

THE CONSERVATIVE FRIEND

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The Cross in Quaker Faith

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life [Jn. 3:14-15].

For Friends, the historic event of the cross is only a part of the fulfillment of God's plan; the actual atonement takes place within the human heart. Though the cross shows a fulfillment of the prophets and the Law, Friends claim that the fulfillment of the prophets' words and actions is the experiential knowledge of Christ risen within, that the inward event is the resurrection to eternal life. In the opening quotation, Jesus refers to three consecutive dispensations, and in this essay I want to show the sequential and progressive relationship among them.

To help envision the incremental process leading to completion, we can imagine a jointed spyglass with three parts or tubes that collapse together. As the parts extend one-by-one, greater vision is gained. For the first part, Jesus draws from Israel's history: Moses's lifting up the brass serpent in the wilderness. Jesus then ties this event to the cross on Calvary: the lifting up of the Son of man. The final segment is inward and spiritual, rather than outward and historical. Whoever *believes* in this lifted up (resurrected) Son of man has eternal life and does not perish. Later in the Gospel of John, eternal life is defined as "know(ing) the only true God" (Jn. 17:3). Jesus's end goal is to have others enter a particular awareness or "knowing," an inward state.

Prefiguring the Cross

First, we'll examine the event from Israel's history. We turn to the people of Israel led by the prophet Moses through the wilderness:

And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the Land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much dis- couraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, where- fore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died (Num. 21: 4-6).

Because the journey was hard, the Hebrews came to regret their reliance upon God who had brought them out of Egypt for what seemed to them no other reason than to die. They spoke against their Creator and thus alienated themselves from the source of life. The serpents bite; the people die. Seeing the consequences and confessing their error, they reaffirm their

dependence and seek to re-establish their connection to God through their prophet. They ask for life, that the death-bringing serpents be taken away:

Therefore the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us (Num. 21:7).

The serpents are left to plague them, though God does give an antidote to the poison, and they overcome death:

And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived (Num. 21:8-9).

This story is rich with information about the relationship between God and humanity; no wonder it sprang to Jesus's mind! God would have the people in relationship with Him, even providing for their restoration after they have separated themselves from Him. The Hebrews recognize their error—their sin; they petition for help and then obey God's command. The relationship is restored, and God can work with them once again. The event itself is mysterious. The restoration to life occurs when the people obey the command to look at the raised brass serpent. To cast their gaze, to behold the serpent of brass, is to overcome death. The people's attention is refocused away from their mortal plight and toward that which God has provided. We can see some foreshadowing of what is to come—the Son of man lifted up.

The Cross on Calvary

Quaker understanding of the cross differs from that of other Christian ideas. However, in the year before the great opening that revealed Christ alive, present, and speaking to his condition, George Fox described the significance of the crucifixion in this way:

At that time the sins of all mankind were upon him, and their iniquities and transgressions with which he was wounded, which he was to bear, and to be an offering for them as he was man, but died not as he was God; and so, in that he died for all men, and tasted death for every man, he was an offering for the sins of the whole world (Journal, 5).

John Curtis, a New Foundation Fellowship worker, noted in his study guide to Fox's *Journal* that

(continued on page 3)

Worship Groups

These groups practice waiting worship in the manner of Conservative Friends. It is best to make contact before making plans, as their schedules need to be adjusted to accommodate their regular participants. For worship at OYM monthly meetings see www.ohiょearlymeeting.org

