
THE CONSERVATIVE FRIEND

Number 26

A Publication of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends

Eleventh Month 2006

Concluding Minute, Ohio Yearly Meeting 2006

Editor's note: The first paragraph summarizes OYM's business. The rest of the minute is a tapestry woven from verbatim threads of ministry offered throughout the week.

We turn our attention to the role each of us is called to play in demonstrating and building the Kingdom of God. During the past week, we met in the name of Jesus as a people, gathered under His presence and authority. In our consideration of the Queries, we conducted a thorough evaluation of the state of Ohio Yearly Meeting: its strengths, its weaknesses, our successes, our shortcomings. Our committees reported on the ways they have drawn upon the gifts of our members to bring glory to our Creator. We rejoice to see the Lord active in so many ways, including at the Walton Home, in our electronic evangelism work, and through events such as the Christian Education Camp and the General Gathering. In our evening opportunities, we have heard about the practice of Islam, learned about ways in which our experience of the living Christ appeals to the needs of society, shared reflections on travels among Friends elsewhere, and enjoyed the work of our young Friends. In our business, we sought to find the stillness within, keeping our hearts and minds toward God, who gives us the wisdom to speak when called and to keep quiet when we are thinking our own thoughts. The one and only power here is that of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus.

The true business of the yearly meeting, however, was more than the hearing of reports and summarizing Queries. It was a rededication of ourselves to the Word of God. The joy of the Lord is our strength. The longing of the heart is to seek His face, finding that which truly satisfies. Let us all hear today that Jesus Christ knocks on our inner door. He is the Lord who lives within: "ye in Me and I in you." This inward Light of Christ is the tree of life for the healing of the nations.

We have been reminded that we have to know the resurrection and the life before we can point others effectively to Christ. We must bring the precious name of Jesus Christ to bear in our lives in order to become vessels for the power and spirit of God to

work through us. There is victory in the Light, as Christ eliminates the evil within and speaks to others through our actions. We seek to respond to His love with our whole being – to take up the cross and follow Him – to make our selves willing vessels – to follow and trust even when we don't understand. So much of the time we suffer more frequently by not doing what we are called to do, rather than doing what we are not called to. What hinders us? Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me."

Individual commitment to Christ is imperative, but we do not want to lose sight of the blessings derived from operating as a part of the larger body of Christ. For all parts to work together harmoniously, each individual part must be in submission to Christ as the head. When we are collectively in obedience to Him, we are one in the Lord, who instills Gospel Order into our hearts to maintain this Creation of Christ. We must lay aside ourselves in order to carry on this work, looking not to an outward conformity but to a conformity in inward commitment. This mutual submission is a precursor and foundation of true, lasting peace. This peace requires sacrifices – of our own wills, of our own egos. The true, lasting peace we seek is a gift from the Prince of Peace, and we submit that Christ is worth the sacrifice.

Friends, are we meeting the challenge of our time in history? We cannot even imagine what the Creator of the Universe can accomplish through us if we are united by Him. What is holding us back? What is holding thee back? Be open and ready for what God may bring. Seize the opportunity to deepen thy faith, whether through nurturing another, through prayer, through scripture study, or through blessing someone who has wronged thee. In this dark and confused generation, we have this to offer: the Lamb's War is the Answer.

We now conclude, purposing if consistent with divine will, to meet again on the 15th of Eighth Month 2007.

Seth Hinshaw, OYM Clerk

Scheduled Meetings for Worship

(For worship at OYM monthly meetings see www.ohioyearlymeeting.org)

Meeting	Location	Contact Person	Contact Information	Meeting Schedule
Athens Christian Friends	Athens, Greece	Themistoklis Papaioannou	papathem@gmail.com; P.O. Box 21121, Athens 11410, Greece	Weekly: First Days, 5 PM
Caln is now Keystone Fellowship Mnthly Mtg of Ohio YM.	SE Pennsylvania	Mike Kinch	717-284-4999; mikekinch@ mymailstation.com	Weekly: Seventh or First Day
Crossroads	Michigan: Flint, White Lake, Lansing	Phil Helms	248-360-2074; admin@ michiganquakers.org	Weekly: First Days
Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ	Evanston, IL (near Chicago)	Robert Hopper	847-733-7226 GatoWobbly@aol.com	Monthly: 2nd Seventh Day
Goshen	Scone, Scotland	Paul Thompson	UK # 01738 553582; Book- seeker@scone18.fsnet.co.	Fortnightly: 1st & 3rd First Days
Gwinnett	Atlanta, Georgia	Scott King	770-315-9478; a_lang@bellsouth.net	Weekly/ First Days
Richland/Ashland Friends	Loudonville, Ohio	Scott Savage	419-368-9419 (leave message)	Monthly: 2nd First Day
Stirling	Tillicoultry, Scotland	Henry Logan	UK # 01259 753508; log1957an@yahoo.co.uk	Every other First Day of the week
	Little Falls, New York	Geoff Gilmore	315-823-0616 geoff@gsgilmore.com	Monthly: 3rd Fifth Day

