THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE
1981

WHAT JESUS MEANS TO ME
Jesus the Liberator

ROGER C. WILSON

About the Author

Roger C. Wilson has been an active member of the Religious Society of Friends for over fifty years in Manchester, London, Hull, Bristol and Yealand. Before World War II he was on the staff of the British Broadcasting Commission, and during the war worked as General Secretary of the Friends Relief Service. From 1951 to 1971 he was Professor of Education at Bristol. During this time he was a member of the Friends Service Council and served at the Quaker United Nations Office (New York) and the University of Malawi on short assignments. He became Clerk of London Yearly Meeting from 1975 to 1977.

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Early in 1976 I found myself a member of a small group of Bishops, Moderators, Mothers Superior and others who met for a week in a retreat house in the grounds of Windsor Castle to consider both how bishops and their like in other churches in fact exercise their responsibilities as leaders and how they should do so. The organizers said that they particularly wanted a Quaker in the group. We said we did not have that sort of animal. They said any Quaker would do and as Clerk of Yearly Meeting I was sent. It was an eye-opening occasion for me. I had not previously appreciated the truly awesome load of complex responsibility borne by contemporary bishops – spiritual, ecclesiastical, political, scholarly, pastoral, social, ecumenical, ceremonial, and more – which led to a situation in which we had 'forgotten how to talk about God', said a member of the group, a Roman Catholic abbot, Basil Hume, who was called away half way through to become Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. So far as I was concerned this struck home, bishop though I was not. Born and brought up in a very active Quaker home, thoroughly involved in the service side of the Society's life, not infrequently led to take part in the verbal ministry of my Meeting, I was yet a Quaker by tradition who shirked the proper commitment of a Christian to try to think and talk about God, not really because I was too busy, but because I did not have to.

A few weeks later a session of our Yearly Meeting was opened by Jocelyn Burnell, a young but already distinguished radio-astronomer of Irish Quaker stock. She and her research colleagues were working right out on the frontiers of knowledge about the universe, in areas of great uncertainty where growth of understanding was dependent on clear statements of truth as currently reached – "Truth, a path, not a possession" happened to be the title of the following year's Swarthmore Lecture. If we are to travel forward in the life of the spirit, said Jocelyn Burnell, we have to provide ourselves with personally written "travelling documents" that will help us to find where we stand from time to time, that can be rewritten as we learn more, and that we can share with others as we "seek to know one another in the things which are eternal." And she spoke movingly of some of the things of which she was sure and some of the things of which others seemed sure while she was not.

Stabbed into reflection by these two remarkable people, I felt called upon to consider where I stood and, if I could, to talk about it. I found myself with four threads in my hand – a very moderate knowledge of the Bible as history, four deaths in the 1960s that shook me and the parts of the world in which I was living at the time, a long unease at the terms in which orthodox Christianity seems to attribute to God the creation of the universe, and the theological freedom within the Christian tradition which Friends sustain through their worship and their use of queries rather than creeds. And as I reflected on these four threads of knowledge, experience, perplexity and freedom, I found they led me to reflect on the meaning of Jesus for me.

Christianity is about the meaning of Jesus in our search for God, or, put the other way, in God's search for us as his co-workers in the establishment of his Kingdom. Some of us Friends are so haunted by the conventional significance of verbal terms that we repudiate the label Christian at all. Others of us are so clear about the meaning of Jesus for us personally that we are pained when others do not share it. This divisiveness is a pity, for I believe that the phrase of Don Cupitt, "one Jesus, many Christs," is a pointer in a right direction. It is spelt out at greater length in the Proceedings of London Yearly Meeting, 1966:[1]

> *Membership in the Christian Church involves loyalty to a person. It does not (or should not) therefore depend on sameness of interest or compatibility of temperament but must learn to thrive on a tremendous diversity of gifts, of needs, of outlook. Some of us may have had the experience of visiting a friend of ours and discovering other friends of his whom we had not met and of hearing after their departure the sigh of the host: 'I must apologise for the other visitors. I have a very mixed bag of friends and some of them ought not to meet each other.' Jesus does not so apologise: he asks us to learn to appreciate the qualities of the mixed bag of men and women who express their loyalty to him in strangely diverse ways.*

I hope that what I have to say will not be taken as criticism of others who are better Christians than I, and that we are united in believing that the second Query of London Yearly Meeting is of supreme importance and deserves a personal and not a consensus answer: Do you seek to follow Jesus, who shows us the Father, and is himself the Way?

