

# THE CALL

a Quarterly Letter for Friends in Christ  
“Primitive Christianity Revived”

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## THE CALL

Quarterly Journal of Friends in Christ.  
[Plain Quakers]

The aims of this publication being to help bring people to the feet of Jesus Christ, to publish the cause of primitive Christianity, to promote Christian Love and Fellowship, Unity and Gospel Order in the Church, Harmony amongst all people, and to help build the Redeemer's Kingdom here on earth.

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## Shema Yisrael

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5**

This couple of verses, rendered in Hebrew, form the centre of morning and evening prayer in Judaism, and are known for short as the Shema. Anyone who has witnessed Ashkenazim at worship may have heard it. Its recitation is taken as a serious obligation. The most orthodox of their religion take the injunctions of Deuteronomy 6 – beginning as it does with the words “*Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it*” (Deut. 6:1) – often to the extent of literally binding the commandments as a “frontlet” between their eyes (Deut. 6:8). It is not unusual to see a male follower of Chassidism with a phylactery on his forehead as he prays.

What is a Gentile to make of such outward devotion? In particular, what is a Friend to make of them. Our ancient Friend George Fox spoke, as many preachers did, of a new and spiritual Children of Israel, an Israel that was inward, not outward, to whom the Lord had not only given his Law, which was holy, just, and good (Rom. 7:12), but had also poured out his spirit upon them (Ezek. 39:29). Such a pouring is a personal matter, but not a private one. The Holy Spirit draws us together, and as “the Lord our God is one Lord,” so is his spirit. And what is poured into the heart must come out in what we say and do. Hence our testimonies. These things are not laid upon us as some kind of outward *order*, they are outward fruits, consequences of God’s touch.

How do people beyond Friends see *us*?

## Shall the sword devour forever?

I had thought of simply calling this article "I'm tired of it!" It is true though. I am. I'm tired of seeing through the lies and tired of it not making much difference (the first casualty of war is truth). I'm tired of our bent as a species towards bloodshed and violence.

I'm tired of this cartoon image of John Wayne riding in, shooting first, asking questions later. I'm tired of this cartoon image of Bond riding in on a tank literally crushing enemies then sleeping around. These are morally bankrupt nationalist images that over simplify the world to "them" and "us". To "Goodies" and "Baddies."

Last I checked the Bible still says there is no one truly good, but God. There is also that of God in all of us and that of the author of confusion. I'm tired of people who know this not living as if they do.

There are factions and groups of all sorts, not just terrorists and heroes. I'm tired of prejudices that label entire nations without regard as heroic or terrorist, ally or enemy. (Side note: There is a group of people in Afghanistan who deeply oppose both the Taliban and NATO. They also oppose violence itself).

I'm tired of no one talking about the inevitable 20 year war following Wayne and Bonds acts of shock and awe revenge. I'm tired of people not seeing that revenge is not justice. Indiscriminate killing is not holy or righteous.

I'm tired of people not seeing the deeper causes, reasons, and motives for war. Lust (see the book of St James) for money, power, oil etc. I'm tired of corrupt politicians, war profiteers and arms companies. I'm tired of the lies.

I'm tired of the cost of war. I'm tired of thousands of combatant and civilian lives being lost on all sides. More will still follow, for every war leads to more war.

I'm tired of the lack of compassion and empathy so many have. We mourn for "ours", but not for "them". Our tears should be spilled rather than more blood for all the orphans and widows.

For children born at the wrong place and time.

Yes I'm tired! I'm tired of the media, Wayne, Bond, the Taliban, NATO, Putin, corrupt foreign policy all around, racism (war is also racism) and the entire rotten broken cisterns of this world. I'm tired of every act of violence no matter how small that contribute to this dark night, even any thoughts that fail to be pure and captive to the obedience of the Prince of Peace. I'm tired of our indifference and unrepentance as individuals and collectively as a species. I'm tired of hearing the screams in my heart as I try and sleep at night troubled by this world. I'm tired of it, so tired I could cry. The question is are you? Let us pursue peace and our Prince of Peace all the more. Soli Deo Gloria.

David Timothy Holdsworth

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## How we live our lives

On the subject of an authentic person, as we recently hear discussed in the realm of politics, I thought of how it comes to fruition in the thoughts expressed by those who were early Friends.

