

# The Canadian Friend

Volume 107, Number 1

March 2011



Interpreting the Sacred

# The Canadian Friend

The Canadian Friend (ISSN 0382-7658) is the magazine of Canadian Yearly Meeting, and is published five times a year on its behalf by the Publications and Communications Committee. The Canadian Friend is sent to all members of Canadian Yearly Meeting and to regular attenders. It is funded through quotas and free-will donations of the membership to further the work and witness of the **Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada.**

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Publications Mail Registration No. 09887

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

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The Canadian Friend acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities.

**Canada**

## Editor's Corner

Literal interpretation of the Bible is rampant and varied in my family, taking its victims on all sides: paternal, maternal, even adopted. While one aunt lives in the desert in a very particular way waiting the certain arrival of Jesus along with twelve apostles - right there, another aunt has picked up from Ontario to be with God's people in the "Promised Land". She and her family wait for the "...coming of our Saviour" in Israel.



Through grace, I sorted out that God/Christ Spirit is available to be born in each of us no matter where we are in the world, no matter what we name It. We are called to live lovingly toward all and express gratitude. 'All' refers to all life, all creation - the planet we are gifted with. This is my interpretation. Articles on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (p. 8), *Pondering a Mystery* (p. 10), the Energy Minute (p. 15), *John Woolman's Mystical Approach* (p. 18), *Richard Rohr's Contemplative Interpretation of Scripture* (p. 20) and the experience that Sheldon Clark shares on page 26, speak to the importance of understanding God's leading for us by being mindful; listening to reason and Spirit - the still small voice within - as we seek guidance.


Repeatedly I am delighted with the synchronicity that weaves through submissions. Helen Lawson noted in 1957 in *The Canadian Friend*, Henry Cadbury's commitment to rigorous reading of texts. Recently the publisher Douglas and McIntyre sent me a copy of *Chocolate Wars* by Deborah Cadbury. It's an in-depth history of how Quaker principles shaped an industry, and guided its relations with workers, and their communities. The choice by the Cadbury, Rountree, and Frye families to provide healthy working and living conditions, health care, proper wages and holidays, was based upon their understanding of the mandate from the Bible to care for one another and share wealth. While they were grateful for riches, riches were to be shared. They felt it was their duty to succeed so that they could help the helpless, the homeless and the unwell. "The idea of material success for its own sake was abhorrent. They were determined to use their growing business in a way that was compatible with 'enlarging the riches of human experience'". If the teachings of Jesus to love one another were followed, the Quaker chocolate makers believed, "...people and nations could live in peace together".

The journal wants to know what thoughts you enjoyed reading, what has inspired you, or prompted you. Looking forward to your comments.

Blessings,  
Sherryll Harris

Apologies to Kirsten Ebsen for confusion regarding her professional credits as noted in CF December 2010. Correction on the back page. [Ed.]



<b>2</b>	<b>Editor's Corner</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Energy Minute</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Page from the Archives</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Good News</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Opinion</b> by Dick Preston	<b>17</b>	<b>Welcome Sue Starr</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>What Makes a Text Sacred</b> Bert Horwood	<b>18</b>	<b>John Woolman's Mystical Approach...</b> Jon Kershner
<b>7</b>	<b>Insight</b> by Michael Phillips	<b>20</b>	<b>Richard Rohr's Contemplative Interpretation of Scripture</b> Gerald Harris
<b>7</b>	<b>Poem</b> by Keith R. Maddock	<b>21</b>	<b>Book Review</b> by Arnold Ranneris
<b>8</b>	<b>The Mysticism of Religion and Science</b> Bill Wilson	<b>22</b>	<b>Quaker Book Service</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Jesus and Peter Walk on Water</b> William H. Mueller (below)	<b>23</b>	<b>The Quacker</b>
		<b>23</b>	<b>Grants Available</b>
		<b>23</b>	<b>Advertising in the Canadian Friend</b>
		<b>24</b>	<b>The Heart of Christ</b> Alfred K. LaMotte
		<b>25</b>	<b>Awkward Question</b>
		<b>26</b>	<b>Inasmuch</b> Sheldon H. Clark
		<b>27</b>	<b>Insight</b> by John Courtneidge
		<b>28</b>	<b>Around the Family</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Gleaning: Pondering a Mystery</b> Bruce Sanguin	<b>29</b>	<b>Notice Board</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Reports: Representative Meeting</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Creatio Ex Nihilo</b> Harold Macy
<b>13</b>	<b>Yonge Street Half Yearly Meeting</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>Last Words</b> Keith R. Maddock
<b>14</b>	<b>Friends General Conference Gathering</b>		

**Cover:** Courtesy Roger Davies, Halifax Monthly Meeting. Roger wrote: "It is from a series called *Spirit, Draw Near* that first appeared as transparent window-art at the Universalist-Unitarian Church of Halifax. I call it *Earthy Menorah*. I covered shiny sheet material with a bit of earth, drew with my fingers to reveal the shiny beneath, then gathered some tulip petals and placed them about. In my mind it references the wondrous Menorah that transcends the everyday limits of termination, able to renew and renew and renew, and I think of how Quakers can always enter the renewing Light of love."



## THE CANADIAN FRIEND

Published monthly at Toronto, Ontario, Canada by the Home Mission Committee  
of Canadian Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends.

Authorized as second class mail, Post Office Department, Ottawa.

Subscription Rate: \$2.00 per year — Twenty cents per copy

Sustaining Subscription — \$5.00 per year

Editor — MARY C. NEEDLER

Friends House, 60 Lowther Ave., Toronto 5, Ont.

ESTABLISHED 1903

OCTOBER, 1957

Vol. 53, No. 15

### What Think Ye of Christ?

This question continues to remain at the centre of any gathering of Friends who are concerned with "Growing in the Experience of God". Friends in the Americas, meeting at Wilmington, Ohio, during the latter part of June, examined the basis for growth.

In the summer issue of the "Friends Quarterly" Richenda Scott opened an article on "Friends and Historic Christianity" with these words: "Is there a place within the historic Christian church for the Society of Friends, or is it outside, withdrawn, standing defiantly among the ranks of the avowed heretics and the spiritual anarchists? Many Friends would answer in different ways, in diametrically opposed ways."

There will always be a need for Friends to meet and consider this question. Wilmington was necessary for such a purpose. The variety of Yearly Meetings, Conferences and Associations was evident on the labels worn by all delegates. It was too easy, in meeting a new Friend, to take note of his label before greeting him. Happily as the days passed the labels faded with a growing fellowship. Underneath the varied social activities there was a serious searching into the basis of unity.

The genius of Quakerism was evident in the worship-fellowship hour as many shades of belief met in silence which took the worshipper beyond ideas into personal relations in love. This made reconciliation a reality.

My choice for the discussion hour was the group in theology, in which laymen met with professors. Friends are naive who say there is no theology in Quakerism, if we mean by theology the orderly thinking on ideas about God, which come to us from our daily experiences with God. Friends rejoice in freedom

within theology, without imposing a corporate creed which would hinder the continuing revelation.

We considered the relevance of theology to personal living, to social concerns, to other religions, to the life of the Meeting and to ethics. What matters is our attitude to the theology of others. "Theology must be embedded in experience", was a helpful comment from Frederic Crownfield of N. C. Theology is not the experience, neither is it a motivation for living, nor is it competitive nor a device to stir the emotions. What is it we bring to each new experience?

A further consideration was the theology of early Friends. This is most difficult without having had their experience. We have changed both their words and the meanings. When Henry Cadbury urged that we call for a moratorium on "that of God", he expected us to do some orderly thinking about "that" and "God". If our theology divides us into such groups as evangelical, rational, mystical, pacifist and neo-orthodox, it behoves us to wait in the silence of God's Spirit in order that the "dynamic active field of force" will move our minds to transform our hearts into love.

Douglas Steere offered an assignment to the Friends World Committee that could operate within Monthly, Quarterly and Half-Yearly meetings. His concern for laboratory experiments into the implications of our faith could supplement the usual routine which consumes so much of our precious time at meetings. There is a vast area for such research, including varieties of evangelism, world religions in relation to Quakerism, relations in ecumenical groups, ways of mediation between Protestants and Quakers, Roman Catholics and Quakers, relations with such communities as the Bruderhof. These areas are all waiting for concerned Friends to explore and in so doing there will come a heightening of our expectancy.

"We look backwards to the Old Testament and onwards and outside to all world religions. This is radical and tremendous."

This is the hope of the work of the Holy Spirit. I hope that within Canadian Quakerism there will be a serious interest in the research opportunities.

Maurice Creasey, director of studies at Woodbrooke, England, was asked to speak to Douglas Steere's concern for a theology of the Holy Spirit. This brought us face to face with the basic question, "What think ye of Christ?" Although Maurice Creasey was not listed for an evening lecture, I felt, along with many others, that his help came at a time in the conference when it was most needed. The significance of Jesus, he said, is to illumine history. God is for all men at all time. The Spirit, as recorded in the Old Testament was seeking in a limited way what Jesus and the risen Christ were seeking.

We look backwards to the Old Testament and onwards and outside to all world religions. This is radical and tremendous. Man's response to life sets the way of his salvation. Although early Friends were Trinitarians in a non-academic way, we can accept the "Grace of our Lord, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit" without the formulation of doctrine made by the councils of the early church. Friends have entered deeply in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and cannot escape talking about it. What fellowship can we know apart from that of the Spirit of the living God?

I was most impressed with the message sent out by Young Friends. They realized that it was impossible to talk about the implications of their faith until they had talked about their faith. Can we as grown-ups do less? I feel that the stimulus from such a gathering as the one held at Wilmington will spur us on to further examine what we really mean by "that of God". Then we will know the causes of our disunity, the reason for difficulties within the Peace Testimony for large numbers of Friends, as well as the ways to reconciliation. Herein lies our hope, in experiential unity.

*A. Helen Lawson*

[An active member of Hamilton MM in the 1950s, before transferring her membership to Toronto. Later Helen's membership was held via HMAC when she lived in places like Owen Sound and Barrie Ontario. Thanks to Kyle Joliffe for this archive treasure. Ed]

Opinion: by Dick Preston

## What Is a Mythology?

In what ways are myths true and false? They are intangible and inexact. We know better than to go to a storyteller to have brain surgery. So what DO we go to a storyteller for? Some of these stories are only fantasies, like advertising claims or urban myths. On the other hand, we know that they are sometimes a powerfully imaginative way of teaching essential moral truths, like the myths of the Garden of Eden or the Sermon on the Mount.

For some curious reason, every culture, provides a body of myths that serves as a lens for seeing a path for living and a purpose in this world.

Mythology is not equivalent to history. Histories are carefully crafted stories of past events that we believe to be accurate statements that, if we had been there we would have seen. Mythology, on the other hand tells us about the personal meaning of events, how they embody ideals, and a vision that depicts our best interests. Whether these are best interests for the common good or for individuals, or both is uncertain. We try to act according to the images mythology provides.

*Dick Preston  
Hamilton Monthly Meeting*

[Excerpted from a paper Dr. Dick Preston prepared for the 2010 Annual Conference of the Peace & Justice Studies Association. Winnipeg, October 2010. In it he explored reasons we need a peace mythology.]



*Dick Preston*

*Member of  
the Canadian  
Department of  
Peace Initiative:  
Hamilton Chapter*

# What Makes a Text Sacred?

*Bert Horwood*

I have books on my shelves that I think may be sacred. They are not part of the Bible. But they are much like biblical writing. The authorship is debated; let's call him S. The books are old enough that the archaic language is hard to grasp. The age of the texts leads to a variety of versions, caused by different histories, political necessity, commercial considerations, scribal and printing errors. S. wrote history, poetry, songs and jokes. There are: philosophy; sex; politics; murder; treachery; noble sacrifice; mystery; true love; folly, and generosity of spirit. S. peopled his work with: monarchs; paupers, fools, students, witches, merchants, prophets; maids; widows; saints; spirits, and scoundrels. He featured both men and women as strong characters.

