
THE CONSERVATIVE FRIEND

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The Joy of Repentance

“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”
(Mark 1:14-15)

It is interesting that the Lord began His ministry on the earth with this exhortation. At that time, when so few people had the knowledge of the signs of the times and the imminent ushering in of the Kingdom of God, Christ Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand and that his hearers were called to repent and believe. Jesus’ preaching on repentance followed the groundwork laid by John the Baptist, who preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Note that John’s message was that sins were removed from our charge by our repentance. John pointed the way to the new covenant, and Christ obviously fulfilled the ministry of John.

What is Repentance?

It is sad that in today’s society, repentance has a rather negative connotation. We hear people say that others need to repent or face the judgment of God, but how rarely do we hear someone say that they have been blessed by a deep repentance?

In the Hebrew scriptures, the word *repent* means to regret something. The Hebrew word *naw-kham*’ (Strong’s 5162) is derived from roots meaning to sigh or breathe heavily. When it “repented the Lord that He had made man” (Gen. 6:6), God was asking Himself why he had gone to the trouble. The word is used in several other instances, including Ezekiel 24:14, where God stated that Jerusalem had rejected Him for so long that “I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent...” The situation was so bad that Israel had to face the consequences. The common understanding that repentance involves regret for mistakes comes from *naw-kham*’.

A second Hebrew word is translated *repent* in a few instances. This word is *shube* (Strong’s 7725); it means to turn back. Spiritually speaking, *shube* means to stop going in a particular direction, turn

around, and go in the other direction. In Ezekiel 18:30, God warns the house of Israel to “Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”

In the Greek, the word for *repent* is *met-an-o-eh’-o* (Strong’s 3340). Like *shube*, it means to reverse a previous decision or to think differently (mentally turn around). John the Baptist preached the remission of sins through repentance (Mark 1:4). Jesus preached “Repent: for the kingdom of God is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17) Peter preached “Repent ye therefore, and be converted.” (Acts 3:19) Paul wrote that an earlier letter helped the Corinthians to gain a godly repentance.(2 Cor. 7:10). These and many other instances in the scriptures indicate that God expects His people to repent when we are led astray or otherwise commit sin.

When is Repentance Necessary?

We were born into a world in which the forces of light and darkness struggle each day to influence human activity. As humans, we are sometimes influenced to do the wrong thing even though at the time it seems like the right thing to do. On other occasions, we know the right thing to do, but we choose to do something else. In either case, we can sense that we have placed a blot on our soul and made it a little less easy to receive the spiritual nurture that God has for us. The normal terminology for this state is having a weight on our conscience or sometimes having a guilty conscience. The latter term is used more often when a sin we have committed wronged another person.

It is not possible to overstate the insidiousness of sin. A single sin (or a pattern of sinfulness) is much like a copperhead fixed onto our hand. The fangs continue to pump venom into our bloodstream, gradually darkening our spiritual understanding. We find that we are unable to do the right thing because of the snake. While in this state, we usually have a limited number of options.

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Scheduled Meetings for Worship

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

Meeting	Location	Contact Person	Contact Information	Meeting Schedule
Arbroath Christian Friends	Arbroath, Scotland	Henry Logan	UK # 07855-503399 log1957an@yahoo.co.uk	First Days, 10 AM None in 2nd Mo,2007
Athens Christian Friends	Athens, Greece	Themistoklis Papaioannou	papathem@gmail.com; P.O. Box 21121, Athens 11410, Greece	First Days, 5 PM
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 620688; Book-seeker@blueyonder.co.uk	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)	2nd First Day
Ripley Christian Quakers	Ripley, Derbyshire,UK	Mike Wakefield	UK # 01773-541424 Rcquakers@lomaxes.me.uk	First Days, 10:30 AM
(no name)	Little Falls, New York	Geoff Gilmore	315-823-0616 geoff@gsgilmore.com	3rd Fifth Day

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The most common option is to wait out the snake. This option involves hoping that time will take care of whatever the problem is. She will forget what I did to her. Better people have done worse things. Some people use a false spiritual analogy to wave off the problem. A relative of mine once said that because he had been sanctified, God did not care that he had committed a serious (and public) sin. The venom is working. The advantage of this option is that it requires no action on our part. The disadvantage, which is usually overlooked, is that the root cause of the problem remains in place in our innermost beings – making it more likely that we will repeat the same mistake in the future.

The less common choice is victory over the snake. Just as Paul cast off the snake that bit him on Melita, we have a way to stop the influx of venom into our souls. At first glance this option sounds compelling, but it involves walking the narrow path which few people find. It involves repentance.