Financial Contributions Appreciated

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The editor welcomes articles for publication, those written recently as well as excerpts from earlier Friends' writings. Subscriptions are funded through readers' contributions and an appropriation from OYM.

The Faith and Tradition of Conservative Friends: Fitting for Our Nation's Future

Editor's note: This article is a condensation of an evening address that Nurya Parish gave at last summer's Ohio Yearly Meeting, being published in *TCF* in two parts. This is the first part.

When I visited Ohio Yearly Meeting sessions in 2005, I found myself listening not only to the words offered, but also to the faith I heard behind your words. It is my sense that Conservative Friends are at a significant point of discernment, seeking the Lord's will for your actions in the context of our time. I believe Conservative Friends do have 'something' very precious to offer our world. By "mirroring back" what I have seen, heard, and discovered among you, I hope to show you your own gifts in a way that you would perhaps not discover on your own.

I am, however, not a pure mirror "For now we see through a glass darkly... we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part..." as Paul said I have my own distortions and likely my words will not present a true picture. It is, though, with love that I speak, and I hope to be of more worth than a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal

I think it is worthwhile for me to explain more fully my own situation. In fact, some of you may be wondering, "Why on earth is a hireling priest speaking to us?" I feel a need to let you know literally "where I am coming from" so that you may factor in my location as you reflect on my observations about your own traditions.

I was born Las Vegas, Nevada, and lived there for the first seventeen years of my life. Las Vegas, I have come to believe, is a symbol of the culture of hedonism and environmental destructiveness which permeates our country at this time. As a child, I just knew it felt wrong to be there and I wanted to leave. My parents had a very troubled marriage and finally divorced when I was sixteen. My home was a cold war, and as the only child, I was the diplomat who extended relations to both combatants.

I was raised outside any religious tradition by par-

ents disconnected from their own religious traditions. I was more or less an atheist or agnostic, doubting or disbelieving the existence of God, for the first twenty formative years of my life. Because I had no religious training, Christianity was completely foreign to me. My exposure to the Christian story was limited to picking up brochures in strange places that warned me that I would go to hell if I did not accept Christ as my savior. For me, an outsider, that concept made no sense.

The Lord was nonetheless active in my life, although I did not know His name. God led me to discover church. I discovered the Unitarian Universalist Association, the UUA—a group of congregations whose theology more or less mirrors the current theology of Friends General Conference. A significant aspect of this theology is its lack of clarity and thus its inability to make significant truth claims. On the positive side, the UUs did not ask me to accept confusing theological concepts, but instead accepted me as I was, with all my questions and doubts and concerns. And God called me to ministry in that context.

I obtained a Master's of Divinity degree from Harvard, where I spent part of my time fruitlessly lobbying the administration to offer courses in spiritual development and discernment. At that point it seemed Harvard was more concerned about the intellectual preparation of scholars than the spiritual preparation of ministers.

Again the Lord was active in my life and led me to discover continuing Christians among the Unitarian Universalists—people who play a part in the UUA much like the part Conservative Friends play in the larger Friends movement. From these Christians I heard the story of Jesus Christ in a way that I could accept. It was not focused on hell or damnation, but rather on living, insofar as was humanly possible, in the spirit and likeness of Christ. I became a Christian about a year before I was ordained.

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Conservative Friends: Fitting for the Future (Continued from page 3)

I have worked full-time as a clergyperson for eight years, serving two congregations. The first church I served was tiny—40 members—and struggling to survive. The church I now serve is large—1000 members—and nevertheless is struggling to survive. Over these years I have become disillusioned with the role that clergypersons are called to play.

So—Las Vegas, a broken family, no religious upbringing, affiliation with a denomination of ambiguous theology, an uneasy relationship to the clergy role. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels,” Paul writes, describing the gospel. Certainly I am one of those earthen vessels; I am saved by grace and grateful for my salvation in Christ. But as I look around the world, I discover that especially in my generation, elements of my earthen story are repeated in many lives.

