it makes folks very nervous...) And here is the icing on the cake: in the garden there is such a spirit of well-being that there is even harmony between humanity and creation. According to the biblical witness, God's original intent — long before brokenness muddled the loveliness of creation — is for shalom.

All throughout the Hebrew scriptures, we see the on and off again struggle of God's people trying to recapture that shalom either by their own methods (which usually only adds to their problems) or by once more learning to know, love, and walk with their God. One of my favorite ways this is described is

when Israel is reminded that God has called them to live in a spacious place:

- **Exodus 3:8** So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.
- **2 Samuel 22:20** God brought me out into a spacious place; God rescued me because God delighted in me.
- **Psalms 31:7** I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.

This spaciousness, and the freedom that accompanies it, is at the core of the Hebrew vision of salvation and deliverance. It is the opposite of being confined or controlled by anything outside of us or even something within us that is not God. This grace of God, as it is viewed in the Scripture, liberates captives, sets free the fearful, unchains the prisoner, cancels the debt of sinners, heals the broken and allows the righteous to live an unhindered life before God.

Not a bad picture of peace, is it? Much, much more than the absence of conflict, it is an unhindered, contented life lived before God and in the beloved community belonging to God. The paradox in all of this, however, is that Israel finds its greatest freedom and peace in its radical allegiance and submission to YHWH, in the confines of God's covenantal love, be they at home in the land of promise or living as aliens in a strange land. Their peace is not based on their circumstances, rather it comes through their faith/trust/union with the Living God.

As we move to the New Testament, along comes a rabbi. Some of us would say more than a rabbi: the Christ, the Incarnate Word of God spoken into the flesh of human history.

around them is shaken to the core, for no one dared dream this was possible. And yet here it is happening right before their very eyes.

You see this same sort of peaceful revolution happen again in Luke 7 with the woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears. She, "a sinner," was welcomed and accepted by Jesus in a setting where others were inclined to overlook or ignore her. You see her, overcome and overwhelmed by the mercy of Jesus, experience the most amazing transformation as she begins to act as one who is forgiven, who is welcome, who is acceptable to God despite what others have said about her and despite what she may have thought about herself for her whole life. To this woman, Jesus says, "Go in peace." Read this passage when you go home because there is a great unanswered question that I think the writer of Luke's gospel raises intentionally. When Jesus sends her away in peace, where will she go? Who will welcome her now? It is a passage that screams for the formation of a community so grounded in God's love and peace that "lost" sinners find a home where they are able to grow in into saints.

There is another place in the Bible where you don't actually read the phrase but I trust it was spoken. "Go in peace" was a common Hebrew blessing and it was at the heart of Jesus' invitation to others, so I am assuming it here. It is the story of Lazarus in John 11 and 12. You might recall that Jesus is summoned by Lazarus' sisters because their brother is sick. But Jesus cannot be hurried, and by the time he arrives it is too late; or so it seems. And though it has been a few days since Lazarus has passed away, Jesus calls to Lazarus' tomb and before a crowd of people a man's life is returned.

Now, often we leave the story of Lazarus at this point: a reunited family ready to live happily ever after. It's the feel-good movie of 30 A.D. But if you read on, in particular to John 12, you find Jesus and his friends meeting at Lazarus' home,

of truth, something that resonates deep within them, so much so that principalities and powers tremble.

Now, it might be that the language of the Lamb's War is an offense to some. But just as Fred Kauffman said on Wednesday evening that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was the end of all sacrifices, I would argue that the Lamb's War is the war to end all wars. As we learn to surrender ourselves/yield ourselves fully to that Life and Power that is our peace, all occasions for war and violence are no more.

I want to end this evening with a phrase often found in the Gospels. It was spoken by Jesus and later by others who followed in his steps. It is this: "Go in peace!" What might it mean for us to "go in peace"?

The hilarity of this phrase is that is usually gets spoken to a person whose life has just been turned on its head. You see it with the woman in Mark 5 who has been bleeding for many years and who dares to reach out and touch Jesus. This took great courage on her part because she was considered "unclean," and to touch someone else was a great offense. But Jesus allows it, declaring her "saved," that is, physically and spiritually healed. Her brokenness is mended. And then Jesus sends her away with what I view as both a command and an invitation: to go in peace. Not just freedom from inward anxiety, but the wholeness or completeness of life that comes from being brought into a right relationship with God and others. It is an astonishing invitation, one she never could have dreamed was possible. But now here, in the presence of Christ, a whole new way of life was opened to her.