The books include tragedy and comedy. S. conveys enough ambiguity to allow for different interpretations. The characters and the plots have complexities that mirror the human condition as we recognize it. Over centuries scholars have probed S' works. Most of the stories derive from earlier sources. Spelling, punctuation, new words and typesetting variations contribute to uncertainties of the texts.

All of these things can be said with equal force about the Bible. There are some differences. S. is much more recent than biblical writers. He wrote in English, thus eliminating the problems of translation and transliteration, at least for English readers. S.'s works are mostly stage plays which are performed nearly as often as the Bible is read publicly. And of course, S. is none other than William Shakespeare.

Why can't Shakespeare's writing be recognized as sacred text? Technically, it has not been approved by a recognized religious body like a Christian Ecumenical Council or Jewish Rabbinate. Various groups such as the Council of Trent, decided that the existing approved sacred writings were the final word. They closed the canon to any alterations and additions. Belief in the possibility that there would be no further textual revelation is contrary to Quaker experience and conviction. We experience continual revelation and thus have open minds. We are open to openings.

It may be too much to hope that a world-wide Quaker body would declare the canon of scripture open and add the plays of Shakespeare, if not other texts. But we can at least be aware of the moral tendency and power for spiritual insight in these plays. They explore the human condition in both its finest and foulest forms. They have a spiritual force which impels to the good without being overtly theological. Nevertheless, Shakespeare was fully knowledgeable of the theologies of his time; the plays are grounded in them.

One of the roles of sacred text is to provide comfort to those in distress. Friend Sheila Hancock, writing of her pain after the death of her husband, said, "The Bible's useless, I'm searching my Shakespeare for comfort." And later, acting on tour, she wrote: "The healing power of Shakespeare in these troubled times was potent too. My company's performances of [*Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* in sports halls and community centres were some of the most beautiful I have seen."

With testimony like that, bolstered by my own experience of deep spiritual experience while watching Shakespeare's plays. I think I will move my Shakespeare collection to the shelves with my Bibles .

*Bert Horwood*

*Thousand Islands Monthly Meeting.*

## Advice Number Five

*Remember the importance of...  
all writings which reveal the ways  
of God...Appreciate that doubt and  
questioning can also lead to spiritual  
growth and to a greater awareness of  
the Light that is in us all.*

*Advices and Queries*

*The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in  
Britain*

Insight by Michael Phillips

## God-talk and Truth

In Pendle Hill I bought a copy of John McPhee's *Annals of the Former World*. All the Quaker stuff, all the "God-talk" that I've been doing has reawakened my yearning for the numinous. The McPhee book has contributed this: Geological Time, "deep time" as McPhee calls it, compares uncomfortably with our daily, human, subjective perception of time. When you contrast the time scale of newspaper thinking, or our peculiar use of "forever" in historical contexts, with the geologist's perspective of millions, amounting to perhaps four billion of Earth's years, our daily perspective shrinks to pathetic paltry. But then, contrast Geological Time to the various time scales of the cosmologist - from ten to the minus thirty-two part of a second, to fifteen billion years. Well, what's left of my life? The flickering of all earthly life, let alone human, is as ephemeral as a fart in a whirlwind.

So what does that make of our heavenly aspirations, our yearning for the numinous, our Mystical Experiences, our Truths and moral judgments, and of love?

Eternity transcends time. It is immanent in all duration. Not simply an infinitely long duration; it includes and dissolves into itself all and any duration, it is complete in the present instant, and is the only sensible meaning to locutions such as "before time began". In that sense we can say that now is forever.

The numinous - well, God - is immediate, whole, and beyond all our perceptions, meanings, experiences, and truths.

On the other hand, why should we think that because we can recognize God's immanence in our deepest consciousness, can know the totality of being that underlies existence, why should we think that makes us privileged to be party to all the workings of eternity. What makes us think that the human carcass, in its mysterious interconnected workings, molecular couplings and burstings, in its joints and junctures, electrical sparks and silences, in all this, produces a significantly better insight into fundamental reality than that of a frog, a stone, an elementary particle, or a star, or a cluster of galaxies? Thus, spaces or objects extremely large or small, durations extremely brief or long, insights into phenomena or eternity, are all one.

My insights are as good, and as imperfect as any. It is incomparable hubris for humans to assert that we have any sort of privileged claim on "God's mind" as cosmologists and religious fanatics seem to believe.

*Michael Phillips*

*Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting*

(Journal entry, November 11, 1999)

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## Story

*In the beginning was the Story  
Of how it all began - a story  
Self-unfolding like a sunrise  
In the morning of the world  
Before the clouds were gathered  
On the far horizon - omens  
Bringing showers never seen before  
And the universe became a tale to tell.*

*It all started as she said he said  
Or so he claimed to hear it  
From the mouths of witnesses  
Who were never really there;  
Yet the Story gives us dreams  
To dream, knowing we are blessed.*

*Keith Maddock*

*Toronto Monthly Meeting*



# The Mysticism of Religion and Science

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest, was born in 1881 in Auvergne, France. As he himself states, he got his love of his faith from his mother and his love of the natural world from his father, who took Pierre and his brothers and sisters on walks in the country looking for rocks. Throughout his life he worked at integrating these two passions, and felt it was necessary for the rest of us to do the same if our mysticism was to be whole and relevant. Teilhard rarely used the word spirituality. He preferred the word mysticism and he talked about the mysticism of religion and the mysticism of science.

When he was a boy, his mother cut his hair and what she had cut she threw into the fire. This was a traumatic experience. As the hair burned he realized he was fragile and impermanent and he started to search for that which was permanent. Initially Pierre found a piece of iron. He thought this would give him a sense of permanence, but it began to rust. He moved on to rock, but found they too could decay. He realized that the only thing that was permanent was spirit manifest through matter.

Shortly after the First World War broke out Pierre asked to be a stretcher bearer so he could be with the men at the front lines. His writings during this time express an optimism that is in sharp contrast to the horrors of the war. He saw people willing to give their lives for a cause. So what cause would people need to build a world of love and compassion? All types of people were working together to achieve a successful outcome. Differences in nationality, religion, or state of life, were not as important as working together for a successful outcome. Why *couldn't* they work together to create a better world?

Teilhard worked with Muslims who did not have their own spiritual leader. He became their spiritual guide and they gave him the name Sidi Marabout - a spiritual person, a person protected by God.

In the course of his life Teilhard de Chardin was a priest, mystic and visionary. He held a PhD in science, was a paleontologist, geologist, and archeologist; he trained the first Chinese paleontologists and was instrumental in the discovery of Peking Man.

He realized that if religion was to have any relevance to the contemporary world, it needed to take seriously the discoveries of science and the idea of

“...the stories in scripture and the dogmas of the church need to be reinterpreted in the light of scientific discoveries.”

evolution. This meant that the stories in scripture and the dogmas of the church needed to be reinterpreted in the light of scientific discoveries. He states: “Our age seems primarily to need a rejuvenation of supernatural forces to be effected by driving roots deeply into the nutritious energies of earth. Because it is not sufficiently moved by a truly human compassion, because it is not exalted by a sufficiently passionate admiration of the universe, our religion is becoming enfeebled.” He felt [scriptures] should be treated the same as the hypotheses of science. Can they stand up to the test of reality and every day life? If not they should be let go. I find his definition of hypothesis quite fascinating: “Hypothesis: a very poor choice of word to designate the supreme spiritual act by which the dust-cloud of experience takes on form and is kindled at the fire of knowledge.”

He took the Incarnation and the Cosmic Christ of Colossians very seriously. For him there was not a dichotomy between matter and spirit. Matter was how spirit manifested herself. As he states, “For those who know how to see, nothing is profane, everything is sacred”. The Sacred for him was symbolized by fire - the fire of Love. **“Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of Love, and then for a second time in the history of the world, humanity will have discovered fire.”**

Evolution for him was how the Divine continues to manifest itself. “More and more I see growing in me the evidence and the human consequences of the great thing that is happening right now. Not ‘God is dying’, as Neitzche said, but ‘God who is changing’, so that, as I am in the habit of saying, the upward movement is now reinforced by a forward movement never before considered by religions.”

We need to expand our horizons. He wrote: “The powers that we have released could not possibly be absorbed by the narrow system of individual or national units which the architects of the human earth have hitherto used. The Age of Nations has passed. Now unless we wish to perish we must shake off old prejudices and build the Earth.”

*Bill Wilson, Jesuit Priest, Victoria, BC,  
gives workshops on the teachings of Teilhard  
in the Fern St. Meeting House*



# Jesus and Peter Walk on Water

William H. Mueller

Perhaps no other text of the New Testament rubs against our Twenty-first Century sensibilities of scientific objectivity, reason and logic, than the story of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee. Some believe in the verity of the incident as a sign of Jesus' divinity. Others say such things are impossible and a good reason not to take the Bible seriously.

Both views miss the point of the story. Jesus himself hated signs, and would be the last to go out of his way to perform one, to show-off as it were. "It is an evil and unfaithful generation asking for a sign..." says Jesus in Matt. 16:4 (all quotations from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, 1985). Rather, this is one of the most tender friendship stories in the New Testament. It shows us the special relationship between Jesus/Messiah and his pupil Peter. At the same time it teaches us about the fundamental relationship of the Christian to God: one of trusting *friendship*, the kind that defies reason and logic.

Let us examine this beautiful story. Jesus and his disciples have been teaching, healing and feeding with the loaves and fishes, large crowds by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus instructs his disciples to get in a boat and go over to *the other side* ahead of him. He will remain behind, dismiss the crowds and retire to pray a little in the hills.

The crossing is slow, because the disciples have encountered a head wind. Jesus finishes with his devotions and decides to walk out to the disciples' boat on the windy lake. They see him approaching on the water. In today's parlance, 'freaked-out' cannot convey their distress. "Is it an apparition?" they ask, "has Jesus died unexpectedly?" Jesus then reassures them: *Courage! It's me! Do not be afraid* (Matt. 14:27).

The story could have ended there with Jesus getting into the boat as he does in other gospel versions of this story. Instead, a thing happens that I can only describe as 'goofy'. Peter calls to Jesus:

*Lord, he said, If it is you, tell me to come to you across the water. Jesus said, 'Come'. Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. Lord, he cried, save me!* (Matt. 14:28-30).

In the next verse is the tender act of love between these friends that is the crux of this tale: *Jesus put out*

*his hand at once and held him. You have so little faith, he said, why did you doubt?* (Matt. 14:31). It is notable that Jesus responded to his friend's distress *at once* and *held him*. Jesus is often referred to as the *light*. Perhaps the best known [instance] to Friends is found in the prologue to John (1:9) where Jesus is described as the *real light that gives light to everyone*. Peter was *held* by the *light*!

Jesus delivers a mild reproach: *You have so little faith, why did you doubt?* Or was it encouragement for the next time Peter's trust in God faltered? The disciples had by this time in the narrative received their instructions for their ministry (Matt. 10) and they knew they would face many challenges. Let us remember that of this doubting Peter of *so little faith*, Jesus declares only two chapters later: *You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community* ('Peter' means 'rock') (Matt. 16:18). This story shows us the remarkable power of a man who lives with perfect trust in God (Jesus) and his friend Peter, who is less than perfect. Peter is like us. We are less than perfect, yet we are the rocks upon which God depends for the building of God's community on earth. Our life is one of moving toward the perfect light of Christ, but it doesn't come in one fell-swoop. This is a story about the sons and daughters of God, God with us, God as *friend*.

References to God as *friend*, go back to the Torah where we have Abraham's easy give and take conversations with God (Gen.18:22-33) and Mose, whose encounters with God were described as *face to face, as a man talks to his friend...* (Ex. 33:11). Jesus also uses the metaphor of the divine/human relationship as *friend* when he tells his disciples near the end of his ministry on earth that his relationship with them has changed (John 15:15). No longer are they to be as servants to a master; he now regards them as *friends*, because they know and understand God's message as well as he does. For this reason the Quaker community is called *The Religious Society of Friends*.