Not everyone is raised in Las Vegas. But in our time in America, everyone is raised in a culture which prizes entertainment, instant gratification, and salvation through consumerism, and where environmental devastation is seen as normal, a necessary evil consequent to the American way of life.

Not everyone is raised outside of church. But less than half of all individuals in America participate in a community which has the Christian story at its center. Some studies put the number at closer to 25 to 35%. Many children are being raised the way I was raised—living in the world without a way to understand the world, much less minister in it. Most of those children are not raised in alternate religions—they are simply raised as I was, in no religion whatsoever.

Not everyone comes from a broken home, but fully one-quarter of those in my generation do. Studies, most notably by Judith Wallerstein, have shown that the emotional impacts of parental divorce last for decades and reduce the stability of marriages in the next generation. We can expect that more children of divorced families will be growing up in our world. And as Elizabeth Marquardt has recently shown in her book, Between Two Worlds, such children, not offered a coherent belief system by united parents, learn early to rely on themselves and

on what they find within.

Not everyone charts a religious path in the UUA (in fact, few do) or is called to clergy life and studies at Harvard. But the essential tenet of the UUA, namely tolerance and freedom in religion, are common among many people in the US and Europe today. And the lack of emphasis on cultivating the soul in favor of the mind has been widespread for at least the past hundred years, as people increasingly turned to modern science rather than scripture as a way to understand the world.

All of these aspects of our society today can be traced to the cultural changes of the last century or so. Furthermore, some of the shadows we see on the horizon are unintended consequences of the choices human beings have made over that time. It is a measure of how much change has occurred that it is hardly possible for an American of my age to imagine living without cars, without phones, without computers, without electricity. And yet for thousands of years human beings survived without these so-called conveniences—and as a result enjoyed the clean air, water, and earth that I and my children will never see. It is a measure of how much change has occurred that according to Eric Schlosser, McDonald’s Golden Arches are now more widely recognized by children than the Christian cross. It is a measure of how much change has occurred that of women with children under age six, 39 percent worked outside the home in 1975, while 62 percent did in 2004. And as Jean Twenge points out in her recent book, Generation Me, today most young men AND women are taught that they belong in the workforce rather than caring for their children. This message causes confusion, anxiety, and distress to young mothers and fathers when babies arrive and with them the reality of their constant need for care.

In the face of these and many other changes of the last century, what does it mean to be a people who confess that the spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable? As a seeker looking in, I find that the faith and practice of Conservative Friends offers much desperately needed wisdom and grace. And, intriguingly, some of the very same

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A Sparrow Alone (Psalm 102)

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; Incline thine ear unto me:

in the day when I call answer me speedily.
For my days are consumed like smoke,
and my bones are burned as an hearth.
My heart is smitten, and withered like grass;
so that I forget to eat my bread.
By reason of the voice of my groaning

my bones cleave to my skin.
I am like a pelican of the wilderness:
I am like an owl of the desert.
I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top....

But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever;
and thy remembrance unto all generations.
Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion:
for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come....

For some of us the making and maintaining of friendships does not come naturally or easily. For others the challenge might lie in being content in God's Providence, and finding joy and acceptance in whatsoever and whosoever He sends.

For me this double challenge takes precedence and keeps me close to the throne of Grace. If I turn away from this twin challenge, I seem to forfeit the peace of mind and soul that comes from being centred in His will. I find that the difficulties I encounter in being obedient in this way become a source of blessing.

Psalm 102:7 says "I watch and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop." I think this expresses the loneliness we all feel sometimes. This sense of isolation and feeling that nobody understands or cares are common to most, even in the busiest and most social of lives. So what is wrong with the sparrow? Everyone knows that sparrows gather in flocks, twittering and chattering gaily amongst themselves. They seem to be communicating. How come this one is alone on the housetop? How come indeed.

Well, Friends, it seems that our little flock is well and truly scattered and we are few. (John 11:32) So we sit alone on a housetop and pipe our mournful song. For those of us who are housebound for whatever reason, or do not yet have the blessing of a meeting close at hand, or have transport difficulties, or perhaps financial, physical or other restraints, which can make it difficult to travel to be with others, all this can be a great challenge which we know can give way to frustration and depression. For those of us who primarily meet alone, whatever

the reasons for our feelings of isolation, whether real or imagined, the many means of communication available to us should make a difference. Personally, I am always much cheered by a card, a letter, a phone call, a newsletter, an e-mail or even, best of a all, a visit to share in waiting worship. It is good to feel supported by others and encouraged in the Lord.