As I have said, until my middle fifties, I was a traditional Quaker, feeling totally secure in the Society's congregational religious fellowship, recognising that that there were some parts of the package that were not particularly congenial, but that they did not stand in the way of my total emotional sense of being at home in the Society. I had not had to think. The prospect and then the outbreak of war in face of the awful phenomenon of Nazism compelled some critical examination of my inherited pacifism. But when that exercise was concluded by the decision to register as a conscientious objector, and I had in consequence been sacked from the British Broadcasting Corporation, the unity with my wife and family and the security and very respectability of membership in our religious Society protected me from any sense of loneliness that might otherwise have compelled me to seek a particular and personal sense of refuge in the arms of God. Like most other people I had sleepless nights, horrified at what humankind can do to our fellows because they belong to other nations or groups. But throughout the war years and for many years afterwards I never felt lost or doubted that somehow God was at work in the world.

This changed abruptly in September 1961. In June I had come back home to Bristol late on a Saturday night after two days absence. Early the next morning before going to Meeting I slipped into my room in the University to have a glance

[1] Quoted in a recent (1979) London Yearly Meeting Pamphlet entitled "Unity in the Sprirt."

at my in-tray. To my astonishment there was a cable from the United Nations in New York, asking whether I would be willing to consider going to the ex-Belgian colony of the Congo as a senior member of the U.N. mission to that repulsive part of the world where brutal ex-colonial violence had been in the headlines for months. A year earlier, in 1960, Belgium had suddenly and without preparation abandoned her colonial regime in equatorial Africa, leaving a territory of a million square miles, the size of the whole of Western Europe, to lurch into civil anarchy, bloody tribal war, widespread famine, an irresistible hunting ground for great power rivalry. It was the nastiest – if not quite the bloodiest – piece of the whole era of decolonisation. Under the leadership of U.N. Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjold, and with the aid of a multi-national peace-keeping force, the U.N. had installed a mission which was trying to gather up threads into some sort of manageability; but for the whole of that first year the picture had been one of blood-stained chaos, with no recognisable signs to onlookers of where or how peaceful conditions might be restored. As a family we knew something of decolonisation in other parts of Africa, and we had felt relieved that the Francophone Congo was no part of direct British political responsibility. So as Margery and I walked down to Meeting on a glorious early summer morning we were glad to know that the answer to the United Nations telegram would be a simple, "No, not my business."

But the ministry in Meeting that morning turned powerfully on the theme of Christian response to inequality on the part of these who found themselves at the top of the pile. And as we came out of Meeting Margery and I looked at each other and said, "Oh dear, that's us." I wriggled and turned, hoping that back-trouble would be a medical impediment, and then that argument with New York about the hierarchical status of my remit, "Social Affairs," would be a block. But by the beginning of September I found myself en route to the Congo, alone, since Margery had been appointed earlier to represent Friends at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Delhi and would not be able to come to Africa till later.

Arrival in Leopoldville, the capital, plunged me into desolation. The city struck me as a monstrous mausoleum, symbolic of the fragile vulgarity of flamboyant European colonialism. Some weeks earlier the U.N. high command had isolated on the still new University campus a number of Congolese with some claim to be political leaders, instructing them to negotiate among themselves to form a government of which they would be free to fill the ministries with such human resources as they could muster – not much as there were not more than a few score of people with highter education or substantial administrative experience among a population of 14 million. Nevertheless, this government had been formed about a month before I arrived, the latest arrival of all the senior consultants, the only one whose first language was English, knowing no one except one former member of Friends Relief Service, who happened immediately to be going on leave. The working language was French, in which I was fairly rusty, and my Congolese opposite numbers were only somewhat more at home in it than I. The structure of civil administration was at best tottering, in many areas had collapsed. Leopoldville itself was not overtly violent, but the spectre of violence brooded over all, and there was active fighting in which the U.N. forces were engaged

in the province of Katanga at the other end of the country. The problem of armed secession in Katanga was the primary concern of the experienced U.N. hands, so that newcomers like myself were left with no guidance. Nothing could have been more deflating or terrifyingly bewildering as I contemplated what I had thought would be participation in a great enterprise of post-colonial reconstruction. Not only had I no idea where or how to begin, but I was frightened and lonely.