Without a doubt Jesus is the Son of God, as the disciples declare at the end of this story, and Peter too is a son of God, who can even walk on water. But his measure of the *light* at the telling of the tale is less than Jesus'. He and we have much to learn on the journey. How many of us have *taken fright* and called out to God in our distress? The story tells us that Jesus/God will be there *at once*, and will *hold us*.

William H. Mueller

St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting in Potsdam, NY.  
Allowed Meeting, care of Ottawa Monthly Meeting

# Gleaning

by Bruce Sanguin

## Pondering A Mystery

“...today, we might consider expanding this Mystery of Spirit becoming flesh to include the entire universe: the galaxies, the supernova, the elements forged in those great fires, our solar system, the emergence of life, and this great trajectory of sacred unfolding towards increased unity, increased diversity, increased complexity and consciousness - the Great Epic of evolution is a sacred story of Spirit becoming flesh.

We ponder with Mary a timeless mystery - that God took flesh and dwelt among us. The Christmas story as we hear it in Luke's and Matthew's gospel every year is best understood within a genre of literature that today we call historical fiction. In other words, it is based in the story of a historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in the First Century. We know he was a Jew, probably a peasant. It is most likely that he was born, not in Bethlehem, but in Nazareth. He gave his own life in fulfillment of some of the ancient prophecies of his own tradition, in service of the poor, prepared to challenge the status quo institutions to live more justly; he saw his own life as the very expression of God's love for creation; he had a small following of disciples whose primary message was the Kingdom of God - a realm of conscious unity with the divine that enables us to love each other, to love the left-behinds of society, and perhaps most importantly to love even our enemies. Jesus taught that it was possible to enter this divine realm, here and now. We don't need to wait until after we die. It's not a reward for good behavior. The Romans crucified Jesus as an insurgent. Finally, the first disciples experienced [this truth] when they gathered to break bread and share a meal in the memory of Jesus. He was mysteriously present to them after his death.

That's the history part. The fiction part is most of the rest of the story. But the stories that were subsequently told of Jesus, concerning his birth, miracle stories, and his resurrection from the dead -

along with the apostle Paul's theological reflections in his letters to the early church - transcend mere fiction. Rather, they are myth. And *myth* as a literary genre doesn't mean untrue. Myth doesn't mean fairy tale. A myth, as Joseph Campbell went to great lengths to help us understand, is a vehicle for eternal truths about reality to be grasped by the imagination. In this sense, myth takes history as its starting point, as a stage or backdrop upon which another story will be told - the story of sacred Mystery.

The purpose of myth - a sacred story - is not to offer an alternative version of history. This is called literalism and it is the enemy of Mystery. As Tom Harpur puts it in a recent piece on Christmas: "myth is infinitely more transformative and true than history". The purpose of myth is to drop us into the state that the author of Luke's gospel attributes to Mary: "But Mary pondered all these things in her heart". She enters the Mystery of her life. And that is why we gather on Christmas Eve, isn't it? We want to know that beneath the words, there is the Word - the Source of all truth. We want to know that underlying the Christmas rush, there is a stillness where we might feel the brush of the Holy, an angel's wing perhaps, hinting at a realm of great joy. Beneath the feeling that we all know, of merely existing, we want to ponder, with Mary, the Mystery of existence itself. How did we get here? Is there meaning in this 13.7 billion year universe? Is my life merely an accident, a chemical reaction in an incomprehensibly large universe? Or am I, are you, are we collectively an expression of a Sacred Heart evolving in and toward the fullest expression of love? Are our lives merely a tale told by an idiot with no discernible plot or purpose, or are we a part of a larger drama? I would suggest that we gather to listen to this timeless myth, not so that we can muster up the wherewithal to believe the story literally. Rather, we're here because we want to enter the divine drama ourselves and play our role in the unfolding story of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

Myth dignifies history, imbuing mere fact with sacred depth, gained by this practice of pondering the Mystery.

A silly debate still goes on concerning the virgin birth. In an era of science it's hard to believe that this conversation [continues]. Is it true? Did it really happen? If I don't believe it, can I be a Christian? But this is not pondering the Mystery. It's obliterating the Mystery with literal thinking.

## The myth of the virgin birth was already in circulation in the First Century.

The myth of the virgin birth was already in circulation in the First Century. In fact, it was applied to Caesar's birth. Caesar was called the "son of the Most High", the Son of God", born of a virgin. The "good news" - yes, the Roman Empire called it that - was that God had anointed Caesar to bring a reign of peace to the world. The virgin birth myth was the human being's way of making an emphatic point: this birth was an unmediated action of the Divine.

The virgin birth, applied to the life of Jesus of Nazareth, represents an evolution of the myth. We can affirm that the Great Empires of history did in fact play a role in bringing a kind of peace to the world. But it was peace through violence, by conquering, enslaving, and then taxing the conquered nations mercilessly. But when the claim is made that Jesus was born of a virgin, and therefore represents the highest divine ideal, it subverts the existing interpretation of the myth. It says that God comes, not in a dominating King, to bring peace through violence and terror, but through a Jewish peasant, who knew only love, and who brings about peace through justice for all. The one born of a virgin proclaims the Kingdom, not of Caesar, but of a God who reigns through love alone. To "believe in" the myth of the virgin birth doesn't mean we take it literally; nor is it a judgment on the evils of natural biological processes of sex and birth. Rather, it is our way of entering into an evolving story of God's love for this world.

Let's take this sacred myth one step further. What if we are being invited to enter this drama of Christmas by imagining ourselves to be virginal? Whenever we consent, with Mary, to the invitation of the Spirit to be a vessel of love - which is to give birth to the Christ in our day and age - we are transcending our biological impulse for mere survival through reproduction. This conscious willingness to birth a new spiritual order comes from a higher impulse. Our yearning to play our role in the evolution of love on Earth is seeded by what our scriptures call the Holy Spirit. This yearning originates, not from our basic instincts - as important as these are for our survival - but from a Mysterious, yet pervasive intuition that our highest calling is born of an unmediated union with Spirit. "Flesh and blood", says Jesus, "has not revealed this to you, but rather God in heaven." (Matthew 16:17).

The Word became flesh and dwelled among us is how the author of John's gospel tells the story - the myth of the birth of Christ according to John 1:1-3. Until recently in the Christian church, to ponder the Mystery of Spirit becoming flesh was to reflect on *the* incarnation. We were convinced that this wedding of flesh, and Spirit happened only in Jesus of Nazareth - fully God and fully human. It was an attempt to ponder the Mystery of Jesus' life. But today, we might consider expanding this Mystery of Spirit becoming flesh to include the entire universe. The galaxies, the supernova, the elements forged in those great fires, our solar system, the emergence of life and this great trajectory of sacred unfolding towards increased unity, increased diversity, increased complexity and consciousness - the Great Epic of evolution is a sacred story of Spirit becoming flesh.

What the Christmas myth conveys more than anything else is that the split between matter and Spirit, between science and religion, between history and sacred myth is a product of our own imagination. In Christ, writes Paul, God was reconciling all things - that is, "making friendly" all that we have pitted against the other. God becoming flesh and dwelling among us means that you don't have to choose between Spirit or flesh, history or sacred myth, science or religion. It's all different perspectives on the one great mystery of incarnation.

In Jesus of Nazareth we see the point and purpose of this Great Story as it relates to the human realm after 13.7 billion years. Love itself gathered up and gathered in the whole cosmic adventure into the body, mind, and heart of a Jewish peasant to inaugurate a second creation. As the first creation contained within it all the potential for the emergence of life on Earth, so this new creation in Christ contains within it the potential for a new species of human being to emerge. And the purpose of this new human is to reveal and realize the Kin-dom of God, a reign of love and peace on earth.

To put it simply, love came down to lift us up. We tell this story so that we might be lifted up above the mundane details of life, the getting and the spending, the spectacle, the bread and circus, and all the dramas of the ego that blind us to our essential identity as virgins of God, and our destiny which is to fall in love with this Earth, with each other, and with ourselves with the same passion as God, who is forever becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

*Bruce Sanguin, Christmas Eve service 2010  
Canadian Memorial United Church, Vancouver, BC.*

## Reports:

### Representative Meeting

November 12 & 13, 2010, Ottawa, Ontario

Representative Meeting took place at the Friends Meeting House. The weather was glorious. Past fall meetings have been exceedingly frosty, I would say, even freezing! This was a pleasant change.

One of my favourite parts of Representative Meeting is the 'go around' on Friday evening when members introduce themselves and tell of the happenings at their Monthly Meetings. You can't help but get a warm feeling as you listen to the simple events that bring life to the individual Meetings. I am always inspired and energized when I hear what Friends are up to all around the country. From a cake to celebrate a brand new linoleum floor, to Wednesday lunch Meetings, to Quaker Quest, to a Toast and Testimonies program, there is no shortage of wonderful things taking place.

- We learned that Ann Mitchell has been named General Secretary of Quaker Earth Care Witness.

- Positive comments were offered on the practice of having the same Clerks at Representative Meeting as we have at CYM.

- It was reported that the final version of *Faith and Practice* is going to be "lovely". "Well-indexed" and "beautifully-designed" are words I recall from that brief report. Can't wait to hold it in my hand.

- The Finance Committee encourages Monthly Meetings and individuals in Monthly Meetings to donate generously.

- Dave Grossman reported for Home Mission and Advancement Committee (HMAC) that Sue Starr has been hired as Quaker Education Program Coordinator for Canadian Yearly Meeting. Dave distributed a pamphlet outlining how Quaker Education Program (QEP) can serve Monthly Meetings.

- A lengthy discussion took place about the Quaker website. Many concerns were expressed. The speed at which technology is changing makes it difficult to keep our website fresh. The discussion points were noted and will be sent to the Publications & Communications Committee.

- Joyous news for Musquodoboit Friends! After much discussion Representative Meeting was able to recommend to CYM that Musquodoboit become a Monthly Meeting.

- The Youth Secretary Committee needs guidance from Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups across Canada as they prepare to move forward the project of hiring of a young adult Friend as Youth Secretary. I think they would like to know that Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups support the hiring of a Youth Secretary, and they would also welcome any guidance or suggestions on how to go forward in this project. Communication needs to be sent to Virginia Dawson as soon as possible.

- If you are planning on being the youth Programme Coordinator, or any one of the Program Directors at CYM you **must** have a Police Clearance Certificate. This is not an option.

- The schedule for CYM 2011 has been approved for one year and the possibility of holding CYM at Camp NeeKauNis in 2013 is being considered. You will hear more about this.

- The four Friends chosen to act as delegates at the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) in 2012 are: Ellen Pye (Vancouver) Jessica Klassen-Wright (Saskatoon) Vince Zelazny (NB) and Steve Fick (Ottawa). The back-up nominees are Graeme Hope (Vernon) Maggie Knight (Victoria) and Anne-Maria Zillacus (Ottawa).

- A Call for Global Change: Six queries have been developed to encourage Friends to reflect on how global change in all its aspects is affecting their lives. FWCC is hoping to hear from Friends all over the world. Friends are asked to form small groups or clusters (four or five) and to worship and share their personal experiences with these queries. A facilitator's guide and additional information is available at [www.fwccglobalchange.org](http://www.fwccglobalchange.org). Take a look at these queries. They may not all be appropriate for everyone in your Meeting but you will certainly find some that are extremely relevant. Ensure that any delegates who attend CYM in 2011 have some thoughts or responses to share from their Monthly Meetings or Worship Groups about these global queries. A report from every Monthly Meeting or Worship Group is requested by May, 2011.

- In addition, financial support is needed in order for African and Latin American Meetings to be able to participate meaningfully in this Global Change Consultation. Facilitators are going to be hired to help. Finance committee approved a donation of \$500 to match Quaker Ecological Action Network (QEAN) funds.