Of course I do realise that for some it may be genuinely difficult to make time and effort to stay in touch. I feel that way myself sometimes, but I think this does beg the question as to how much should being in touch, lets call it communicating, be a priority between Friends? What should be the basis for this communication? What does it mean to communicate? Does it matter? If so, why?

We know that contact in isolation brings its benefits, that much is obvious, but how much more might it mean when isolation is not just simply a matter of location or social needs? What if it is spiritual? Psalm 68 v6 tells us "He settles the solitary in families." Why is this? I believe it is so that God's love can be communicated and shared. Friends, isn't that what God is for? God IS love. Titus 1:4 says we should tell each other about God's love and share our common faith.

So then, we *commune* with God, and *communicate* through *community*. Simple really, so why don't we do it? I must confess to making all sorts of excuses from tiredness and doubts about my ability to communicate, through to fear of rejection and phone phobia! But I know that unless I make communica-

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What Is Truth?

“What is truth?” is a question, a statement, or both. We cannot be sure out of what motive or motives Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine, posed this question to Jesus of Nazareth, as recorded in the book of John. Was Pilate seeking to know, sincerely, the truth, or was he making an arrogant or cynical statement to the effect that there is no truth? For the Romans and Greeks the truth was found in philosophy and in the art and science of logic; for the Jews the truth was found in the Torah, in the Law and the cultic practices associated with the temple in Jerusalem. Pilate’s question was posed by many others before him, and it has been posed countless times and in numerous places all over the world since the First Century A.D.

Men and women throughout history have attempted to find and know the truth that will explain the how, and the why of human existence, and the purpose for which each of us is here. In fact, many would say that this drive to seek out and know the truth is the primary motivation in human existence. Various schools of philosophy have sought to know and establish the truth through an objective system of propositions and proofs. The diversity of philosophical and theological systems and views that address this question are evidence of how people have sought to know and express their beliefs about truth. Even persons who claim that there is no objective truth in human existence per se have developed systematic philosophies to substantiate their beliefs.

Since the beginning of the modern age, and particularly in the post-modern age, the quest to know an objective answer to the question of “What is truth?” is often seen as a quaint or even irrelevant endeavor. The dominant or popular view of truth in post-modern philosophy and society is that there is no objective truth, rather, truth is entirely subjective, and therefore there are many truths all of which are equally valid and truthful. To a certain extent this is an understandable reaction to the imposition of “truth” upon people by individuals, institutions, systems, and structures of a given society and culture. Often these same individuals and insti-

tutions fail to uphold and even violate the truth they impose, and this leads many to disillusionment, cynicism, and despair, and to distrust or doubt any claims about truth as it pertains to human existence.

The predecessors to early Friends, collectively known as Seekers, were also disillusioned with the people and institutions of their time that claimed to know the truth and were willing and able to impose it upon those who differed with them. The Seekers, though, held the conviction that there was an objective truth that could be known and experienced, but that one of its major characteristics was that those who believed and lived in it were not led to impose it upon others, especially through oppression and violence. These people firmly believed in the reality and existence of an objective truth, valid for all people, at all times, and in all places. For those who became known as Friends, or Quakers, this truth is given to all irrespective of differences in culture, time, or geography. Furthermore, this truth is not restricted to those with knowledge of a book or even the name of Jesus.

My own experience of searching for the Truth, of being a seeker, was characterized by finding theologies, philosophies, and systems that appealed to me and made sense to me. I would read and study and often seek out a person or community from the given tradition or school of theology, or sociopolitical system, and I would attempt to put into practice the outward forms, if any, and rest assured that my intellectual understanding was sufficient and of primary importance. Even my initial encounter with and practice of Quakerism, and what I thought to be my “convincement,” in the late 1990’s was primarily of this order. At times I despaired of ever finding the truth that would speak to my condition and that of the world around me. An accurate description of my state of being during this long period, from my early twenties until my convincement in the 12th Month of 2005, is summed up as follows: “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

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Conservative Friends: Fitting for the Future (Cont. from pg 4)

changes in public life which have ushered in our century of changes have also disposed people to be more inclined toward this way of life and faith.