One of the most poignant reminders to me, is the life of William Penn and Isaac Pennington, the latter suffering at the hands of his Father, who beat him so hard just for attending his local meeting, wearing his hat, and not bowing to impress others in company, which were the normal ways men chose to gain others' presence and impress them. Isaac Pennington, the son of a high professional man, bore the loss of status and popularity from the world, bowing instead to strongly-held principles that all were equal, and kept to them throughout his life.

There are times in other lifetimes, when one must suffer a loss of status, money and a roof over one's head, to be nearer to living authentically. If God calls us to a certain principle, and continues to impress upon us, this is the way, we have to follow what is being asked of us.

Christine McCarthy

## Be Saved from this Crooked Generation

An update of a sermon published on Facebook on the day called Pentecost five years ago

Today many of the world's Christians celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. This is a traditional Hebrew festival of firstfruits, known to Jews as Shavuot, that for Christians recalls the promised (John 14:16, 17, 26) outpouring of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of the resurrected Jesus. The story is told in the second chapter of the Book of Acts:

The original church of one hundred and twenty believers was gathered at Jerusalem early on the morning of Shavuot, in what the narrator calls a "house," but evidently an open enough space that a public of more than three thousand could witness what was happening and be "confounded" by it. What those passersby heard was praises of the greatness of God being shouted out in their own native languages by Galileans, uneducated country folk, who were somehow speaking in the Persian, Greek, Arabic, Latin, and Coptic that were the mother-tongues of the foreign-born Jewish passersby who had come to the city to make offerings at the Temple. Troubled, they asked one another, "What can this mean?" (In Luke's original Greek their question is, "What does this wish to be?")

The twelve Apostles stood up, and Peter cried out, "This is what was promised by the prophet Joel!" Now in Joel 2:28-32 there is a prophecy that God would one day pour out God's Spirit, or Breath, upon all flesh, so that young men would see visions, and elders dream dreams, and even male and female slaves would prophesy. God would show wonders in the sky, and signs on the earth below, "blood and fire and plumes of smoke... and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Peter, having recounted Joel's words, applies them to the present time. God had just been working wonders and signs through Jesus of Nazareth – and now, this wonder, this miracle of tongues!

I imagine a solemn hush falling on the crowd: they've just witnessed a supernatural act of God, and here is a man who can explain it to them – surely, a real, live prophet! But what is it that he's saying about Jesus of

Nazareth? He's saying that Jesus fulfilled prophecies made a thousand years earlier in the Psalms (16:8-11, 110:1, 132:11). "Therefore," Peter concludes (Acts 2:36 NRSV), "let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." What! They crucified him? Yes, Peter has already made the point that they crucified him "by the hands of those outside the law," their proxies, the soldiers of the Roman Empire who, ignorant of the Law of Moses, were "outside of it" (Acts 2:23 nrsv). And they are to be counted among those who enabled the Crucifixion, just as you and I are among the many who enable the crucifixions of our own times – whether we justify them as "necessary," like drone strikes that kill the innocent, whether we patronize or profit from rapacious corporations, or whether we turn a blind eye to the everyday cruelties and scapegoatings in the workplace, the schoolyard, the courts and the streets. In more ways than most of us care to acknowledge, we're of one spirit with the passive enablers of the crucifixion in Jesus' time. (Let no one ever again think that Jews of Peter's time were any weaker or wicked than our own people in our own time!)

Some of Peter's audience, conscience-stricken, ask the Apostles, "What shall we do?" Do two things, Peter answers: (1) change your mind-set, and (2) be washed clean of your sins, so that, by the power of Jesus Christ, they can be put away from you. These words are usually translated, "Repent, and be baptized," but this is the kind of church-talk that puts many of us to sleep, or even repels us, and today I want to use fresher words that will help us understand what's really being asked of us.

First, "change your mind-set," or in the original Greek, *metanoēsate*: What we really need is a new heart, a tender heart that won't tolerate our going against our conscience ever again. For the rest of the world says, "Let us do evil, that good may come," a devilish kind of sophistry that the Bible warns against (Romans 3:8). And the rest of the world suffers from the kind of madness that leaves people incapable of imagining that what they say or do might be wrong (Proverbs 12:15, 16:2, 21:2). Peter is here telling us to adopt a mind-set that says to God, "You who

will only what is best for all, let my will never again oppose Yours. You who are All Good, help me refuse all complicity with evil, though I have to die for it. Make my heart lamb-like, like Christ's." And ours is a God who will answer such a prayer!