- Svetlana MacDonald reported for Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) that CFSC sees



two main issues that are of great concern to them. First, the issue of communication. Second, the issue of finances. They suggest that each Monthly Meeting choose a person who will be specifically responsible for receiving information from CFSC and for communicating it to Friends at their Monthly Meeting. Also, CFSC is in great need of money. They do not receive money from CYM but depend on it from other sources. Over two thirds of donations for CFSC come from outside the Quaker community. Please consider donating to CFSC. There is a very real and present danger that programs will need to be cut if funding is not increased.

- Halifax Monthly Meeting is looking into creating a Half Yearly Meeting for the Atlantic Provinces. Representative Meeting supports their active consideration of this initiative.

Representative Meeting finished up a few minutes before 6 PM and during the final worship time a number of Friends spoke. Marilyn Manzer reflected with joy and thankfulness on the ten years she has been participating in RM. Beverly Shepherd reminisced about her first Representative Meeting fifteen years earlier: "Frank Miles suggested I would be a good person to investigate everything that had already been discussed regarding a restructuring of CYM. I was terrified but it was a great way to learn!"

This is my fifth Representative Meeting. I continue to be impressed by the clarity, the intelligence, and the relative speed at which difficult issues can be brought forward, considered in a unfailing spirit of love and good will, and resolved. Minutes are honed with care; individual words are considered and changed again and again when necessary. It's a process that continues to amaze me and to give me hope for the human race.

Ottawa Monthly Meeting fed us, transported us, organized billets, and generally did a wonderful job of looking after the human necessities of eating, sleeping and travelling in comfort. The food was delicious, the company was delightful; the environment was warm and nurturing. Thank-you to our Ottawa Friends!

*Julie Berry-Imbert  
Yarmouth Monthly Meeting*

## Reports:

### Yonge Street Half Yearly Meeting

We met on a golden autumn day at the historic Yonge Street Meetinghouse in Newmarket, ON. Friends from Hamilton, Simcoe-Muskoka, Toronto and Yonge Street meet in spring and fall to worship together, renew friendships and transact business. About thirty Friends ages ranging from four weeks to ninety years attended the October 30, 2010 Half Yearly Meeting. We were surrounded by the spirit of Friendly worship that the Yonge Street Meetinghouse has nurtured for two hundred years.

The first item of business was the approval of a fund to encourage participation by new attenders in the spring Half Yearly Meeting to be held on June 3 - 5, 2011 at Camp NeeKauNis. Yonge Street Half Yearly Meeting will pay the registration fee for a new attender from each of the Meetings which comprise the Half Yearly Meeting. Monthly Meetings might consider appointing the new person as an assistant delegate. Monthly Meeting Clerks should contact Half Yearly Treasurer Cate Elliott ([cate@vianet.ca](mailto:cate@vianet.ca)) once someone has been named.

Yonge Street Friends Burial Ground Committee, administers and cares for the burial ground owned by Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) which is located next to the Yonge Street Meetinghouse. The Burial Ground Committee reported on their activities. The Committee has started a restoration project of cleaning, raising and straightening historical headstones, some dating back to the early Nineteenth Century, and they have painted the metal fencing which fronts the burial ground. The Committee also has made copies for the CYM archives of their minutes from 1956-1999. Those interested in joining the Committee, which is looking for a new member, should contact Jeffrey Field, Committee Clerk ([jeffrey.field@sympatico.ca](mailto:jeffrey.field@sympatico.ca)) or Clerk of CYM Trustees Barbara Horvath ([barbara.horvath@sympatico.ca](mailto:barbara.horvath@sympatico.ca)).

Another report concerned the CYM Youth Secretary who will be appointed soon. Marilyn Church asks what support Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups can provide a new Youth Secretary whose work is a priority for Friends. Information about the position is posted on the CYM website.

Clerk Glenna Janzen read a report about the Canadian Department of Peace, a concern arising from the Culture of Peace Initiative approved by the United Nations Security Council. Civil society

groups, including non-governmental organizations are challenging violence and promoting peace as essential to the good life. Peace includes respect for nature as well as for others, resulting in new forms of solidarity. A group of Friends is advocating for a federal Department of Peace as an important step for Canada.

Don Woodside reported on the 1812 Peace Committee which is organizing a commemoration of the war of 1812 to be held in 2012 in southern Ontario. The 1812 Peace Committee and the Mennonite Central Committee will celebrate the contribution of conscientious objection in that war by placing memorials to conscientious objectors outside three or four Niagara region churches. They are also preparing a booklet about the conflict. Yonge Street Half Yearly Meeting and Hamilton Monthly Meeting support the 1812 Peace Committee. This matter will be forwarded to CYM.

Friends Responses to Global Change, a worldwide consultation initiated by Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) was the theme for the day. We considered six questions that FWCC is asking Friends around the world in preparation for the 2012 triennial gathering with the theme *-Being Salt and Light: Friends living the kingdom of God in a broken world.* Virginia Dawson is responsible for reporting to the FWCC steering group on behalf of the Yonge Street Half Yearly Meeting 'cluster.' Friends spoke about: the effect of global change; actions we have taken; how changes may have affected our relationship with the Divine; historical and Scriptural references. We talked of how we can bear witness to abundance, and how we can support one another in "rekindling our love and respect for God's Creation in such a way that we are messengers of the transforming power of love and hope". We found these to be important but unwieldy questions and rather vague formulations, although useful for the beginning discussion. Friends in Canada have been thinking about these issues, and the discussion yielded a wide range of responses. Then we watched a short video lecture which expressed optimism and hope in face of global change.

Final business items included a donation to FWCC. We wish to support the consideration of global change by Friends in other parts of the world, and to support FWCC-Section of the Americas in providing study materials to prepare for the 2012 FWCC world gathering.

*Jane MacKay Wright, Toronto Monthly Meeting*

## Reports:

### Friends General Conference Gathering July 2010

I arrived at Friends General Conference Gathering (FGC) in Bowling Green, Ohio, with Rose Marie Cipryk. We were members of the early team that helped pull The Gathering together. I filed registration envelopes with meal cards, general information, and name tags. I also assisted during registration.

From Monday to Friday I attended Sharon Gunther's workshop called *Framing the Sacred*. There were about twenty-five photographers with various skill levels wanting to learn Photoshop. We managed to get something of an introduction to this very large, powerful program.

In the afternoon I worked at the Information Desk (the job I do every year that helps pay my way to the Gathering). I have come to see the Information Desk as a Triage Centre for the myriad needs of Friends. Questions range from: "Where is the Book Store?" to "Where is my six year-old son? I lost him an hour ago, and can't find him." We work with FGC Central Committee staff to direct Friends to the best solutions for their particular needs.

As a result of watching Sally Campbell - Volunteer Coordinator at The Gathering - the Volunteer Desk position was created last summer at CYM. Sally helped me to see the importance of doing our best to provide for those with special needs. It is clear to me though, that the CYM venue of Kings Edgehill, in Windsor Nova Scotia, has a multitude of new challenges. There are no elevators and it is a hilly campus. However, our efforts remain steady to the challenge.

During FGC in Session, most days the temperature was about 100 degrees F. so I generally collapsed when I wasn't at the workshop, or working on the Information Desk. Travelling home with Rose Marie and Caroline B. Parry was a blessing in itself. I listened to what Caroline is doing with her work, and was wonderfully inspired by loving Friends for the whole trip home.

Thank you Home Missions and Advancement Committee for helping me afford to attend the FGC Gathering. Bring present helped me grow as a Friend, helped me to see better ways to work our own Information and Volunteer Desks for CYM in Session, and it gave me an introduction to Photoshop.

*Margot Overington, Halifax Monthly Meeting*

Since The Gathering Margot worked on the idea of postcards for CYM in session, to advertise the joys of participating on CYM committees [sample below - left to right: name unknown, Sandy Zelazny, Margot Overington, Dave Grossman, Leigh Turina, John Calder, Maria Recchia, Paul Sheardown, Anne Jackson].



## Energy Minute:

### The Quest for Energy and Respect for the Commonwealth of Life

A Religious Witness on Right Relationship  
and Energy Policy in New Brunswick

**Over the past 350 years the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has grown more fully into the understanding that all life is deeply involved in the reality of the Divine. The whole Earth is the nurturing home of the commonwealth of life and should, therefore, be treated with deep respect and great care. We are supported in this conviction by scientific findings on the interdependence of all life within Earth's ecosystems. We agree with the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples that what we do to the Earth we do to ourselves. Spiritual insight and scientific knowledge agree on this understanding.**

The New Brunswick Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends has thus come to acknowledge that the way we acquire and use energy

is a matter of spiritual concern. Our witness is based on the ethics of right relationship and respect for all life, including the collective life of Earth's ecosystems and human communities.

- Respect for the integrity of Earth's ecosystems and for life provides a framework of ethical guidance for accessing and using energy.

- Energy acquisition and use is a domain of activity in which human communities are in direct and especially critical relationship with Earth's ecosystems.

- These relationships can be mindful of Earth's integrity and respectful of life, or they can disregard the integrity of Earth and disrespect life. We always have a choice.

- Respect for, and protection of, the commonwealth of life must be placed before human self-interest that damages the environment. In line with the Quaker testimonies of simplicity and integrity, we try to live out this respect for all life by making careful choices in the use of energy.

In this spirit, and with regard for the long term common good, we urge the Government of New Brunswick to undertake an examination of the environmental and community impacts of two energy technologies that have recently come to the forefront of development in our Province: natural gas extraction that requires hydro-fracturing, and large scale wind power installations. Our faith community

has become especially concerned about the way these energy technologies are being deployed in New Brunswick.

We are especially concerned about the practice of hydro-fracturing deep layers of certain rock formations in NB in order to access natural gas. The use of this technology requires the high pressure pumping of large amounts of fresh water mixed with toxic chemicals into underground rock strata. The use of fresh water on the scale required is itself a serious public concern. The use of toxic chemicals greatly increases this concern.

Much of the contaminated water returns to the surface and presents a serious disposal problem. Some of the toxic water remains underground. The history of this practice elsewhere shows that it can endanger the ground-water resources of communities in the areas of drilling and fracturing. Hydro-fracturing is a contaminating and high risk intrusion into the underlying structure of Earth's surface with unpredictable and damaging environmental consequences.

We are also concerned about the development and placement of large-scale wind power installations. Serious questions are emerging about the health effects of these installations when placed near homes and settlements, and about the overall environmental and energy system effect of their construction and operation.

**Out of respect for the integrity of Earth's ecosystems and the security and well being of human communities, we ask the Government of New Brunswick to apply the precautionary principle to the technology of hydro-fracturing, and to the development and placement of large scale wind power installations.**

We ask that all such energy resource projects be subject to well-defined and continuously improved assessments that determine their relationship to ecosystem integrity and the well-being of human communities, and that these assessments determine development decisions. We ask that a well-defined regulatory structure and enforcement process be in place for projects prior to approval for development.

We need to recognize the disruptive and often destructive impact on Earth's ecosystems, and on human communities, of the quest for more and more energy resources. We need to change our quest for energy from an exploitive system that encourages excessive and unwise use, to a stewardship system that

promotes conservation, efficiency, and protection of the environment. We see the need for well-informed leadership in New Brunswick that will move rapidly to renewable energy development and make this change.

From within the most fully developed understanding of our religious principles, the commonwealth of life is seen as our sacred community. From within the most fully developed understanding of earth sciences, we see that human flourishing depends on flourishing of the commonwealth of life. It is, therefore, our ethical and human responsibility to handle all resources, including energy resources, in a way that protects and advances Earth's capacity to support life. Earth's capacity to support life is a gift; it is our source of sustainable energy security and the only true wealth we have.

*New Brunswick Monthly Meeting  
Religious Society of Friends, Fredericton, NB  
21 November, 2010*

## Good News

Friends:

Recently we gained another victory on the path to nuclear disarmament. On December 7<sup>th</sup> the Canadian House of Commons voted unanimously to support the UN Secretary-General's 5 point plan for nuclear disarmament. I was among a group which has been working on this for almost two years, focusing on a nuclear weapons convention as the likeliest way to bring this change about. Now the next step is to have this become a major part of Canadian foreign policy.