A few days later we were told that Dag Hammarskjold would be coming to the Congo, primarily to try to secure peace in the Katanga situation, but he would be spending three or four days in Leopoldville en route. All I knew of Hammarskjold was what I had learnt from the newspapers – a man willing and able to hold his own as an international diplomat within the ring of great power rivalry, ready to accept the risky responsibilities of his position. When, along with the rest of the mission, I stood in the airport reception line in the shadeless, steamy, tropical heat, I was astonished to find him a small, slight figure with the brightest blue eyes I have ever seen, a handshake still firm and cool at the end of the line and a face that was firm without arrogance. The whole thing was over in ten minutes, but I was reassured. The next day he met us civilian consultants in an informal group meeting. He did not address us. He talked just long enough to set us talking about our problems and responded in such a way as to get us to see that it was not our job in the U.N. mission to behave as if we were a government. Rather must we put ourselves at the disposal of this new group of Congolese ministers and civil servants, however muddled they might be in our eyes, in order to help them to find their own way forward. He did not in any sense tell us what to do. He convinced me at any rate that I had to try to be a certain kind of person, and that if I could do this the Congolese and I together would begin to find answers. The lowering cloud and glooming storm lifted and though I still had no idea how to begin I somehow felt safe. I saw Hammarskjold again a little later at an evening reception when he moved about, talking not so much with the mighty but rather with the N.C.O.'s and other ranks in the U.N. force. The impact he made on me was terrific.

Two days later he was killed at night in an inexplicable aeroplane accident on his way to peace negotiations in Katanga.

The death of Hammarskjold was the most desolating and frightening experience of my life, far more frightening than being in the middle of blitzes in wartime London. Though he had thrown no light on how I should do my professional job he had thrown up a protective fence between me and chaos, providing as it were a filter that would allow me to deal competently with as much of the encircling nastiness as I had spirit to manage, while in some undefined way he would bear the burden of the unmanageable. With his death I was back in the dark, dangerous, impenetrable jungle. Yet as the shock receded I began to be aware that Hammarskjold had conveyed to me a message of reassurance about the relationship between the moral responsibility of the U.N. professional and the cultural suppositions and apparently limited skills of my Congolese colleagues. The stature of Hammarskjold transformed my perception of the job. I don't think that in my twelve months there I did much to help the obvious problems of the Congo government,

but I think my Congolese colleagues and I learnt a good deal about what we had to share with one another. And I learnt something about Europeans and, looking backwards, began to have some insight into the Gospel story.

And there my reflections might have rested as I returned to my busy university life in Bristol. But two years later, in 1963, Margery and I were in America, attached to the Quaker United Nations Office in New York with the specific role of talking with Friends and others across the country about the moral and political issues raised by the Congo chaos. We were in the U.N. restaurant when the first reports of the attack on President Kennedy began to come through and in a New York taxi when his death was confirmed. Over the next few days I saw Americans in the throes of the frightening desolation that I had experienced in the Congo. The protective filtering fence provided by an apparently strong President was gone; they were left defenceless against the terrifying chaos of an encircling world to the handling of which they had no clues. It was in this experience, as in some sense a detached observer, that I began consciously to formulate and interpret my own Congo experience. There was a difference – it did not seem to me that, as the immediate shock receded, there emerged any new sense of the responsibility of life. America stayed baffled by the growing inhuman horror of the Vietnamese War.

Four and a half years later we were back in the United States for a protracted stay at Harvard University. The Western World was in turmoil – American Universities riven by the tension in race relationships and by the war in Vietnam, European students in revolt. At Easter I returned to England for a few days to attend a conference. Just as I was returning to America came the news of the killing of Martin Luther King. I arrived back in Harvard to a community of Friends as well as university and citizen associates in Massachusetts who, in their turn, were now faced with death of the loved person who stood between them and unmanageable violence – racialism at home, war abroad. The filtering fence was gone, but as we joined some thousands of people in the open air on Cambridge Common, mostly youngish, black and white, for a form of memorial service there was a strange sense of reassurance as we sang "We shall ovecome . . ." . We remained for a time in silence and then shook hands with those round about and went our ways with a re-found confidence that in death Martin Luther King had proclaimed an eternal message that would endure though, Heaven knows, the muddiness of American waters has not cleared much since.

Then, only three months later, while we were still in America, Robert Kennedy was murdered. Again we were among a people encircled by dark chaos with no filters or fences between themselves and endless, meaningless violence. And in the next weeks there was no emerging sense that death by violence was in this instance something re-creative as America passed into the throes of Presidential election in which Nixon was the political winner.