Meeting	Location	Contact Person	Contact Information
Friends of Jesus Fellowship	Washington, DC	Micah Bales	316-210-6224 micahbales@gmail.com dcmetro.fojf.org
Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ	Evanston, Illinois (near Chicago)	Kevin McMurtrey	kevinmcmurtrey@gmail.com
Friends in Christ	Harrisville, Michigan	Kimberly Anne Makela	plainquakers@gmail.com www.plainquakers.org
Goshen Meeting	Scone, Scotland	Paul Thompson	UK # 01738 620688; Bookseeker @blueyonder.co.uk www.plainquakers.org
Lubbock Friends Meeting	Grace Presbyterian Church Building, Lubbock, Texas	Sara Scribner	sarabscribner@aol.com meeting is at 4820 W. 19th Street, Lubbock, Texas 79407
One in Christ	15 th St. Meeting House, NYC	Brian Doherty	212-279-6200 brianj.doherty@verizon.net
Midlands Quakers	Stonebroom, Derbyshire, UK	Allistair Lomax	UK # 01773-875962 ripleychristianquakers@hotmail.co.uk weekly online meeting, First Days, 10:30 AM
Uxbridge Worship Group	Corner of Routes 98 and 146A, Uxbridge MA	Connie Bair-Thompson	First Days, 9:00 AM
Whittier Worship Group	Whittier, California	Kim Palmer	kimpalmer11@yahoo.com

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Editor — Phil Helms, 2485 Bogie Lake Road, White Lake MI 48386 philipwhelms@yahoo.com

Treasurer — Elvina Krekler, 1187 U.S. Route 250, Adena, OH 43901

WFCF Committee Convener — Nancy Hawkins, 5190 Kirk Rd, Columbiana, OH 44408

The editor welcomes articles for publication, those written recently as well as excerpts from earlier Friends' writings.

The Cross in Quaker Faith, *continued from page one*

this description is very like the “well-expressed view which is held by many types of Christians.” With his opening in 1647, Fox’s understanding changed, leading him to differ from other Christians in holding that the essential sacrifice and atonement must occur within each human heart, a sacrifice prefigured on Calvary. Fox writes:

In the flesh without them [in history], he [Christ] is their example or figure, [while] “Christ in his people is the substance of all figures, types, and shadows, fulfilling them in them, and setting them free from them
(Works, 3:592-3).

Jesus’s submission in Gethsemane (“*nevertheless not as I will, but as thou [wilt]*,” [Mt. 26:39]) must be our own, if the actual reconciliation or atonement is to follow.

It is separation from God that is the problem to be overcome and to which all solutions allude: the brass serpent, the cross on Calvary, and the inward submission to God. And each situation calls for a redirection of intention. In the wilderness, the people are to cast their gaze upward toward the raised ensign of the brass serpent. People are likewise to cast their gaze to the historic cross, and further, to recognize that the Son of man has taken on their situation, has assumed humanity’s spiritual state. In both of these situations, there has been a shift in people’s awareness: In the first, people simply *behold* the uplifted ensign; while in the second, they not only behold the uplifted one but *become beholding* to the one who has acted on their behalf. Greater ties result, reaching into the inner man—to his sense of gratitude and obligation for the sacrifice that has been offered on his behalf.

The Cross, the Power of God

Friends have recognized that more than gratitude and obligation are required of humankind; it is eternal life to which we are called—that we may know the only true God (Jn. 17:3). This is the final and end purpose of the plan of which the first two developments have been described. How different is the account of the inward atonement from that of Fox’s earlier explanation of the outward cross on Calvary! And yet, in his description, Fox returns to the outward event as the corporeal model of his experience:

None know the atonement of Christ but by the light within...Mark! He saith, the light is that which gives the knowledge, and the light within doth not set up another atonement: but they that deny the light within set up another atonement than Christ. We should be made free from the law of sin and death while we are upon the earth. And here the blood of Jesus is witnessed, and the atonement, and the Father and the son; and this is all seen with the light within
(Works, 3:121).

The seventeenth-century Puritans objected to this claim. The Quakers call the light within Christ the redeemer, and thereby, the Puritans said, the Quakers had set up an idol, which denied the things that God had already done for humanity. Quakers countered this attack with the assertion that they did not deny the person of Christ but vouched for the re-enacting of his historic work within the heart. Says Isaac Penington:

That charge of thine on us, that we deny the person of Christ, and make him nothing but a light or notion, a principle in the heart of man, is very unjust and untrue; for we own that appearance of him in his body of flesh, his sufferings and death, and his sitting at the Father’s right hand in glory: but then we affirm, that there is no true knowledge of him, or union with him, but in the seed or principle of his life in the heart, and that therein he appears, subdues sin, and reigns over it, in those that understand and submit to the teaching and government of his Spirit (Quaker Spirituality, 144).