All of these efforts in which Friends and others are involved may or may not achieve, in our lifetime, what we strive for: peace with justice.

Regardless, it is a privilege that we are able to be a part of the struggle.  
Keep on!

Best, Murray Thomson (Ottawa)



## *Welcome Sue Starr!*

### *Quaker Education Program Coordinator for Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM)*

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The Home Mission and Advancement Committee (HMAC) is pleased that Sue Starr has agreed to serve CYM as the Quaker Education Program (QEP) Coordinator. Sue lives in Whitehorse, YT and is a member of Prairie Monthly Meeting. She has served CYM most recently as the clerk of Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Council (CMM&C), attended fourteen of the last sixteen CYM sessions, and is very attuned to Quaker process. HMAC hiring committee was most gratified to find that many of the candidates demonstrated great vision for what the program could become, and had many gifts that could be of service. Canadian Yearly Meeting is truly blessed to have a membership that is overflowing with talent and loving service.

The broad scope of this program and its deep importance to Canadian Friends, requires that its coordinator be an individual with both a knowledge of the resources available to seekers, and an understanding of the structure and workings of Yearly Meeting. The coordinator must also have a loving heart and be led to serve Friends both in their growth as individuals and in their Yearly Meeting. HMAC is delighted that Sue Starr is such a person!

As a child, Sue was strongly influenced by Quaker Elders in her family, and therefore has a deep connection with Friends. At that time Friends with young families were encouraged to be active in other Christian Churches. Her childhood attendance at Meetings was infrequent. However, since her reconnection with Friends in 1994, Sue has been an active participant both at Yearly Meeting in Session, and on committees throughout the year. Also, because she is an isolated Friend, she understands the importance of spiritual community and has a deep appreciation for Yearly Meetings, Half-Yearly Meetings, and Regional Gatherings.

Sue's work experience includes development, design and facilitation of adult and youth learning, as well as organizational development consulting. As important, she has been an active grandmother for over seventeen years, and has recently retired after ten years as resident grandmother (and bookkeeper) at her daughter's dance studio, where she is affectionately known as 'Grandma Sue'.

In her first few weeks of work, Sue has focused on setting up means for Friends to easily contact and communicate with her. She has also strengthened her relationships with CYM staff and Committee Members so that she will more easily be able to connect Friends with the resources they seek. Over the next several months, Sue plans to visit local gatherings to gain an understanding of the different Meetings around the country. She would also be available as a resource, if requested.

In the long term, Sue plans to connect with individual Meetings, gather information about resources, and develop ways for Friends to access these resources. Over time she will also develop and facilitate a visitation ministries program, using Friends from across the continent to strengthen relationships and share resources among the widespread Worship Groups, Monthly Meetings, and Regional Gatherings that make up Canadian Yearly Meeting. She has already received some individual requests from Friends, and hopes that ongoing requests will help her plan for the continued development of this program.

A committee of care for Sue has been formed and its members are Nancy McInnes, Rob Hughes, and Barrett Horne. Her committee of oversight consists of Ellen Helmuth, Katharine Carmichael and Caroline Balderston Parry. Sue is working eighteen hours a week for the CYM Quaker Education Program.

The purpose of the QEP is to assist Canadian Friends in their growth as Quakers individually, as they interact with each other in local Meetings and within Yearly Meeting. While there are many resources available some people are unaware of them, and resources are not always easy to access. Most particularly those Friends who are new to Quakers and are seeking to grow, are least aware of where to look for help. This is of special concern in small or isolated Meetings and Worship Groups. However, even experienced Friends from large Meetings may face challenges, or require assistance accessing resources for learning. Development of this program is rooted in a loving care for all Canadian Friends.

Sue may be reached by phone, toll free, at 1-855-273-1590 and by e-mail at [qepc@quaker.ca](mailto:qepc@quaker.ca) and will return calls within 24 hours. Remember that Sue is on Pacific time if you plan to call her.

*Katharine Carmichael is a member of Edmonton MM,  
HMAC, and attends Calgary Friends Meeting*

Guest Writer Jon Kershner

## John Woolman's Mystical Approach to the Bible

In 1757, while traveling in colonial Virginia, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Quaker minister John Woolman (1720-1772) visited the Yearly Meeting sessions at Western Branch. The state of the Quaker meetings was heavy upon him. He had observed systemic spiritual decay among the southern meetings, most poignantly manifested in slavery and excessive wealth. During the Yearly Meeting sessions Woolman was disappointed that a query against involvement in the institution of slavery was watered down to only warn against participating in the slave-trade itself, without warning against owning slaves. His concern for the condition of the enslaved led him to speak to the hypocrisy among slave-owning Friends. He said "...as we believe the Scriptures were given forth by holy men as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and many of us know by experience that they are often helpful and comfortable and believe ourselves bound in duty to teach our children to read them, I believe that if we were divested of all selfish views the same good Spirit that gave them forth would engage us to learn [the slaves] to read, that they might have the benefit of them." (Woolman, *Journal* 67).

In other words, since Quakers believed the Scriptures to be inspired by the Spirit, and valuable for understanding God, it followed that if the Spirit that inspired the biblical authors resided in the slave-owners, they would teach their slaves to read the Scriptures. However, this went beyond the treatment of slaves to the eradication of slavery, for Woolman could not reconcile life in the Spirit with involvement with slavery. This story illustrates Woolman's understanding of the Bible, his mysticism.

Already, we can see interesting aspects of Woolman's belief about the Bible. He believed the Bible to be inspired by God and helpful for people's well-being. He thought it was a matter of duty to teach others to read the Bible. He believed the Spirit that taught the biblical authors what to write could also teach Woolman's contemporaries how to be faithful.

Woolman's writings are submerged in biblical language. It has been said that his writings contain over 700 biblical references, but I would not doubt that this is an understatement. He multi-layered his writings with biblical phrases and images in a way that not only expressed his particular sentiments but connected his circumstances and mission to the broader scope of the biblical narrative and salvation history. Many of his biblical references carried no off-setting grammatical sign-posts; rather the language of the Bible was woven into his own language in such a way that he seamlessly moved from describing the condition of 18<sup>th</sup> Century colonial America to the words of Isaiah, Paul or the Psalmist – without distinguishing where his thoughts ended and the biblical quotation began. This article examines the way Woolman's mysticism was influenced by the Bible.

To say that Woolman was a mystic is simply to say that he felt God's will was revealed to him and that he could be completely obedient to God's will. That is, God's truth was perfectly knowable, and perfectly followable and he was united to God's will. Woolman was more than just a mystic, because his mystical revelation of God addressed his social context with Divine truth. So, Woolman was also a prophet; a mystic directed into the world. The language of the Old Testament prophets, was identity-forming and message-shaping in Woolman's social and spiritual consciousness.

There are three particular aspects of Woolman's mystical approach to the Bible that are most helpful for understanding him. These are his views of: scripture as union with God, scripture as prophetic vocabulary, and that scripture is fulfilled.

**Scripture as Union with God.** In 1770 Woolman suffered a severe attack of pleurisy. The illness was such that he was bed-ridden for at least a week and wondered whether he would survive. During this illness Woolman felt "my mind livingly opened" and sent for a neighbor to record a vision for him, evidently being too weak to do so himself:

"The place of prayer is a precious habitation, for I now saw and the seventh seal was opened, and for a certain time there was silence in heaven; and I saw an angel with a golden censer, and he offered with it incense with the prayers of the saints, and it rose up before the throne." (Revelation 8:1-4). "I saw that the prayers of the saints was precious incense. And a trumpet was given me that I might sound forth this language, that the children might hear it and be

invited to gather to this precious habitation, where the prayers of saints, as precious incense, ariseth up before the throne of God and the Lamb. I saw this habitation to be safe, to be inwardly quiet, when there was great stirrings and commotions in the world.” (Woolman, *Journal* 160, 160 fn. 6).

Woolman *experienced* this scripture of the Lamb of God surrounded by the saints and the heavenly worship described in the book of Revelation. He understood this experience to be not only a prediction of the after-life, but a “habitation” that saints were united to in the present. In this sense Woolman believed the Bible to be a living narrative, which encompassed him. This is a fundamentally mystical experience where the revealed will of God unfolded in the imagery of the Bible a union with the resurrected, glorified Christ.

**Scripture as Prophetic Vocabulary.** Woolman claimed that God was a just God. The enslavement of a race of people who followed Divinely-created beings was a great affront to God’s justice and God would not be able to put up with it for very long. “We know not the time when those scales in which mountains are weighted may turn” (Woolman, “Considerations on Keeping Negroes; Part Second” 237). The phrase “mountains are weighted” comes from Isaiah 40:12: “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighted the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?” The context of Isaiah 40 is the return of the Lord “with strong hand” (verse 10) to set all things in their proper order, before whose wisdom and power “the nations are as a drop in a bucket” (verse 14). This is a passage that carries great hope for the faithful, and warning for the apostate. Woolman connected the injustice of the oppressive master-slave relationship to the prophetic narrative of the return of the Lord in Isaiah. He, like Isaiah, believed that all people were equal before God.

Woolman believed that all people were created by God and loved by God equally. Prejudice, slavery, and racial oppressions were the result of human attempts to make hierarchies among God’s creation, and thus were antagonistic to God’s will. Woolman incorporated the language of the biblical prophets into his interpretation of the events of his day, not only drawing parallels between biblical apostasy and the injustices of the Eighteenth Century, but evoking the contingency of imminent judgment if disobedience to God’s will continued.

**Scripture Fulfilled.** Woolman found union with God and prophetic expression in Biblical imagery. He also saw scripture being fulfilled in day-to-day events. On the sea voyage from the colonies to England, Woolman experienced the fulfillment of scripture during Meeting for worship. “This day we had a Meeting in the cabin, in which I was favoured in some degree to experience the fulfilling of that saying of the prophet: “The Lord hath been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in their distress” (Is. 25:4) for which my heart is bowed in thankfulness before Him” (Woolman, *Journal* 174).

Woolman understood God to be constantly and directly available. God’s Spirit is not a static thing. Individuals could experience the Spirit and the Bible spoke to all human circumstances.

Woolman engaged in debate over biblical interpretation, wrote extensively, and deduced a finely-tuned biblical theology. Moreover, the Bible was not his only source for written spiritual guidance. He also read Thomas a’ Kempis and the early Quakers. In all these things he was guided by a sense of the Spirit of God active in the world of his day, revealed clearly to humanity and requiring obedience. This belief in the immediacy of God’s revealed will directed his reading of the Bible and his application of it into his life. When he looked into the scripture he found a path for a mystical and prophetic faith.

*Jon Kershner, North Seattle Friends Church, Wash. is working on a Ph.D. in Theology studying Woolman’s theology through the Woodbrooke Quaker Studies Centre, University of Birmingham UK.*



[Jon is grateful to the Elizabeth Ann Bogert Memorial Fund for the Study and Practice of Christian Mysticism]

# Richard Rohr's Contemplative Interpretation of Scripture

Gerald Harris

In the preface to his book, *The Naked Now* (Crossroads 2009) Richard Rohr states: "...all religions at the more mature levels have discovered another 'software' for processing the really big questions like death, love, infinity, suffering, and God. Many of us call this access 'contemplation'. *It is a nondualistic way of seeing the moment.* Originally, the word was simply 'prayer'."

For Rohr, the major 'software' discovery in Western religion has been Jesus. Rohr views Him as the first nondual religious teacher of the West.

*Nondual*—What does it mean? The nondual mind, the *contemplative* mind, Rohr says, "...withholds from labeling things or categorizing them too quickly, so it can come to see them in themselves, apart from the words or concepts that become their substitutes." (p.34) It is not the mind of our culture or religion of recent centuries; ours has been resolutely dualistic.

The dualistic mind demands that things be this or that, in one's interest or opposed to it, right or wrong, with or against, good or bad. It hastens to sort and file new information under concept labels. For our dualistic mental software, the thing itself, the moment itself, passes unexperienced, and can be regarded only after placement into its selected concept file. Thus, the dualistic mind knows not reality, but only its own finite set of fixed concepts.