So in the space of seven years I had been close to the violent deaths of four men, each of whom, in life, had filtered the raw reality of the world's politics so that men and women were sheltered in facing its pressures rather than paralysed by its chaos. None of the deaths solved problems, but two of them, after the shock had receded, confirmed and renewed the quality of vision that the men had revealed

to their associates during their lifetime; the Kennedy deaths remained unredeemed tragedies, illustrating the frail charisma that hovers over the world of power politics, more concerned with the manipulation of human affairs than with the changing of human perceptions.

As before, the growing experience of those years was stored in my mind. I had urgent things to do and there it might have stayed dormant had it not been for the provocative encounters five years ago with a Benedictine monk and a Quaker radio-astronomer who prodded me into recognizing the responsibility of a Christian layman to try to think about religious experience and to be ready to try to talk about God. Then, as this personal exercise was developing, Kenneth Barnes, writing in *The Friend*, quoted a remark of the Danish philosopher Kirkegaard: Life has to be lived forwards, but is to be understood backwards. And I found that, looking backwards on what had happened in my life following the U.N. telegram and Meeting for Worship in Bristol in 1961, it had taken a catastrophe and a subsequent series of penetrating experiences to lead me anew to the Gospels, jerking me out of an attitude of mind that I can only label as taking Jesus for granted. What he now means to me is not necessarily what he means to anybody else. Jesus is there for each and every one of us, showing to each of us our own personal pathway to the footstool of God, when we are ready to look for it.

What Jesus meant to his friends as he walked and talked with them in Galilee and went up with them to Jerusalem we do not know. We know that when the moment of trial came as Jesus faced the hostile authority of Church and state in Jerusalem his frineds denied him and ran away. It was the experience of Resurrection – which for me is to be understood in spiritual rather than any kind of physical terms – and the encounter with the risen Jesus that compelled the Gospel writers to look backwards to interpret his life, teaching and crucifixion in the light of the compelling experience that freed them to construct a fresh vision of how God comes into the daily life of men and women†. We would not have any picture of Jesus if the disciples and the early Church had not looked back from their liberating encounter with the risen Christ to what lay behind and led up to the experience of Resurrection.

My experience was, of course, puny; but perceived in the light of the Gospels, it beat on my "clay-shuttered doors" and so opened my inward eyes to the splendour of the words of Jesus: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). For it was in witnessing that there is a world to be overcome that the lives and deaths of Dag Hammarskjold and Martin Luther King were distinguished from the lives and deaths of the Kennedy brothers for whom the world was something not to be overcome, but rather to be managed.

But what is this world of which Jesus speaks so frequently in John's Gospel, and what does he mean by "overcoming" it? I am neither biblical scholar nor scientist and this is not the place in which to reflect at length as a layman on the eternal mystery of creation. But when I look within I find myself living in two worlds, each demanding vital response from me and each exerting pressure on

† Fresh, because while the Old Testament is a sustained account of how understanding of this theme developed through Jewish history, the search had become clogged by the weight of hierarchical authority.

the other. As I understand from popular scientific literature and television programmes, and more profoundly but more obscurely from Teilhard de Chardin, one of these worlds has its orgin about eight thousand million years ago in the ball of gas which is now not only our physical environment but also "us" as biological entities. Life appeared in this world about three or four thousand million years ago as the result of the interaction of chemical and physical factors which may be unique; and in this biosphere a hominid emerged about 3 to 5 million years ago with an elementary ability self-consciously to think. Before the emergence of hominids there was no self-consciousness in the world, no values beyond the impersonal competitive struggle for survival in what seems to me to have been an otherwise meaningless world. Teilhard de Chardin characterises these three stages as pre-life, life and thought; and he, drawing on his immense wealth of scholarship and spirituality, interprets the whole long evolutionary story as the continuous work of the creator God. I would feel much more secure in mind and spirit if I could accept his interpretation. But in all humility I think it raises more problems than it solves – I may well not understand his work clearly enough. To me the leap between the second stage of life without thought and the third stage of thought, however rudimentary, is too stupendous to be conceived in terms of continuity. I find myself compelled to conceive of a creator God entering history at that point by endowing the earliest members of humankind with the self-conscious ability to think, and, at least in part, with an element of spiritual "apprehension".† We human beings have not thereby lost our carnal evolutionary heritage; far from it. But we have gained the power of interpretative thinking that gives us an interior and creative life in a world of the spirit that is quite other than the temporal world in which we have our outward being.††

It is the ability to think that enables men, women and children alone of all living things to say "I". It is this very late arrival of self-consciousness in the world that enables us alone to know that we know and so to be able to interpret experience, to be able to choose whether to foster or exploit, to enjoy or reject, to define purpose in terms of value judgements, to wrestle as it were as citizens of a spiritual world with the temporal and material world of which we are, in our evolutionary animal existence, an exploitive, competitive part.