But what if the inward experience does not occur? What if there is no comprehension of the cross as an inward condition, no owning it as a just paradigm for our limited and alienated state? Instead, what if the cross on Calvary is revered with a false confidence, which claims to stand in good stead in the here-and-now and in the hereafter? If the cross is viewed as a culminating historic event by which we are somehow mysteriously reconciled to God, *it does become an idol*.

If we return for a moment to the brass serpent and locate its whereabouts sometime later, well after it has served its intended purpose, we find it under the censure of the prophet Hezekiah. He saw that the brass serpent had become an idol for the Hebrew people, and so he destroyed it:

He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made, for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it (2 Kings 18:4).

On the other hand, what if the cross is set aside as irrelevant and given no place within present-day Liberal Quaker faith and practice? Dismissing this reference point of the cross (and thereby denying the reality of the sin and alienation that it is meant to overcome) do we not humor ourselves into claiming that our best efforts and intentions are already divinely inspired? Remember the error—the profound human error—made by the Hebrews in the desert: we usurp God’s wisdom and authority and replace them with our own lesser capacities. Says Rufus Jones:

If any supposes that Friends have inclined to be “humanists” and to assume that man is so inherently good that he can lift himself by his
continued on page four

The Cross in Quaker Faith, from page 3

own belt into a life of consummate truth and beauty, he has not yet caught the deeper note of Quaker faith (Quaker Spirituality, 278).

The “deeper note” to which Jones refers is the cross, “the power of God,” as Fox reminds us. By the

power of God, which is known *only* through the inward cross, can we carry forward the hope and obligation enjoined upon us.

- Patricia Dallman, from her book,
The Word Within: Essays on Prophetic Quaker Faith
2009, Foundation Publications

Were Our Friends Really Quietists?

Writers on Quaker history will sometimes describe a change in style that appeared after the early years by saying that the Friends of the eighteenth century were “Quietists.” Readers unacquainted with the term may express surprise, saying “but those Friends were not always quiet!” This is a sensible objection, because Quietism is really a technical term for a religious movement within Roman Catholicism, and it may be questionable whether it can accurately be applied to Quakerism at all.

Quietism arose in the 1600s, and both the doctrine and the term itself were known in Catholic context before the end of that century. Its earliest exponent was a Spaniard, Michael Molinos, but his teachings were suppressed by the Inquisition. By the time Friends became acquainted with the movement, it was represented chiefly by the French writers Archbishop Fénelon and Madame Guyon, both of whom were read with approval by many Friends (and Fénelon is still a significant literary figure in France today). The Quietists wrote about a wide variety of matters of mainly Catholic import, such as the famous debate over whether religious contemplation could be acquired, or only infused. For Friends however the main point of interest was a doctrine that the human will is completely corrupt, so that we should look only to divine guidance within, suppressing the motions of our own will. To some, this teaching seemed to suggest Friends’ desire to seek the Light of Christ.

The problem with Quietism is that, while we do indeed need to seek the Lord’s guidance always, and not take up action based on our worldly cravings, still our Lord is not looking to crush the human will. Rather, He is looking to re-train it for righteousness, so that by being purified in His fire, we may desire for ourselves what the Lord already wants for us. We place ourselves in the Lord’s hands; we learn from and walk with Him; but we do not expect Him to replace us and to carry the entire load, while we loll about in the background. The Catholic Quietists wanted the Lord to do everything directly. Anyone who has tried this approach to spirituality will know that it is more likely to lead to a completely empty void than to the fullness of Truth.

It does not appear that our Friends of the eighteenth century thought of themselves as Quietists, even if some of them did read the writings of Fénelon and of Guyon. Rufus Jones is the earliest writer I have found

who applied the term Quietism to Quaker history, and from his point of view the term was not a compliment. He pointed out that Quietism arose in part from the extreme pessimism about the possibility of the human will that spilled across a long swath of history from the predominantly Calvinist culture of the seventeenth century, influencing Protestant and Catholic alike.