The contemplative mind stays with the thing itself a little longer. It rests present, to the moment, before attaching it to concepts, and even then is disposed to file information not as *either-or* but rather as *both-and*, allowing conceptual tensions to sit unresolved. For Rohr, "...the sacrament of the present moment... living in the naked now... will teach us how to actually experience our experiences... and how to let them transform us."

Richard Rohr speaks for a contemplative movement that has arisen in Christianity over the past few decades. A Catholic monk, he stands among numerous religious who have rediscovered the wisdom

traditions of Christianity and brought them out of the cloister. His books have sold in the millions. Other monks and priests have been popularizing Christian mystics from the Middle Ages and new Christian mystical practices based on ancient models.

"Do not let the word 'mystic' scare you off.", Rohr says. "It simply means *one who has moved from mere belief systems or belonging systems to actual inner experience.*"

He asserts: "...all spiritual traditions agree that such a movement is possible, desirable and available to everyone. In fact Jesus seems to say that this is the whole point! .... Some call this movement *conversion*, some *transformation*, and some *holiness.*"

Movement from belief systems to inner experience, Rohr also describes as change from telling people *what* to know and to see, to teaching us *how* to know and to see. Likewise, prayer becomes "...not an attempt to change God's mind..." but a practice for "...changing *our mind* within us..."

Rohr and Christian contemplatives understand this effort of "...changing our mind within us...", as a primary intent of Jesus' words and of His life. Jesus' main metaphor for the new consciousness, Rohr asserts, was "the Kingdom of God". And Jesus' teaching of Luke 9:24, "...whosoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.", refers to the journey from an old life of the mind and heart, bounded and imprisoned in the dualistic self, to a new life in the freedom of nondual processing. In contemplation one may rest, be still, in the presence of God. In prayer, Rohr says, "...we merely keep returning the divine gaze and we become its reflection, almost in spite of ourselves." So prayer is like "practising heaven now".

Prayer occurs largely without words and largely in the heart rather than in the head. Rohr refers to Romans 5:5: "The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.", and again to John 14:17: "You already know. The Spirit is with you and the Spirit is in you."

So it is in the heart that one may enter the presence of God, as in Matthew 6:6: "...but when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret..."

The "inner room" can be one's own heart, and prayer "in secret" can be prayer without words, not overheard and monitored by the dualistic self.

Just as Jesus' words are, for Rohr and other Christian contemplatives, wisdom teachings for transformation, so also is His life. Rohr states, "All



statements and beliefs about Jesus are also statements about the journey of the soul” (p.147). Jesus’ life is itself a metaphor for the soul’s progress. Thus, one does not need primarily to *believe* the events, but to *know* them in one’s own course of transformation. “Here”, Rohr says, “there is nothing to rationally prove or disprove, believe or unbelieve. If you go on a sincere inner journey, you will know for yourself on some level.”

Rohr hopes for change from a “belief-based religion to a practice-based religion”. Without such a shift, he asserts, denominations and religions will continue to bicker, to focus on their differences rather than on their commonality. “We will merely continue to argue”, he says, “about what we are supposed to believe and who the unbelievers are.”

Contemplation, by contrast, can draw together people of different denominations and religions. In contemplative practices we may recognize one another as on the same journey to union with the same *One, Source or Essence*. We may learn from the wisdom of one another’s supreme teachers, regard their lives with reverence, see in those lives stories of our own inner lives, and delight in the image of God reflected in their persons.



Gerald Harris,  
Victoria Friends  
Meeting

## Book Review: Arnold Ranneris

*Engaging Scripture;  
Reading the Bible with Early Friends*  
Friends United Press, 2005  
by Michael Birkel

A book that grows from the spiritual practices of an author is a treasure. Michael Birkel’s is one of these. He is Professor of Religion at Earlham College where he teaches Introduction to Bible and Historical Christianity. He is also deeply rooted in the Quaker

Tradition, and has written notable books like *A Near Sympathy* (John Woolman) and *Silence and Witness: The Quaker Tradition*. In *Engaging Scripture* he considers the way in which Friends have read the Bible. “With Early Friends as our reading companions, we can discover the power of Scripture to take us into the presence of God.”

The admonition to read Scripture has long been with us. “Be constant in the private reading of the Bible and other writings which reveal the ways of God.” (1964 Advices).

“Remember the importance of the Bible and the writings of Friends” (1995 Advices). The practice of Lectio Divina has long been an accepted way of reading the Bible in other traditions. Indeed the method can be used for any prayerful reading material. As Friends, we know that we cannot really plumb the depths of the writings of George Fox, John Woolman, Isaac Pennington and others, without some Scriptural knowledge.

Michael Birkel roots the study of the Bible in this tradition. With examples from the writings of many early Friends, including Fox, Dorothy White, and his own study, he brings out the deep meanings which can be derived from this way of reading Scripture. The example of Fox’s well-known passage: “Sing and rejoice you children of the day and of the night, for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt”, is linked to a variety of Biblical passages. William Taber speaks of “the language of the inner landscape”. This is what we are seeking and will experience with this kind of reading and reflection.

There are many one-line statements that are worth reflecting upon: “Reading Scripture is a worshipful act and so we enter it in a worshipful frame of mind”.

“We listen spaciously. We listen as we would in Quaker Meeting for Worship.”

“We invite the presence of God - the Spirit - into our reading time.”

A chapter titled *Reading to be Transformed* explains how prayer can be part of our use of Scripture. “This kind of reading opens the gates of imagination as a spiritual resource...this can be a powerful tool for the transformation of self and society.” Reading Scripture and Mindful Living go together.

This is a book which as Frances Bacon said: “...is to be chewed and digested”.

Arnold Ranneris, Victoria Friends Meeting  
Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting

# Quaker Book Service



The following titles have been added to our stock. For a complete listing of QBS books, see our 2010-2011 Quaker Book Service Catalogue, which was included in the July 2010 edition of The Canadian Friend and is also available on the CYM website, [www.quaker.ca/qbs](http://www.quaker.ca/qbs).

***The Mind of Christ: Bill Taber on Meetings for Business***, edited by Michael Birkel, PHP #406, 2010.

The late Bill Taber, a minister in Ohio Yearly Meeting, left thoughtful notes on the conduct of Meetings for Worship for Business. He speaks of worshipful silence in a patient, spiritual search, often time-consuming, to reach a sense of unity in making decisions under the guidance of the Inward Light. The pamphlet ends with practical suggestions, notes and topics for discussion, and stresses that both clerk and participants should be well prepared. (34 pp; \$8.45)

***Paths to Quaker Parenting***, edited by Harriet Heath, Conrow Publishing House, Haverford, 2009 ( a project of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting: Quaker Parenting Initiative)

A mixed group of parents met during a three-year period to consider their questions and experiences in using Quaker beliefs, testimonies and practices in dealing with their children, especially teenagers. A useful report for parents. (122 pp; \$19.40)

***The World is our Cloister: A guide to the modern religious life***, by Jennifer Kavanagh. "O" Books, Worcester, UK and Washington, USA, 2007

This is a guide to practising a daily devotional life, "to which Protestant, Catholic, Hindu and those with no label can relate." The author is active in the Quaker community as a writer, broadcaster and outreach worker. (223 pp; \$29.95)

***Living from the Center: Mindfulness, Meditation and Centering for Friends***, by Valerie Brown, PHP #407, 2010.

The author draws on Buddhist mindfulness, Quaker experience, and habits of prayer to demonstrate the process of centering in Quaker worship. An appendix provides useful steps in a centering exercise, with end notes and discussion questions. (36 pp \$8.45)

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## THE QUACKER



Dear Friends,

Last fall, as my flock headed South, I went north, to Cape Breton. Judique was a wonder of music and history of Celtic CB. I landed at Inverness, which has many wonderful places to stay. I noticed that there are all kinds of tourist treasures if you stay in Inverness. Walk the beach for real "beach glass" for the picking. Being a new-comer to the Island, I moved north. Turns out that the Cabot Trail requires a day pass, the cost was \$19 for a family. Quack. Expensive, if you are a human. Luckily, being a duck, I got to fly over some of the most breathtaking scenery I've ever seen. Cliffs falling to the sea, sunrise over the Atlantic, breathtaking visions of land, sky, ocean. Cape Breton has so much to offer all of us. Culture from the Old World, born anew. Acadians, Celts, home industry everywhere, music, art, life happening in a small, mostly self-sufficient world.

'S e do bheatha (shar duh vay-huh). Goodbye. (Literally; a blessing with you). Register for CYM, August 5 -13 in Nova Scotia. Looking forward to seeing you!

### Grants Available:



#### Home Missions & Advancement Committee of CYM (HMAC) offers study grants:

The **Quaker Studies Fund** supports applications to attend courses and workshops at Quaker institutions or conferences. The current maximum award for this fund is \$1000.

The **Quaker Youth Pilgrimage Scholarship** is sponsored by Friends World Committee for Consultation, and takes place every two years. Financial support is available to Young Friends and attenders of Meetings and Worship Groups within CYM.

Applications must be accompanied by a Minute of Support from the applicant's Monthly Meeting. Friends receiving grants or loans from HMAC are expected to submit a report of their experience to HMAC that may be forwarded for publication in the Canadian Friend.

Applicants should be aware that they may be awarded an educational grant or loan only once in any three-year period.

For application forms or further information, see CYM's home page on the web or contact HMAC Grants & Loans Officer, Brent Bowyer, at 519-357-1883 or via e-mail at <bandcbowyer@hotmail.com>.

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"O seeker, trust in the authority of your own experience. For we are not led by knowledge to the heart, but by the heart to pure knowledge"

## The Heart of Christ

*Alfred K. LaMotte*

In 1972 I was a pilgrim to the medieval shrines of Europe seeking the heart of Christian prayer. I'd already explored the wisdom of India with a guru. I told him I longed for Christ, I was not a Hindu. "Be a Christian", he said. "Take this meditation into the Church."

In the crypt beneath the church in Vezeley, France, I discovered the tomb of Mary Magdalene. I had no idea she was buried in France. For the first time in my life I prayed through a saint: "O Mary, mother of prayer, guide me to the heart of Christ!" I wasn't even Catholic.

Much later I learned her mythic story. After the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene boarded a ship bound for Britain with Joseph of Arimathea. On the coast of Provence, where now is the port of Marseilles, Mary disembarked while Joseph continued to Britain with the Holy Grail. Living in a cave in the hills Mary became the first Christian mystic.

I forgot about my prayer to Mary Magdalene. During my travels I later shared my longing for the heart of Christ with an old priest. We did not discuss Mary Magdalene. We spoke of Gregorian Chant and the old traditions. Mumbling about an abbey in the south, he scribbled a note: Besancon near Carpentras. I stuck it in my wallet.

A month later, by sudden intuition, I got off the train in Marseilles. I took another train to Avignon where I reached for the crumpled note in my wallet. Besancon, near Carpentras. Carpentras was a three-hour bus ride into Provence. There I hitched a ride to Besancon: not even on the map, no bus, no train, few cars. The village dozed in golden light. Poppies and lavender danced in the fields. Granite hills shimmered in waves of heat. Everyone in Besancon was napping. Was there an abbey? My driver didn't know. I started to hike.

Covered with dust and sweat, I walked for hours, no abbey, only the drone of crickets. At evening I tried one more country lane. The sun was an orange candle on a purple ridge. I ambled another mile, through apricot groves, a flock of goats, then I saw the dome.

An ancient Romanesque dome of well-fitted stones, farm house and cinder block dormitory, tidy gardens, no sign. From the chapel came a sound as timeless as the longing in my heart: Gregorian chant.

I knelt in gathering darkness where nine young monks chanted Vespers. An oil lamp flickered from a niche in the granite altar. Carved in relief upon that stone was a woman, wild and naked, long hair covering her breasts. She held the oil lamp in her hand and gazed at me.