This self-consciousness is an inexplicable gift of God which offers us the key to citizenship in that other world – his Kingdom. It is a gift we can use in an infinite variety of mixed ways, from a ruthless application of our wits to exploit the earth's resources and any power we have, or seek to have, over our fellows, right across the spectrum of committing ourselves to sensitive but incoherent value

† I use this word to signify a form of knowledge or experience garnered at a much more fundamental level than that gained by intellectual processes. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Psalm 19. See Quiller Couch's essay "Apprehension v. Comprehension" in The Art of Reading, Cambridge, 1924.

†† Paul makes the point in 1 Corinthians 2:14; the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God. George Fox puts it this way: Friends, meet together, and know one another in that which is eternal . . . For knowing one another only in the letter and the flesh differs you little from the beasts of the field, for what they know they know naturally. (No More but my Love, Letter 67, Quaker Home Service, London, 1980.)

judgements until we bring our lives into unity with Fox's great injunction: "Mind that which is pure in you to guide you to God."† We have our outward being in the temporal world which we have the wits to exploit or the grace to transform. If, minding that which is pure in us, we receive grace, we shall know;

> *". . . the eternal creative tension between the infinite and the temporal. The Christian who bears the burden of this tension does not have all the answers or know God better than anyone else. He, or she, simply has a job to do. 'To preach Christ crucified' in whatever way is possible . . ."*††

That brings me back to reflection on what Jesus meant by "I have overcome the world." In almost every chapter of his Gospel, John puts the word "world" into the mouth of Jesus, who cites it as something to be overcome, or to be saved from, or to be entered into by the grace of God so that it may be transformed. The Greek word used by John that is translated "world" is "cosmos." He uses "cosmos" to mean human society as it organises itself apart from God††† – impersonal, yet human network, in which our immediate self interest, our greed and acquisitiveness, our envy, our aggression, our very spiritual insecurity so blind and bind us that, though God offers us the freedom of light and creation, yet most of the time we prefer to grope in darkness because of the excuses it provides for remaining earthbound in the temporal. The message of John is that the temporal cosmos was entered and transformed by Jesus as, in the power of God as Love, he lived, taught, was crucified and entered into the spiritual experience of humankind as the eternal risen Christ. Jesus showed us what it means to live as in the presence of God. The godless cosmos can be entered, purified and sanctified by us as we commit ourselves to the guidance of God as Love, transforming the temporal into the eternal, bit by bit and occasion by occasion as we faithfully follow the Light. This is the Jesus who, in rejoining the disciples and rehabilitating them after the shattering episode of the desertion, filters through to us no more of the harsh reality of the cosmos than we can bear, liberating us from the otherwise paralysing burden of membership of human society with God left out.

As we drink at that source we are freed to enjoy at least visiting citizenship in the Kingdom of God which is within. But the more deeply we drink the nearer we are brought to the redemptive suffering which God may require of those willing to commit themselves to the creative vision which he offers to his co-workers in overcoming the world by finding ways in which the temporal may be transformed into the eternal, not once for all, but again and again as we live life forwards. Jesus shows us what it means to love and to be loved, to forgive and to be forgiven, to bear creatively the pain of wrestling with the cosmos,

> *. . . To hope till Hope creates.*
> *From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.*††††

† No More but My Love, Letter 2

†† Penny Jackson in "I Will Not Let Thee Go Until Thou Bless Me", The Friend, London, 28 December, 1979.

††† The Gospel According to John. A.M. Hunter, Cambridge, 1965.

†††† Shelley, Prometheus Unbound.

This is freedom and I know Jesus as liberator and looking backwards, I see Dag Hammarskjold and Martin Luther King as free men using their freedom to liberate those who walked with them to be co-workers with God as he strives to enter the cosmos through human lives. N.B. Re-read John's Gospel, chapter 17, particularly verses 6-21, and see what they mean to you.