But were our Friends of the eighteenth century really Quietists? While they were careful to avoid sin, and to take action only as led by the Lord, it does not seem to me that they wanted to squelch all the motions of the will. It would be interesting to hear more about this subject.

Joseph D. Conwill
Member of the former
Navesink Hills Meeting

To Recognize the Power of Christ

In the late 20th Century, some Friends from Flushing, Long Island visited Ohio Yearly Meeting and were impressed with Ohio Yearly Meeting’s meaningful worship, in particular their profound silence and chanting ministry. From George Fox and other early Friends, they inherited: “know Christ to be their teacher, to instruct them, their counsellor to direct them, their shepherd to feed them, their bishop to oversee them, and their prophet to open divine mysteries to them; and might know their bodies to be prepared, sanctified, and made fit temples for God and Christ to dwell in,” (from *Journal of George Fox*, Ellwood edition). It is no small wonder that the report of these Friends impressed me. My Flushing Friends admired Ohio Yearly Meeting’s wearing of plain dress and their commitment, dating back to the Civil War, to being conscientious objectors. Even though I was impressed with what I had heard of Ohio Yearly Meeting, I was unable to leave New York at that time due to family obligations.

Today, if we wish to establish new Meetings in the name of Christ, we need to surrender to Jesus’s inward ministry and speak whenever we are moved in the power of God. In that way, we can help perpetuate and recognize the power of Christ as experienced by earlier OYM members.

- Arthur Berk
Affiliate member of
Rockingham Monthly Meeting

Christian Friends Conference - Western Region Palo Alto (California) Friends Meetinghouse, June 17, 2017

The quarterly meeting of the Christian Friends Conference - Western Region was held on Saturday, June 17, 2017 at Palo Alto Friends Meetinghouse, with 12 present, two for the first time. We were mostly from the unprogrammed meetings, with one long-time Friend from the Conservative tradition present. We heard greetings from some absent Friends; our Statement of Purpose was read; the schedule was presented, and Our Invitation to Worship was read.

Friends then gathered for about two hours of waiting worship, commenced as usual with a period of Bible reading in worship. We heard 1 John 4:7ff God is love, abide in Him; John 4:5-14, the Living Water; Micah 7:7 my God will hear me; water, wind and oil (Hebrews) all flow and can serve as images of God working in our lives.

Friends then met for fellowship over lunch. Around 1:00 PM we gathered again to hear an address from Sally Kingsland who reported on The Deeper Roots Program that she has been attending, a series of four residential retreats led by Deborah Fisch and Lloyd Lee Wilson. There were 15 participants, two leaders, and two 'hospitality workers' who essentially served as elders. It is intended for people who want to apprentice themselves to the Quaker way, understanding that we are all in apprenticeship to Christ. It is not limited to the Conservative Friends tradition, but is meant for a broader range of Quakers. For more information, please visit the Broken Vessels Quaker Ministries website at:

<https://bvqministries.org>

In her small group discussions Sally found value in being part of a community who make a significant commitment; working together; experimenting; relief to be in an explicitly Christian setting. Her group took up the issue of "lamentations" which was a deep and rich time together.

Sally's presentation stimulated a period of worshipful sharing from Friends. One Friend noted that Brian Young, pastor of Berkeley Friends Church recently posted a message with a connection to Lamentations. Another Friend had participated in a lamentations group in Philadelphia.

A Friend reminded us that Quakers got through the spiritual challenges of WWII fairly well, but the Vietnam war swept many anti-war activists into our Meetings. They stayed, but didn't have as much spiritual grounding. Another recommended a recent work on Quakers by T. Vail Palmer, "Face to Face."

One Friend questioned the lack of young Friends among us, asking what are we doing to encourage younger folks to join us. Another noted that his seeking resulted in weeping, and he had not known at that time that lamentation was a form of prayer.