So much for that word "repent." Now, what is meant by "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ?" It must certainly mean more than "Go to church and let a priest wet your body," or by now we'd have a world without crime, addiction, war, or even lying. In fact, Scripture itself explains that the baptism that saves us is "not the removal of dirt from the body" but "the pledge of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21 NIV). If baptism does not liberate sinners from their compulsive addictions to sinning, then there has been no true "putting away" (or "remission") of sins, and therefore, I would insist, it was not truly a baptism in the "name" (that is, the power) of Jesus Christ, but at best a well-meant counterfeit. Those who have been washed clean of former sins may never cease to be ashamed at the remembrance of past follies, but they know they're freed from them by their changed heart.

Do these two things, Peter says, "repent," and "be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ," and "you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38 NRSV). Now there are Christians who will tell you that if you've received the gift of the Holy Spirit, you'll be able to talk in tongues. No, not necessarily: to each believer, different gifts, according to what God knows about the believer's needs.

Peter's Pentecost Sermon concluded, we're told, "with many other arguments" (Acts 2:40 NRSV). Luke, the narrator, doesn't find it necessary to describe them, except to quote Peter's final exhortation: Be saved from this crooked generation! And friends, this is the entire point of what I'm saying to you today: we live among a crooked generation in the twenty-first century, in a crooked culture based on pretense, selfishness, and hard-heartedness toward people on the other side of the political, religious, or cultural divide, whereas we might all be living by truthfulness, lovingkindness, and universal forgiveness. Proud and greedy, we favor "our own kind of people" to the

disadvantage of the many that we ignore and dehumanize. We swim in a sea of lies and half-truths, letting bullies have their way, letting fear cast out love when Christ is asking us to let love cast out fear. And this crooked generation can so easily hypnotize us into thinking that this is a normal way to live! But no! As Paul was soon to tell the Athenians (Acts 17:30), God now commands everyone everywhere to repent! Pray with me, friends, that the living God, the indwelling Christ, the Holy Spirit that we've been given, free us from such insanity and strengthen us all to live as children of light. A world in great distress depends on our good example and moral leadership.

**John Jeremiah Edminster**

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## **Firbank Fell, the new community and the politics of Jesus Part 2**

Fourth, Jesus could have allied his interests with the Herodians and Sadducees. Herod was a puppet king and Sadducees followed Zadok the high priest. The key ideas here are of 'realism', 'reason', 'effectiveness', 'responsible', and accepting things as 'the way they are'. Roman rule was immutable then, and Herodians and Sadducees were leaders aiming to do their best to preserve as much of Judaic life as possible. They 'accepted and directly sanctioned the social system of Roman occupation under which they lived and from which they profited'. It is not an unfamiliar strategy to affirm status quo. Service of a chaplain is to sanctify an existing order or institution.

But, Jesus rejected the Herodian and Saduceean option. As Yoder states: 'for Jesus, the strategy of "infiltrating the establishment" was not a temptation at all. Of the four available options, it was the only one which never could have come to his mind. This party was against him from the beginning; in fact, from the time of his birth. It was their head, Caiaphas, who stated that it was expedient that one life should be sacrificed - whether justly or unjustly mattered little - for the sake of the community (John 11:49-50). For it does come to this: if religion is to sanction the order that exists, it must defend that order even

against criticism by the prophetic word, even at the cost of the life or the liberty of a prophet. The critic-from-within- the-establishment, the in-house prophet, will, if he stays inside when the crunch comes, be with Herod after all. This has not changed in our day'.<sup>14</sup>

Notice: despite Jesus' attitude this is the preferred stance of most Christian churches through history, especially since emperor Constantine in the fourth century and the Constantinian conflation of church and state.<sup>15</sup> My point is that, sadly and erroneously, it continues to inform faith communities - including Quakers - at levels both individual and corporate. Lasting legacies of Christendom, it seems, are not kicked over that quickly.

What option is there, however, if Jesus rejects Zealot holy violence, discards outward migration to the desert with Essenes or Pharisaic inward migration, and refuses to join with the established authorities? The answer to the question Yoder argues 'must look back to what God has been doing or trying to do for a long, long time'. It begins with Abraham following God's promise; he left Chaldea and promised to lead a new lifestyle and 'this is the original revolution; the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values and its coherent way of incarnating them'.

Jesus fulfills Old Testament promise. He gathers his people about his word and his will creating a community like none ever seen. This is Jesus' way. Its novelty is in being a counter-cultural community. A voluntary society that you cannot be born into; membership is by repenting and professing allegiance.<sup>16</sup> There are no second generation members. The community is genuinely cosmopolitan without differentiation by race, gender or economics; it is egalitarian and communitarian and presents a new way to live. Ethics embodied are the threefold cord from Jesus' sermon on the mount: love of enemies; forgiveness; and friendship. Disciples follow the way of non-violence, non-retaliation, and non-resistance. Jesus' way to transform the world is through such a society through which the world is blessed and turned right side up (not 'turned upside down' but rather turned to the way that God intends).