In general John writes as if Jesus perceived the cosmos as something with which God as Love is eternally in tension as he strives to enter cosmic experience. Yes, but it seems to me that, in writing a gospel that is primarily philosophical, John misses another side of Jesus: the Jesus who was totally and happily at home in what he perceived as those elements in the cosmos which provide us with the raw material of physical life, the raw material of mutually supportive human relationships, the raw material for the enjoyment of the five senses and aesthetic creation. It is the other writers, and especially Matthew and Luke, who write of Jesus reminding people of what they draw from the cosmos, sun and rain, seedtime and harvest, the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, the sheep of the hillsides, the careful performance of household chores, the spontaneous warm relationships within families and between neighbours, experiences so ordinary that Jesus does not present them as miracles but rather as ways in which the raw material of the cosmos may be sanctified and enjoyed when understood in the light of God's creative love.

The angels keep their ancient places;
Turn but a stone and start a wing;
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces
That miss the many splendoured thing.

Jesus' face was never estranged. †

This is the Jesus of Galilee who enjoyed the world, who taught us to pray: Our Father . . . but who also knew that if men and women were both to enjoy the world and to know that suffering is part of it but can be made creative, then he must leave Galilee to go up to Jerusalem, a hard, cruel city, there to confront the ecclesiastical and political managers of the cosmos, and, by death and resurrection, to overcome the world in the power of God's timeless re-creative love.

Love, from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart . . .
. . . springs
And folds over the world its healing wings. ††

Jesus knew and faced everything that the turbulent, godless cosmos hurls at men and women, transforming its meaninglessness into the raw material for rejoicing and its cruelty into the occasion for suffering that is redemptive. To me Jesus means that, in commitment to God as Love, there are ways of both enjoying and standing up to the temporal hurricane of the cosmos and so having a toe-hold in the kingdom of God, even though for much of the time I am a thoughtless vandal, yet forgiven again and again and again.

"Jesus lived as in the presence of God," said a Friend in a Meeting where

† Francis Thompson, *The Kingdom of God.*

†† Shelley, Prometheus Unbound.

we had been talking about these things. "Jesus is the name of a historical person known to us through the Gospels: Christ is the eternal divine force that Jesus showed forth in his life and that continues to reveal itself in man," says Sigrid Lund, a Norwegian nursing-mother of Quakers.†

Martin Luther King was a Baptist whose inspired use of conventional Christian terms turned sparks into pillars of fire. Dag Hammarskjold was a mystic whose private reflections were kept in diary form, published only after his death. I want to conclude by reading a passage that he wrote at Whitsuntide, three months before he was killed, and to follow that by the final paragraph of Albert Schweitzer's "The Quest of the Historical Jesus."

> *"I don't know Who – or what – put the question. I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone – or Something – and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.*
>
> *From that moment I have known what it means 'not to look back', and 'to take no thought for the morrow.'*
>
> *Led by Ariadne's thread of my answer through the labyrinth of Life, I came to a time and place where I realised that the Way leads to a triumph which is a catastrophe, and to a catastrophe which is a triumph, that the price for committing one's life would be reproach, and that the only elevation possible to man lies in the depths of humiliation. After that, the word 'courage' lost its meaning, since nothing could be taken from me.*
>
> *As I continued along the Way, I learned, step by step, word by word, that behind every saying in the Gospels stands one man, and one man's experience. Also behind the prayer that the cup might pass from him and his promise to drink it. Also behind each of the words from the Cross."*††

And from Schweitzer:

> *"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old by the lakeside, He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou Me,' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."*†††

† Sigrid Lund, Portrait of a Friend, Margaret Gibbins, F.W.C.C. and Q.H.S., London, 1980.

†† Dag Hammarskjold, Markings, Faber, London, 1964, p.169.

††† Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, The Macmillan Company, New York.

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURES

This is one of a series of lectures instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on the occasion of the establishment of that Yearly Meeting in January 1, 1964.

This lecture was delivered in Adelaide, 4th January, 1981 at the time of the holding of Yearly Meeting.

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. He and his companion, George Washington Walker, travelled widely but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through this visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia. James Backhouse was a botanist who published full accounts of what he saw, besides encouraging Friends and following up his deep concern for the convicts and for the welfare of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the country.

Australian Friends hope that this series of lectures will bring fresh insights into truth, often with some reference to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism.

Ruth Haig
Presiding Clerk
Australia Yearly Meeting

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