A Friend spoke of our inability to transmit spiritual formation. Another noted that Marcelle Martin

makes a good case that we actually do know how - we just need to do it.

It was noted that to have a covenantal community we need leadership, something that liberal Friends have difficulty with. We were advised to be faithful to what we are given.

Friends then convened a brief business meeting. Our attempts to find a Saturday in September that did not conflict with some other Quaker gathering were not successful. Bruce will continue to try to find a reasonable time to meet, and let the group know.

We then gathered for our final period of worship. We heard an advice to end our hesitation to pray out loud, and let our prayers out. A Friend prayed for us to be faithful to our Father's Word.

In Christ's service,
Bruce Folsom

In trying to schedule a September meeting for the CFC-WR we found that there is not a single Saturday in September that does not conflict with another Quaker gathering that our members wish to attend. We have decided, therefore, to consider the weekend at Ben Lomond Quaker Center with Lloyd Lee Wilson (Sept. 29 to Oct. 1) to be our quarterly gathering. We will attempt to hold an informal gathering over lunch on Saturday the 30th.

In for the Long Haul: Inspiration, Strength and Perseverance for Spiritual Life Today

with Lloyd Lee Wilson

Sept. 29 – Oct. 1, 2017

"Our membership of this, or any other Christian fellowship, is never based upon worthiness. We, none of us, are members because we have attained a certain standard of goodness, but rather because, in this matter, we still are all humble learners in the school of Christ. Our membership is of no importance whatever unless it signifies that we are committed to something of far greater and more lasting significance than can adequately be conveyed by the closest association with any movement or organization." — Edgar Dunstan, Quakers and the Religious Quest, 1956 Swarthmore Lecture

A life given over to the direction of the Holy Spirit in the Quaker fashion requires one's constant attention and nurture over a lifetime. The challenges can seem daunting, overwhelming and discouraging, but there are resources in our faith tradition that will nurture our efforts to be faithful. We'll explore spiritual disciplines and practices, the Scriptural story, and the testimony of our fellow Quaker travelers, past and present, as sources of inspiration, strength, and perseverance.

continued on page six

‘Christ has come to teach his people himself’

Friends quote George Fox, “Christ has come to teach his people himself,” to explain why we bypass human intermediaries, rites, and rituals in our quest to learn from (not of) God and to come closer to Him through Christ. We need to beware of the tendency to understand the quote as “Christ has come to teach people himself.” Leaving out the word “his” is a critical error. To do so implies that Christ’s work is only, or primarily, directly with individuals. This is far from the Truth that Friends know.

Throughout the Old Testament, underlying all the stories of specific persons, is the theme that God was calling all individual persons to be united under God’s headship. *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.”* (Deuteronomy 14:2) Here, the second person singular makes clear that the “people” was a collective noun, a single, indivisible whole. The Jews waiting for their messiah knew that he would come to succor and lead them collectively, as a nation or people, not one by one. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified and risen from the dead, was and is that messiah. It is He who is to be not just the teacher but the head of His people. As Paul put it: *For the*

grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

As Christians, we understand this unification of many persons into one people to be the creation, by Christ, of His Body, a unique living organism. Not one of its cells can live by itself; each depends on all the others, and all the others depend on it. As each cell lives in service to Christ, all cells flourish in the unity which is that organism. We Friends can only be His people if we **corporately**, as well as individually, submit ourselves, as one living body, to His control in all things at all times.

A worldly organism must do several things in order to be alive. It must take in and metabolize nutrition to generate energy for all its other functions. It must move. It must preserve its internal integrity. It must defend itself from external harms. It must respond to its environment. It must reproduce its own kind. These same requirements apply to the life of our Ohio Yearly Meeting meetings as the Body of Christ. Not the physical life of food and raiment (the Father knows we need these things), but a life in the Spirit.

How do these attributes of a living thing apply to the spiritual life of our meetings, Christ’s body? Here are queries to assess whether our meeting is a living thing:

Nutrition and Energy

What is the spiritual food of our meeting? What spiritual energy does it generate, and how is that energy put to Christ’s use?