'When he called his society together Jesus gave its members a new way of life to live. He gave them a new way of dealing with offenders - by forgiving them. He gave them a new way to deal with violence - by suffering. He gave them a new way to deal with money - by sharing it. He gave them a new way of dealing with problems of leadership - by drawing upon the gift of each member, even the most humble. He gave them a new way to deal with a corrupt society - by building a new order, not by smashing the old. He gave them a new pattern of relationships between man and woman, between parent and child, between master and slave, in which it was made concrete a radical new vision of what it means to be a human person. He gave them a new attitude toward the state and toward the "enemy nation"'.<sup>17</sup>

In common usage the name ascribed to this new peoplehood is 'church'. A gathering of people committed to live their lives following Jesus' way and realize a pattern of living out what they believe. The existence of such a group signifies a deep social change. Its presence is a threat to the wider established order of things because 'if it lives faithfully it is also the most powerful tool of social change'.<sup>18</sup> Yoder affirms indeed that 'the primary structure through which the gospel works to change other structures' is the church.<sup>19</sup> Little wonder that after Firbank Fell the first generation Quakers were popularly perceived as a political threat.<sup>20</sup>

Having followed Yoder's explication of Jesus' way, at this point I will ask a question about how the church is to be in the world. I want to report briefly a scheme described by Stanley Hauerwas,<sup>21</sup> and acknowledge again limitations of any typology. Hauerwas sets out three broad models of being church,<sup>22</sup> claiming that it is a false dilemma of church being in or out of the world, between 'being politically responsible or introspectively irresponsible'.<sup>23</sup>

First, an activist church privileges building a better society with a humanization of social structures. God is perceived present in any movement for social change and church wants believers to join the campaign to get on the right side of history. The difficulty, Hauerwas asserts, 'is that the activist church appears to lack the

theological insight to judge history for itself' and its politics 'becomes a sort of religiously glorified liberalism'. Second, on the other hand, comes the conversionist, or spiritualizing church. Striving only for personal inward change because the structures of society are too tainted to tamper with, secular optimism is seen as false. Focus shifts from society to spiritual, and this church is conformist and challenges nothing because it has no social ethic to offer the world. As Hauerwas puts it, 'alas, the political claims of Jesus are sacrificed for politics that inevitably seem to degenerate into religiously glorified conservatism'.

Third, a radical alternative is the confessing church that is not a compromising fudge between the first types. It rejects the individualism of the conversionists, rejects the secularism of the activists, and dismisses their instrumental approach of whatever works must be faithfulness. Rather, the confessing church is expressive of disciples' fellowship gather to witness in a Jesus-centred and Jesus-led community. The novelty is that of serving not ruling or a lust to power. It is an alternative counter-cultural society, and its politics are the politics of Jesus' way of dealing with the world. Hauerwas states that the 'confessing church can participate with movements against war, against hunger, and against other forms of inhumanity ... This church knows that its most credible form of witness (and the most "effective" thing it can do for the world) is the actual creation of a living, breathing, visible community of faith'.<sup>24</sup>

However, as the gospel stories give evidence, a witness without compromise leads to worldly animosity. The cross is the price Jesus pays for social nonconformity. The cross is not a symbol of any human suffering or burden, because 'the cross is a sign of what happens when one take's God's account of reality more seriously than Caesar's'. The principal task of the confessing church is to be a community of the cross.

In this article, starting from George Fox's Firbank Fell Sermon, I have presented a view of being a new community that takes example and lead from Jesus in both its spirituality and embodied material life.

That community is innovative, counter-cultural and performs a modelling function itself to the world as firstfruits of the order that is to come. Its social practices are a paradigm for the way we are all called to live. Its spirituality a genuine alternative to genuflecting before secular materialism, ideologies and idolatry.

Barry Williamson

Endnotes:

<sup>14</sup> Yoder (1998) 'The Original Revolution', 22. This insight is not unknown: there is an old Muslim saying that if a king appoints a poet to the court this cuts out the tongue of the poet.

<sup>15</sup> An unpacking of the historical succession of Constantinianism can be found in: John Howard Yoder (1971) 'Christ, the Hope of the World,' *The Original Revolution*, 148-182. Reprinted in Yoder (1994b) *The Royal Priesthood*, 192-218.