After Vespers they greeted me in silence and beckoned me to supper: vegetables, cheese, lentil soup and bread, without words. The head monk and I returned to the chapel and whispered, despite the rule of silence. I was invited to stay.

"I don't even know the name of this place", I said. "C'est La Priore de la Madeleine." "Who is she?" I asked, pointing to the woman in the altar. "La Madeleine."

The Magdalene. Only then, after weeks of wandering did I recall my prayer at her tomb. "Her cave was in these hills", said the monk. "This shrine was built for her in the ninth century. She was the first Christian monk. And you are just in time for her feast." A Catholic feast begins with Vespers at sundown. I had arrived at Magdalene Priory precisely at Vespers on July 21. The next day was the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene.

For months I worked in the apricot groves, sang the daily Latin Hours, rose for vigils at three am. But the real duty was prayer. In that ancient dome, before the soft granite gaze of the Magdalene, I prayed for hours each day, using the meditation technique of my guru. The stillness inside me grew boundless, then vibrant, then dazzling. I tasted the light at the center of the soul, where the tiny bud of this I burst into the blossom of God's "Om". Yet I longed for a personal connection to the Infinite.

Suddenly, doubt shattered my devotion. Can I unite with Christ through a meditation technique from India? Impossible, impure, even adulterous! I vowed to give up meditation and adopt the Jesus Prayer. I would only use the name of Jesus as my mantra. But nothing united me with Christ like my guru's subtle method.



Then came my breakthrough. I realized that the conflict was not about East and West, but intellect and experience. God cannot be thought about, for God is. I must surrender my intellect, and plunge into a darkness without concepts, a silence without thought. From that emptiness love is born: light from darkness, Christ from Mary's womb. Meditation deepened and softened, softened and deepened, until my longing was fulfilled. Gazing into the abyss, I gazed into the face of Christ. I saw no form, his features were dissolved in light. When two kiss, they are one: the beloved is nearer than the lover's own heart. They are one, yet two. The Song of Songs says: "For your lips are sweeter than wine, and your name is perfume poured out!" I tasted wine beyond lips, sweetness beyond naming. The person of Christ was essentialized in the sapphire radiance at the center of my soul.

"Taste and see that the Lord is good!" cried the Psalmist. O seeker, trust in the authority of your own experience for we are not led by knowledge to the heart, but by the heart to pure knowledge.

*Alfred K. LaMotte*

[Previously published in *What Canst Thou Say*, August, 2006. Reprinted with permission. Ed.]



[Alfred LaMotte teaches practical spirituality for the workplace for all who struggle with the query: "How can I take my soul to work?" He is a member of Olympia Monthly Meeting, in Olympia, Washington.]

## AWKWARD QUESTION

In which we briefly explore the attitude of religions to physical culture.

### Why is There no Christian Yoga?

*Bert Horwood*

Many religions include disciplines which integrate physical health and vigour with spiritual practice. Currently, Yoga in its myriad forms has caught the attention of Western culture. Yoga benefits both body and soul. Its origins are fundamentally Hindu. Qigong, including Taiji, spring out of Taoism and train the breath and the body as well as ritualize combat. Other examples practised in the West come directly from Japanese and Korean practice or may be new inventions influenced by Asian traditions. Aikido is an example.

Islam, Judaism and Christianity, with the exception of Kebzeh (an offshoot of Sufism) largely dismiss care for the physical body. Certainly there are no disciplined physical exercises to go with spiritual practice. Any form of "body prayer" would be regarded as distinctly odd to most of "the people of the book."

It seems to me that those religions focus exclusively on the condition of the soul to be fit to be with God here, and in the hereafter. The earthly vessel of the soul is considered to be either irrelevant or part of the profane and broken creation resulting from the Fall from Eden. In short the body and its workings are dirty and best ignored. Most faithful Christians await a new body when there will be a new heaven and a new earth. The creation story embraced by a people is a powerful influence on their subsequent priorities.

*Bert Horwood*

*Thousand Islands Monthly Meeting*

*Do you welcome the diversity of culture, language and expressions of faith...Seek to increase your understanding and gain from...wide range of spiritual insights.*

*Excerpted from Advice # 16*

# Inasmuch

by Sheldon H. Clark

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.  
(St. Matthew, 25: 37-40)

*Inasmuch* is inscribed on sweatshirts as the logo for The Scott Mission in Toronto. Newly retired in 1995, I worked for The Scott Mission for several months in 1996. The people of The Scott Mission inspired me. They prayed, worshipped, and acted in word and in deed upon the words of Jesus as quoted from St. Matthew. My career at Pickering College (1972-1995) and association with The Scott Mission inspired me to seek formal religious education at The Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, Indiana (M.Div. 1999) and then at Anderson University School of Theology, Anderson, Indiana (D.Min. 2003). I felt called to turn to another career and become a Quaker Pastor. Friends Meeting, New Castle, Indiana (1999-2003) was my first full time pastoral assignment. I became a Recorded Minister in The Religious Society of Friends at Indiana Yearly Meeting in 2004. My education as a chaplain had just begun.

First Friends Meeting, New Castle, Indiana, called me to be their pastor starting in the fall of 1999. I quickly associated with the New Castle Ministerial Association, and it was through that contact that the secretary of the Presbyterian Church telephoned one day to ask if I would be willing to lead an ecumenical discussion group of inmates in the Henry County Jail. Other clergy were happy to do regular religious services, but the inmates themselves had asked for an open discussion group where they would feel free to explore spiritual issues. I accepted the challenge. **Lesson:** The ecumenical world calls individuals to serve God.

The sheriff who ran the facility was sympathetic. On my first visit, he dropped his gun belt on his desk, and we took a tour of the facility. He stopped and chatted with almost every prisoner, asking what they were reading, if they had heard from a particular family member yet, and how they were doing? The sheriff told me that if his child had been in prison, he would hope his child would be treated decently, and so he was going to set the pattern. **Lesson:** Sheriffs, police officers, and prison guards can be friends and even advocates for prisoner rights.

Our discussion groups began with an opening prayer followed by their discussion topic request and a benediction. Prayer responsibilities were shared. Both men and women inmates showed a depth of biblical knowledge that was not totally surprising in biblically literate Indiana. They were ultimately interested in Grace and Redemption in this life as well as in the life to come. Topics ranged from *The Rapture* to *Forgiveness*, from literalist interpretations of scripture to “*What I understand is... What do you think?*” Then an untoward incident in the jail between male and female inmates resulted in segregating the prisoners by gender. This meant that instead of combined services for all prisoners, men and women had separate services.

One day, I brought to the jail with me another Quaker friend, who was the director of Children’s Services for the area. He had talent as a Rock-’n-Roll and Gospel singer and was the leader of a band. He also was the person who placed in foster homes children whose parents were incarcerated. The eight women who gathered asked that we meet at the round table in the prison library instead of in the overly large and under-heated recreation area where we usually met. The officers in charge approved the request.

One female guard accompanied us and sat with us at the table. The spokesperson for the women asked: “Pastor, would you teach us to pray?” One could imagine my surprise at the question, as this was the same question the Disciples asked of Jesus. I remembered what British Friend John Punshon had said in one of his Quakerism classes: “Every prayer is as though for the first time, and we are all beginners each time we pray.” We prayed around the table, each one praying for the person on her right. The prayers were spontaneous and heartfelt, and other than some initial encouragement, everyone present proved to be adept.

I learned afresh what Harry Beer, Headmaster of Pickering College from 1953-1978, had once said to me, “Expect to be neither shocked nor surprised. Expect the unexpected.” **Lesson:** People who make undeniable mistakes in judgment have redeeming qualities.

In the three years of being a Henry County pastor and chaplain, I found that members of First Friends Meeting were quite willing to participate shoulder to shoulder with other denominational groups in serving special holiday meals, and visiting prisoners, especially those who had no visitors on Visiting Day, or by sitting with those who felt overwhelmed at seeing their spouses and children in a prison facility. One young father who had never seen his newborn son, cried tears of joy as he asked one of the guards if he could be seated somewhat removed from the rest of the visitors, so that he could visit with his wife and child alone. Compassion for the situation clearly moved everyone who witnessed it. They were politely placed at a table away from everyone else.

**Other Lessons:** God talk is also just talk. Be present for the other. Listen to the other and to the Still Small Voice within. "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage: be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God [is] with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1: 9).

Pastors, hospital chaplains, jail/prison chaplains, nursing home chaplains, are linked by the fact that human beings meet and interact intentionally as spiritual beings. Chaplains worship as participants in religious communities, "wherever two or three are gathered together." We bear witness to the pain of others and pray aloud for them. We seek to liberate thoughts and feelings in spite of grey wall circumstances and a sense of overwhelming helplessness; we confront directly end of life issues and desire to bring comfort. The old adage given to pastors still rings true: "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Some human beings place themselves in horrible situations. Others, through no fault of their own, find themselves at the mercy of strangers. Pastors/chaplains want to alleviate the stresses and strains, the interior chambers of horrors, and the blank feelings of helplessness and dismay. We seek to offer what the 19<sup>th</sup> century American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote so well in his 1872 hymn: *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*. [see adjacent column right].

Setbacks, discouragements, alternative routes (the roads taken) frailty, and the inevitable limitations of being human, merely serve to make us all keenly aware of the need to love each other as God loves each of us, to be forgiving as we seek forgiveness, and to be instruments of God's peace.

*Sheldon H. Clark, Hamilton Monthly Meeting*

[Sheldon retired in '95 as headmaster of Pickering College]

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
 Forgive our foolish ways!  
 Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,  
 In purer lives thy service find,  
 In deeper reverence praise.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
 Till all our strivings cease;  
 Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
 And let our ordered lives confess  
 The beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire  
 Thy coolness and thy balm;  
 Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
 Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
 O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier

## Insight by John Courtneidge

Some time ago I had a strong urge to Ministry in Meeting. I stood, and despite jelly legs this message emerged.

It is a message that I've been sure of for many years, and many Friends would not be surprised by me speaking of it. I'm well convinced - as this Ministry voiced - that Jesus was/is, a socialist, and that his teachings, parables and so on, can well be read as a call to repudiate capitalism (a word he probably didn't use). Together, his teachings and his vision of *the Kingdom of Heaven*, were and are inconsistent with the mechanisms of oppression that we now term capitalism.

It seems clear that his Parable of the Prepared Meal outlines the five mechanisms that capitalism (and earlier forms of oppression) used in order to exploit people and the planet. In like fashion Jesus' *Gospel of equality* describes not only a testimony of social equality - of social inclusion of all by all - but also of practical, economic equality. Take, for example, his Parable of the Workers in the Market-place and the Vineyard.

*John Courtneidge  
 Toronto Monthly Meeting*

## Around the Family Around the Family Around the Family



**Ottawa Monthly Meeting:** We moved gracefully into 2011 with strong members and many attenders. Most recently, Frank Cserepy, a regular attender, was welcomed into membership.

First Day School continues with the lively engagement of many children and youth. They raised funds for a Christmas hamper and gifts for a family of seven recently arrived in Canada.

Last fall we welcomed back Lucie Lemieux from two years of public health service in Mali. Our reunion was brief because Lucie then left to work in Cambodia with the Indigenous Peoples Health Improvement Association, a project of Health Unlimited.

Our Meeting is also pleased to have Erika Koenig-Sheridan assume responsibilities as our new Resident Friend.

On a sad note, we report the death of Arthur Starr on November 12, 2010. Arthur was a former attender of Ottawa Monthly Meeting and the father of Sue Starr, our Yearly Meeting's new Quaker Adult Education Coordinator.

**Yarmouth Monthly Meeting** held its annual 100-mile harvest dinner at its Sparta Meeting House on September 29. Over 200 neighbours and local and more distant Friends feasted on roast beef, turkey and ham, accompanied by squash and bread made with red fife wheat grown by Ken Laing.