Motion

How, when, and where does our meeting, as a body, get outside the meeting house and move within and beyond our community?

Internal Integrity

What beliefs and actions of our members challenge or seek to compromise our unique understanding of, and witness for, the gospel of Christ Jesus, and His commandments for us as His body? How does our meeting remove these threats?

Self Defense

What beliefs and actions from outside our meeting assault, or attempt to infect, our unique understanding of and witness for the gospel of Christ Jesus, and His commandments for us as His body? How does our meeting combat these threats?

continued on page seven

About the program leader

Lloyd Lee Wilson has been apprenticed to the Quaker faith tradition for almost five decades. He has served on FUM commissions, as General Secretary of FGC, and as a recorded minister in North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative). His published work includes Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order, Wrestling With Our Faith Tradition, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #427: Radical Hospitality, and numerous contributions to the Journal of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative). He and his wife Susan make their home outside of Greensboro, NC

Possessions vs. Memories

I've been participating in an online auction service here in Columbus, Ohio. You go to their site, type in a search term such as "shelves" or "tools," and peruse the listings, bidding on the ones you are interested in.

Last week, I typed in "nails" and there was a nice listing for several cans and jars lined up two-deep on a shelf in a garage, and husband won the bid a couple days later for \$9.74.

On Saturday, we arrived at the appointed time and lined up at the front door of the house, papers in our hands, ready to pay and pick up our numbered items. Inside, the living room was set up with printers and laptops and staff to take your money and lead you to your items so that you could pack them and remove them from the premises. While we waited for our escort, an older man came up the steps, bypassing the cue of auction winners, and presented himself in front of the temporary desk.

"Where's John?" He asked.

"John?" The puzzled staff looked at each other. "There's no one named John," they responded. A chill passed over me, because I knew what he meant.

"My friend John. He lives here. What's going on?" I looked down, ashamed for my inability to fix this, this sad thing that was about to happen. I saw that his right hand was beginning to shake.

"This is an auction, the man who lived here passed away, and his son James hired us to hold an

auction to clear out the house." The staff seemed completely nonplussed.

I don't think they realized they had just told this man his friend was dead, had been dead so long that arrangements had been made to sell the contents of the house. Dead long enough ago that he had missed the funeral service, the viewing, the opportunity to say goodbye in some hospital or nursing home. The friend was gone, and now everything the friend had owned was leaving bit by bit in the hands of strangers, and nobody told you, nobody called you. It's too late for anything now.

He asked how to bid, and was told the bidding had ended, people were just picking up their purchases. He quickly left, and I asked my husband, see which house he goes to, but the man got into an old pickup truck and quickly drove off. If he had been a neighbor, I was planning to go to him with my purchases, and give him a chance to tell me a story about his friend, shared my purchase if it would have given him any comfort to have something from his friend's workshop.

You can read a great deal about people, when you have unfettered access to their home. You see the resewn buttons on a coat, and the darning on the sheets, and you know the woman who lived there took care of even the small details. She stenciled Pennsylvania-Dutch motifs on the fronts of her kitchen drawers, adding decoration to a room where she spent much of her time. You will sometimes see closets with neatly labeled shoeboxes and hat boxes, a place for everything and everything in its place. Tool boxes and sewing boxes, drawers and suitcases, everything neatly put away, everything maintained and repaired and taken proper care of.

Other homes, the trash is piled up to the windows in at least one bedroom, clothes trampled on the floors until they are suitable for nothing but rags. One home we could barely breathe in, the previous owner having incontinence issues and every carpet and piece of upholstered furniture reeking from years upon years of soiling. Basements with standing water. Cracked and leaking toilets next to moldy bathtubs. We've been impressed, we've been appalled.