<sup>16</sup> This inconveniently glosses over issues about children and member status.

<sup>17</sup> Yoder, (1998) 'Original Revolution', 29.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 154. For a fuller considerations of themes about powers-that-be and the role of the church see Hendrikus Berkhof (1977) *Christ and the Powers* and 'Christ and Power' in Yoder (1994a) *Politics of Jesus*: 134-161.

<sup>20</sup> Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 231-258.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley Hauerwas taught theological ethics at Duke University. In his work he did much to make known more widely the writings of John Howard Yoder. Differences between ideas emanated from their respective denominational backgrounds - Yoder, a Mennonite; Hauerwas, a Methodist.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed this typology is itself drawn from an earlier Yoder essay: 'A People in the World: Theological Interpretation', in *The Concept of the Believer's Church*, editor James Leo Garrett, Jr. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1969: 252-283. Reprinted in Yoder (1994b) *Royal Priesthood*, 65-101.

<sup>23</sup> Hauerwas, Stanley and William H. Willimon (1989) *Resident Aliens*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, 47.

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## Friends' Chronicle

We have heard from the son-in-law of **Gordon Haigh**, who has been a reader of *The Call* for several years, that Gordon died in Fifth Month this year. "*Blessed are the Dead which die in the LORD from henceforth: Yea, saith the SPIRIT, that they may rest from their Labours, and their Works do follow them.*" Revelation 14:13

Another passing was recorded recently, that of **Alicia Keunning**. Licia, as she was known, will be remembered by many people as the founder of Quaker Heritage Press. She was a singular person, sometimes giving rise to controversies; her obituary in the Daily Bulldog (Franklin County, Ohio) had this to say: "At times, Licia's sense of spiritual guidance prompted her to give out prophetic predictions which she took to be from Christ, though her community never agreed with these messages. In some cases, she later accepted that they were products of mania in accord with a medical diagnosis. The last and most widely known of her prophetic messages began in 2005, announcing that Farmington, Maine, would become the New Jerusalem. When this failed to occur on the predicted date in 2006, she entered a period of struggle, recognizing that something was wrong but this time not blaming it on mania, saying only that she should not have named a date. After ignoring the subject for a long time, in her last years she repeatedly reread her writings of 2005-06, but never said she had found any answers."

## Friends' Chronicle, continued

Several of you will have received round-robin emails from Rachel Chamness about her grandson Henry. After a delay, Henry has recently had major surgery. The last bulletin we had stated that he was recovering in intensive care. I am certain Henry and his family will be in our prayers.

### Editorial note:

The Call has on hand an article on the subject of bringing up children. Unfortunately the text has been corrupted somehow, and we can neither trace who sent it, nor be sure that it is complete and correct. Would whoever submitted it kindly resubmit it? Thanks.

## Nature Notes

I have been moved to a different apartment block in the student accommodation complex where I work. My new flat is a couple of floors higher than my old one, and though this means my bedroom window is no longer visited by the mallard ducks, I am much closer to the house martins.

New students will be moving in very soon, and I have undertaken to make entries in their communal Facebook page about the wildlife they can expect to see around the complex. I'm planning to start with the house martins, as they will only be around for the beginning of semester, then they will migrate until next summer. The next entry will be for the greylag geese. They are not actually resident here, but they can be seen throughout autumn, flying in echelon over the apartment buildings.

Mammals are fewer in number than birds. I thought I might mention that native red squirrels had been seen in the community garden, just across the nearest playing field. However, the other day as I was waiting for the bus I saw a grey squirrel scamper across the road. We are at the frontier of the red and grey species! I won't be mentioning the rat population – where there is water, where there are humans, and where there is waste, there will be rats. One does not usually see them, though.

My Irish colleague Mark will be doing the same as I but for trees and plant species. The new students' arrival coincides with the bright red berries of the rowan trees here. Also known as the mountain ash, it is considered unlucky, in folklore that goes back to Viking times, to cut down or otherwise harm a rowan.

The fact that the weather here has been unusually hot and dry, something which has been attributed to Anthropocene climate change, and the fact that a local fallow field has been flattened and built on, has reminded me of Genesis 1:28. God told humankind to "subdue" the earth, and humankind has had a good go at that! But humankind has forgotten that four words previously they were told to "replenish" it. As G.K. Chesterton is reputed to have said, "When men stop believing in God they don't believe in nothing; they believe in anything."