I sometimes wonder if perhaps in my children's lifetime the day will come of which George Fox spoke, in which a great people will be gathered, witnesses to the power of the Lord, practicing in the manner of Friends. The need for such a people has never been greater.

There are four ways in which, to my mind, Conservative Friends offer a different and needed witness in the world. These are 1) An insistence on the presence of Christ in the world and in the heart;

2) A willingness to wait on the Lord in worship, which leads to the practice of free gospel ministry rather than ministry by paid clergy; and 3) A corporate witness to a simple and/or plain way of life (that and/or is important, we'll come back to it later); 4) A commitment to the disciplines and sacrifices necessary for peace. I'd like to discuss each of these from the standpoint of why it is distinctive, why it is needed today, and why the ground for it is fertile at this time. (Ed: This discussion will be continued in the next issue of TCF.)

Nurya Love Parish

Nurya, her husband David, and their two young children live in Grand Rapids, Michigan. They were visitors this past summer at Ohio Yearly Meeting.

**A Sparrow Alone** (Continued from page 5)

tion a priority, I may be doomed to my lonely vigil on the housetop. Hebrews 13:16 exhorts, "but to do good, and to communicate forget not." I am grateful to the Lord for those who have communicated their love of God to me, and in doing so demonstrated their love for me in Christ, and do not forget me in my "isolation." A blessing on them; they know who they are. May I learn from their loving

example and bless others similarly. Let us thank God and sing His praises around the world!

Hazel Ramsay

Hazel and her husband Andrew live in a country cottage northwest of Aberdeen, Scotland. Hazel is active in the quarterly meetings held with Stirling Worship Group, is an affiliate member of Rockingham Meeting (OYM), and has a concern to encourage fellowship among Christian Friends in the UK.

**What Is Truth?** (Continued from previous page)

In a pamphlet published by The Tract Association of Friends entitled *A Quaker View of the Christian Revelation*, John H. Curtis says: "...it is often said that Quakerism is a religion of experience. This is true in that Quakerism is not based on an intellectual tradition, a sacred book, an approved liturgy, or an authoritarian church. However, it is not based on experience as such, nor even on religious experience in general. It is based on the particular experience of the continuing presence of Christ."

The first time that I experienced His presence was earth shattering. I recalled the story of Mary Magdalene and her encounter with the risen Lord at his

tomb; she mistook him for the gardener until he called her by name. How many times I had read this and yet it had only been as an historical record without power. George Fox and the early Friends had this experience of the risen Lord who has come to teach his people himself, and others in every generation since have had this experience of the Truth—for the Truth is not words but the Word to which the lives and words and writings of the Apostles, the early Friends, we and countless others, and the words of Scripture bear witness.

Robert Hopper

Robert and his wife, Rosemary Armocida, live in Evanston, Illinois, and are active in the newly revitalized Chicago area Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ.

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Reports from Two Young Worship Groups

Evanston, IL 8/12/06 A core of committed attenders is emerging. One Friend that is unable to attend regularly sends announcements about upcoming gatherings to others. Our literature table has been well received, stocked it with pamphlets and booklets from The Tract Association of Friends as well as a flyer entitled "Our Invitation to Worship" by Terry Wallace. I introduced the concept of the practice of Spirit-led Bible reading in the manner of Conservative Friends at our previous gathering. Those present expressed a strong interest in experimenting with this practice. Since we had a new attender at this gathering, I explained the practice, and then we prefaced our worship with 20-25 minutes of this. All present expressed very positive feelings about the experience and we plan to continue this practice in future gatherings, God willing.

Evanston, IL, 9/23/06 Our gathering was blessed, and our hearts and minds, I felt, were knit together in the unity of the Spirit. Our sharing and our en-

couragement of one another in the Seed of God quickens and sustains us. Our group is starting to gel, as they say. There is a palpable sense that our worship and sharing is becoming deeper and more open, and this is directly attributable to our grounding upon the foundation of the Everlasting Gospel, the Word of God, Christ Jesus.

Tillicoultry, Scotland, 10/14/06 Greetings in the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Four of us, from Aberdeenshire and Tillicoultry, gathered for worship and fellowship. The meeting was blessed with ministry which touched on our purpose in the world today as Conservative Friends. We enjoyed each other's company for the remainder of the evening over a meal at our home and discussed matters concerning faith and daily living. Aberdeen friends departed for their hotel later in the evening in preparation for the journey home next day. Though few in number, we drew yet closer as a faith community up here in Scotland.