The proceeds of the meal and silent auction, some \$2,950, will support Yarmouth Monthly Meeting's project in Uganda: Alternatives to Violence and income generating workshops. Mary Edgar, who runs these activities, left for another five months in Uganda on November 6, 2010.

**Halifax Monthly Meeting** honours Betty Peterson for her lifetime of work for peace and social justice and warmly congratulates her upon receiving the YMCA Peace Medal. She was nominated by the Voice of Women for Peace:

In their nomination of Betty Peterson for the award, the Voice of Women for Peace wrote: "Betty Peterson .. has devoted her life in Canada to reaching out to others, both personally and through various organizations that she has helped to establish. Her overriding concern is always for the dignity and security of others, to be achieved through non-violent means. She is always willing to be seen and heard in her quest for peace and justice, whether it is singing protest songs with the Raging Grannies, or speaking to the Halifax Regional Municipal Council about the need to abolish nuclear weapons."

**Peterborough Allowed Meeting:** held a one-day retreat on November 6, 2010, on the theme of "Recognizing the Spirit and Hearing the Call." Thirteen Friends and attenders met in the warm and welcoming home of Bill and Rosemarie McMechan in the countryside. The day moved between silent reflection and deep sharing. Readings we brought with us included the first Advice, with passages from our new Faith and Practice on "The Inward Teacher: Discernment."

Lunch was a hearty potluck, and the day ended with a Light 'N Lively followed by a sacred circle dance in which we blessed one another with wishes for peace and took away a renewed awareness of the movement of Spirit in our lives, and in our life together as a Meeting.

### VANCOUVER ISLAND MONTHLY MEETING:

Deaths: Joy Newall on November 6, and Helen Martin on Dec. 10. Both were members of Mid Island Allowed Meeting

We welcomed Linda Scheiber of Duncan Worship Group into membership in September.

Maggie Knight, a Young Friend of our Meeting currently studying in Montreal, participated in the COP 16 (UN Climate Conference Process) Climate Conference in Cancun. Locally, several Friends participated in the efforts of KAIROS to generate local groundswell to enhance Canada's position.



# Notice Board

Quaker Center in Ben Lomond, CA (90 minutes south of San Francisco)  
Personal retreats/Weekend programs  
(831) 336 8333 or visit [www.quakercenter.org](http://www.quakercenter.org)

## Taylor PhD Residency Fellowship

The Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies is offering a prestigious three year PhD residency fellowship. It covers the costs of the required 25 weeks residency in Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, UK, for a full-time 'split-location' student, working mainly from home. This reduces the cost of a PhD by one third. The selected student will receive the benefits of working with Woodbrooke and the University of Birmingham.

The cutting edge research topic will be on believing and belonging in present-day Quakerism.

**Closing date March 31, 2011 for October 2011 start**

For further details, please contact Ben Pink Dandelion

+44 (0)121 5171 b.p.dandelion@bham.ac.uk [www.woodbrooke.org.uk/CPQS](http://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/CPQS)

**African Summer Workcamps 2011 AGLI - African Great Lakes Initiative of Friends Peace Teams - is sponsoring intergenerational workcamps in Burundi (clinic) and Rwanda (peace center). Orientation begins June 25 near Washington DC. Workcamps end July 30. Workcampers will help build with construction - no skills needed. All ages welcome - including families. Learn more: <http://www.aglifpt.org> or dawn@aglifpt.org.**



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## CYM Food Co-op needs your help - it has a deficit!

To our surprise, the CYM Food Co-op finished the 2010 Yearly Meeting in Winnipeg with a \$996.12 deficit, after starting with a \$1854.89 surplus. There was an oversight in setting adequate rates for the week long Food Co-op. The last increase was \$10 in 2006 to \$65.00 to cover the cost of the coordinator. After Yearly Meeting 2007 we had a \$4278.35 surplus, and it was decided to spend some of this on equipment. In 2008 at Camrose Alberta we began renting a tent, but without rate increase. CYM in Winnipeg and Alberta also incurred trailer repairs and increased gas costs. Tent rental in 2010 was \$1314.00 - approximately \$25 each from the fifty-one registrants from the \$65.00 registration. So we can see where the troubles began. As there was no food co-op in 2009 and a small (two person) new group of Food Co-op continuing committee members these patterns were not recognized.

**The Food Co-op owes this \$996.12 to the Yearly Meeting and we are asking you to donate to** bring this deficit down. Friends have benefited in many ways from the Food Co-op experience; affordable, healthy food and community spirit. Please consider donating to the Yearly Meeting earmarking the Food Co-op deficit.

Looking at the patterns of recent years we feel that \$90.00 for Food Co-op in 2011 will adequately cover our costs and hopefully bring a bit of a surplus toward the deficit (as we do not have trailer costs in Nova Scotia). After CYM 2011 when we see how your donations affect this deficit we will examine how to make our Food Co-op sustainable for the future.

Looking forward to seeing you this summer at Kings Edgehill in Nova Scotia.

Barbara Aikman, Food Co-op local arrangements Committee.

## *Creatio Ex Nihilo*

*(Creation out of nothing) Inspired by Genesis 1: 1-31 & Prov. 8:22-31*

Within the void I slumber restless.  
In me, then beside me, she is heavy in sleep,  
until my touch awakens her.  
Arising I leave and go  
into the emptiness and begin the holy work.  
When I return we rest and gaze  
at the gap between shadow and sacred radiance,  
knowing it is not me, but of me.

This will be a reminder to all things hence.

I ride the wings of the wind;  
clouds now formed are my chariot,  
the hot crack of lightning my messenger, my  
minister.  
She is by my side  
as I set the bounds of the sky above,  
limits of it below.

Her delight and laughter please me as the  
foundations are laid.

Longing to show my skill,  
my night is full of possibilities.  
Coming anew to my task with glee,  
I set forth intricate treasures,  
none less loved than the other.

I pull into view granite and flint,  
folding limestone into fanciful loops.  
Later it will be called Cretaceous, Paleozoic  
and there will be wonder at my skill.

With a sweep of my arm the earth roils and  
tosses,  
bursts, then lays loam mellow and fertile.  
Vine, herb and tree  
numberless floral celebrants,  
each looking to me for purpose and life.

I am the One. There will be no other like me.

To admire my task, I step back.  
Powerful and full of my blessing,  
the sun takes its place,  
assumes the role I have ordered.

It is not me, but of me.

It coaxes into the world the breeze  
and it fires the mighty engines of the land.  
To give pause I tap out a rhythm with my finger;  
the sun slips and the dark sky is flung full of stars  
dancing over the perfect green.  
In turn, in my time,  
they give way and the pattern is set forever.

Nothing disturbs us  
as this dark of my making gently hovers  
then retreats from the perfect celebration.

Still, I yearn for more.

With glee, I dream into life  
fantastic creatures of fin and feather.  
Utterly opposites, yet all of me, of mine, of us.  
I am God and I will do as I please.  
The waters are rich with the small and immense.  
The air hears its first trilling hymns of praise.

She is the craftsman at my side  
and rejoices with them.

Is more needed?  
Is it not perfect in balance and harmony?  
The land is clothed yet barren,  
pleasing to the eye but empty.  
Pouring out my cup, I reveal more of my vision.  
Among the verdant and leafy cover  
now run the legged,  
the crawling and the scrambling ones  
with tooth and claw.  
The pulse runs hotter and we feel it.

With an exhale,  
I breathe into man  
and pass the dreams on to him.

*Harold Macy*

*Isolated Friend*

*Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting*

## Through the Looking Glass

Language and metaphor are cultural phenomena that enable people to communicate what they consider the most important (or ultimate) dimensions of their lives in community. Faith-seeking understanding then is never static, but constantly open to imaginative engagement. In this respect we can appreciate why Jesus, teaching profound truths through the use of parables, cited the words of Isaiah: “for they look without seeing, and listen without hearing or understanding” (Matthew 13:13 NEB).

A. James Reimer, author of *The Dogmatic Imagination: The Dynamics of Christian Belief* contributes to our understanding of doctrine, in an age when words like *doctrine* and *dogma* are off-putting to many who feel alienated from inflexible religious institutions. When linked with the term “imagination” however, dogma or doctrine, understood as traditional teaching, is less foreboding. While many of us may have often felt like discarding the baggage of doctrine in our spiritual journeys, Reimer reminds us that theological language (which is also the language of the Bible) is “the rich and multidimensional language of the imagination, the language of transparency”.

Reimer adds a parabolic twist to his argument in *The Dogmatic Imagination* when he compares the experience of dogma to a scrabble game - a metaphor that “allows for a maximum amount of dynamic freedom for human beings within a structure, a set of limitations, by which we ourselves are measured”. He emphasizes that “the challenge is not to throw out dogmas (teachings) of the church, but to enliven our imagination concerning them - to go deeper by enriching our language”.

Robert Barclay (1648-1690) was the first systematic theologian in the history of the Religious Society of Friends. While Barclay’s work has never been accepted as a definitive statement of Quaker belief, it is true to Friends’ conviction of personal revelation, inspired from within, confirmed by Scripture and tested within a community of faith. For Barclay, it has also been described as a “thinking through” from the strict Calvinism of his youth, the Roman Catholicism of his theological education on the continent, and finally to his Quaker “convincement”. Barclay agreed with the Protestant reformers that the authority of the Scriptures did not depend on the approval or authority

of any church - nor were they subject to corruption by human reason. But he also maintained that, “...we cannot go to the length of those Protestants who derive their authority from the virtue and power that is in the writings themselves. We desire to ascribe everything to the Spirit from which they came.” (Barclay, xxi).

In his preamble to a discussion of Scripture, he wrote, “...because the Scriptures are only a declaration of the source, and not the source itself, they are not to be considered the principle foundation of all truth and knowledge. They are not even to be considered as the adequate primary rule of all faith and practice. Yet, because they give a true and faithful testimony of the source itself, they are and may be regarded as a secondary rule that is subordinate to the Spirit, from which they obtain all their excellence and certainty.” (Barclay, 47).

Scripture is a medium that reflects human limitations. This proposition should alert us to the fact that interpretation of the “good news” for our contemporaries is also subject to personal biases and social distortions. This suggests that everyone who approaches life from a faith perspective has a vocation and a responsibility for struggling with the questions that arise out of doctrine; quite different from conformity to any particular creed. While we do not all possess the tools for doing classical systematic theology, we may find assurance in the knowledge that Scripture speaks in different ways to different people - through our differently attuned faculties, interests and needs. Acknowledgment of our individual gifts for understanding also leads to a new level of interdependence and accountability.

John Barclay understood the Scriptures to be an incomparable looking-glass, “...in which we can see the conditions and experiences of ancient believers.” Finding our own experience to be analogous to theirs, we are comforted and strengthened in our hope for the same redemption they experienced. He continues, “Observing the providence that watched over them, and the snares which they encountered, and beholding the ways in which they were delivered, we may find ourselves directed toward salvation, and appropriately reprov’d, and instructed in righteousness.” (Barclay, 59). The Scriptures, then, serve as openings to the Spirit which give life to our communities of faith.

*Keith R. Maddock, Toronto Monthly Meeting*

[Excerpted by permission from a presentation to the  
*Faith and Witness Commission*]

Editor: Sherryll-Jeanne Harris

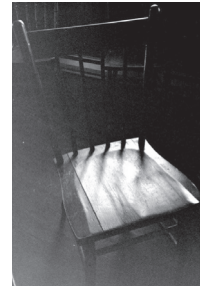
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## **Themes & Deadlines for upcoming issues:**

May 2011 CFSC Celebration Issue

Summer 2011 Young Adult Friends  
Welcoming submissions NOW!  
Deadline: April 15



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As requested by Kirsten Ebsen: I began as an actor and had studied drama at York University and the Banff School of Fine Arts, and was an understudy at the Stratford Festival. I received a Canada Council grant to study with international theatre luminaries at a special Canadian Actors' Equity International Theatre Symposium in Toronto and had written plays previously, including one called *Even in our Sleep*, which was produced on radio by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. And include the final line of the scene - "Leonard: But priest Lawson has become one of us."

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