I've seen this kind of transformation among Quaker women in Nepal. Women who have no voice, who are often abused and of no regard, now find their voice, are treated as equals, and receive a calling to ministry and leadership when they encounter the healing peace of Christ. And they glow! And the community

This Jesus proclaims a new day has arrived — the Reign of God present, right now, in their midst and in ours. It is the peaceable Kingdom where right-relatedness or righteousness is possible, where freedom from fear and even death is available and "enough-ness" is restored to a people inclined to fight over resources.

Jesus comes to invite us into that Life and Power that is our peace. *Did you hear that? He is our peace.* Oh sure, Jesus models non-violence for us. He embodies sacrificial love in a way we are to imitate. But more than that, Jesus says we're invited through the mix of God's grace and our active faith into a life with God. Through Him we "participate (as II Peter says) in the divine nature." Not that we become God but that "we become by grace," a 2nd century writer once said, "what God is by nature."

According to Jesus, this all begins by our turning from self to God. He says if you want to experience the peaceable Kingdom you need to repent (now there is a loaded word): to turn, to be radically re-oriented, to have your life flipped upside down and inside out, not by a new theology or a better philosophy or by trying harder or by proving ourselves, but through a fiery baptism. Literally, we are called into a deep initiation into the Spirit of God, who leads us along the way of peace. You see, when Jesus invited us into life under the reign of God he could have used the Greek word "*proselutos*," from which we get our word proselytize. But he's not asking for a change of religious affiliation, as if moving your membership from Baptist to Quaker matters one whit. No, it's not a "*proselutos*" he calls us to. Rather, it is a "*metanoia*," literally a metamorphosis of spirit and life. And this is not something we can do, but rather a work God will do in us as we yield.

It is in this context that Jesus dares to call us to peace. Peace with enemies; maybe even more miraculously sometimes peace with our Friends! Consider the first gathering of Friends that

Jesus brought around himself. Women, the poor, even a few rich folks like us. Fishermen, the very religious, the not-so-religious. Why, he even calls alongside himself a zealot and a tax-collector, bitter enemies in that culture. But right here in the same Friends Meeting they are together: a wild-eyed political zealot hoping to reclaim Israel's land from the hated Romans and a traitorous tax-collector, a Hebrew who had sold out to Rome in order to get rich himself. (It is no wonder zealots often pledged to kill tax-collectors if the opportunity ever arose. I'm sure Jesus may have had to sleep between those two some nights.) Only by God's grace and peace could these two men come out walking arm-in-arm as brothers, able to put aside their own agendas and biases to find a unity that transcended their diversity.

Friends, this is the power of the peaceable Kingdom, a sign that the Living God truly is present among us: when in Christ there is no longer Jew nor Greek, male nor female, Scythian or barbarian (there always seems to be at least one barbarian in the group, doesn't there?). "In Christ," which is the favorite Pauline way of describing that Life and Power at work in us, we discover a "bond of peace": the Holy Spirit that binds us together and makes us one.

Now none of this, of course, is new to Quakers. As I heard mentioned this week, the early Quaker writings include vivid language about the Lamb's War, something every Friend was invited to experience. This was the process of fiery baptism, a work of God that could never be reduced to a dunk in a pool or the sprinkling of water; no, this was the process of coming into the Light in order to have our lives radically re-ordered and infused by that Life and Power that makes all things new. Isn't that the way George Fox described it? When he "came up," as he said, "into the paradise of God," how did that occur? Through flaming sword — *a flaming sword!*

Read any of the great mystics in the Christian tradition and

you will find near unanimity on this subject. Almost all describe a process of transformation, beginning with something like a purging and then a movement toward illumination and finally a deep union with God. You'll also note as you read those mystics a shared conviction that very, very few of us ever come to union. Many of us, maybe most us, are still easing our way through purgation.

Sometimes, and I say this with all humility and directed mostly at myself, I wonder if Friends are often guilty of assuming union with God long before we ever feel the heat of the flaming sword?

Of course, the Lamb's War doesn't end with individual change. It can't! No, the Quaker vision of the Lamb's War moves into the relationships we share as Friends. We are a peculiar people, meant to be an alternative community, one that makes visible God's peaceable Kingdom through our love for each other, through our generosity with each other, through our willingness to be reconciled to each other, and in our becoming a gathered community around the Living Christ. Here we are talking about a real act of God, wouldn't you say? Look around the room for a moment and remember the beautiful words of George Fox who said, "Mind that which is eternal, which gathers our hearts together up to the Lord and lets us see that we are written in one another's hearts." I so hope this is true for you, not just in theory, but real in the way you relate to each other and minister together. May the Lamb's War level every barrier that may exist between you.

In the crucible of community people are transformed and relationships are made new. From there, we are sent out into our world with humility and courage as Children of the Light, as a peaceable people, maybe even as a valiant people willing to share the good news that we have come to experience. And so the Lamb's War spreads as others catch a glimpse or hear a ring