We were eventually led out through the kitchen, where I saw a simple oak cross hanging over the sink. The cupboards were open, there were neat boxes full of casserole dishes and drinking glasses and pots and pans, and there was a laundry basket on the table full of pie tins and wire whisks and spatulas. Plates were stacked and taped with numbers, waiting for new owners. Worn but clean and folded dishtowels were stacked up and tied with string.

We went down the back steps and into a screen room that surrounded the garage workshop, and I noticed picnic tables, barbecue grills, and gardening tools

continued on page eight

"Christ has come to teach his people himself" *continued from page six*

Reaction to the Environment

How does our meeting, corporately, stay abreast of issues in our environment that relate to spiritual things? How does our meeting respond to these issues?

Reproduction

How do we seek out people who share our understanding of and witness for the gospel of Christ? How do we explain, to our children and interested non-members, how this is unique within Christianity? How do we help isolated meeting members to form worship groups, Bible studies, or similar activities under our meeting's care? How do we help people in these groups to understand who we are and to consider membership in our meeting? How do we help these groups of Friends to become preparative and then monthly meetings?

- Conrad Lindes
Member of Salem-Upper Springfield
Monthly Meeting

c/o Phil Helms
2485 Bogie Lake Road
White Lake MI 48386

Return Service Requested

Possessions vs. Memories, *continued from page seven*

lined up against one side. In the shop were workbenches holding old vises and a railroad anvil. Our escort indicated a shelving unit.

“All the stuff on this shelf is yours,” he said, and we used the boxes we’d brought to stack up forty jars and tins and many cool-whip containers full of brads and screws and nails and hooks and fence parts. There were two additional containers that had not been auctioned off, and when he offered them, we gladly accepted.

As we left, I turned to my husband and told him, I’d like a screen room on our garage someday, just like this, after we move out of the city. I saw myself sitting at the picnic table, happily staining rows of little boxes I’d made, enjoying a breeze, knowing they could dry safely without the worry of rain. I saw myself and my friend Pat sitting there working on our quilts, drinking iced tea and our feet out of our socks and shoes, on the cool concrete. I imagined myself busily shucking bushels of corn and dropping the ears into a large canner, keeping the mess and the heat out of the kitchen on a July summer day.

And I tasted pie, pumpkin pie, and looked down at the containers of cool whip the little old guy had told the little old woman that he wanted, and her old hands with large knuckles gently washing them out with handknitted dish cloths. You could see from the home that they wasted nothing. She patted them dry and left them on a dish towel on the counter, and after dinner he gathered them and took them out to his workshop and puttered around, filling them with the nails he had pulled from the porch roof and straightened and oiled. He gathered the pieces left over from fixing the chain link fence, and oiled them and placed them into one of the containers. He made little paper labels and taped them to the lids and put them onto a

shelf, knowing their value, the keeper of them until such a time he laid down his hands for the last time.

And we all swept in, the auction winners, and got a good deal on a crock pot or a lawnmower or a mirror. I left with my boxes of nails and little helpful metal things that are now on shelves in my workshop, and I am the keeper of them until a purpose presents itself, or I put down my hands for the last time.

Most of all, I wanted to tell you this story because those things—the contents of a house, a yard, a workshop—those things are still here and fools like me will come forward in a heartbeat to throw down a few dollars to take them home and possess them. They fill a void, they make me feel more secure, prepared, or give me a chance to pursue a hobby I can’t really afford. We all fill whatever space we have, with more than we need, until our possessions own us, describe and define us.

Before I reached home with my loot, before the containers were set upon my own shelves, somewhere an old man sat alone in his home. He shed a few tears perhaps, because his friend was gone. Those plates and pie tins in the kitchen, those cool whip containers, those picnic tables, they had perhaps shared pie together, laughed in the screen room, shared the goodness of the garden all those tools had once worked. Maybe they used the barbecue grill together, or made something in the workshop on a long winter’s evening. All those things still exist, but his friend does not, except for such memories he will keep until he falls asleep for the last time. I should have followed him to his truck. I should have given him a hug, and asked for a story, given him a chance to show me again that memories are more important than things.

Valerie Hibbard
Member of Stillwater Monthly Meeting