Why Repentance?

In order to fully understand repentance, we first must understand the nature of sin. God created thee in His image (Gen. 1:27 Note “both male and female”). The adversary seeks to separate thee and keep thee separated from God. Satan does this through sin, especially through a pattern of repeated sin. The presence of sin in our lives makes it less likely that we have communion with God and experience His continuing revelation of Himself to us.

“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8) The works of the devil include those things in thy life which keep thee separated from God. The devil is responsible for the sin in thy life, whether he tricked thee into it or whether thee chose it in a moment of weakness. Jesus wants to destroy those things and make thee a new creature in Him. Jesus wants thee to repent because the power of His resurrection has provided thee with the strength to obtain this victory. Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Mt. 4:17). Repentance is one of the key means used by Christ to bring thee back to the narrow path. Through re-

pentance, He baptizes thee afresh, eradicates the blots on thy soul, and restores thee to full communion with the Father. Some repentance is more of a searching, persevering trial than others; if it were easy, it would involve self-control rather than temperance. As is often heard, repentance includes a rejection of past erroneous decisions, a conviction not to walk in that way again, and a dedication to “walk as children of Light” (Eph. 5:8). It also involves the subjugation of the self and the ego, the willingness to admit serious wrongdoing to the Lord or to others as appropriate, the need to ask for or give forgiveness, and the willingness to make amends if the situation warrants. The inward transformation we experience through repentance leads us to the everlasting life we receive from Jesus.

Those who know about this inward transformation know that it takes special assistance to maintain this life. Paul wrote to the Philippians that he sought to “be found” in Christ, “that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death.” (Phil. 3:8-10) If we truly know Christ Jesus, we also know that without the power of His resurrection, we cannot find the victory over the sin and troubles of our lives. His offer of repentance gives thee opportunity to be made conformable to His death.

The Joy of Repentance

Repentance is a prerequisite of sanctification. No person can attain a high degree of holiness without purposefully casting off sins (or patterns of sinfulness), which paralyze spiritual growth. God wants thee to experience sanctification – the process through which we, ever learning from the indwelling Holy Spirit, are schooled in Kingdom living and become holy people (see 1Thes. 4:3). Repentance is not a matter of opinion; but of experience. God seeks to create in thee a new person to bring glory to Him. Jesus uses repentance to get thee back to new life and reinforce thy dedication to Him. Repentance makes it possible for thee to know the joy of leading a life pleasing in God’s sight and to recognize that He is with thee in each moment, guiding thee away from the snares of the tempter. Experiencing repentance makes it possible for thee to truly say, “To me, to live is Christ.”

Seth Hinshaw

A member of Keystone Fellowship MM, Seth is a recorded minister in Ohio YM and is also the yearly meeting clerk.

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

Editor's note: This is the second part of a two-part article. In Part I, published in the previous issue of *TCF*, Nurya Parrish proposed that her own life experience exemplifies many aspects of American society now. Many young adults today have been raised in a broken family with little religious upbringing in a culture that prizes entertainment, instant gratification, and consumerism, a culture where change is expected. Against this background, many people are turning to seek a different life and faith. Conservative Friends offer a needed witness in four ways: 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; 3) A corporate witness to a simple and/or plain way of life, and 4) A commitment to the disciplines and sacrifices necessary for peace. In Part II Nurya discusses 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.

First, the presence of Christ in the world and in the heart. This might seem to be the least radical of Friends' views, but in fact it is the most radical. George Fox's epiphany that "Jesus Christ has come to teach his people himself" is the core of Friends' faith and witness. The contrast between this doctrine and the doctrines commonly assumed to be central to Christianity are extreme. Many non-Christians assume that the central tenet of Christianity is that God lives outside this world, a judge in heaven, and that we will know God only in death. Friends' assertion that Christ is come, that the Spirit of the Lord is here, that God's presence can guide us in this very moment, is unique to this tradition.

This viewpoint is desperately needed today as an antidote to modernity, which no longer has a location for the Lord which is reasonable to most thinking people. The old three-story universe, with a top story for God, heaven, and the angels, a middle story for those of us alive on earth, and a lower story for the Devil, hell, and the demons, no longer is credible to most thinking people today. Probes into outer space have found no heaven, nor has hell been found deep under the earth. In the absence of a credible religious worldview, people are turning to a secular, 'anything-goes' spirituality.

And yet, a desecralized world is a world in which

human life is cheap, in which the earth is easily exploited for human gain, in which moral authority cannot be claimed. On some level, many people are aware that the modern secular scientific worldview is lacking something essential. The gospel that Friends have been called to preach, that there is a seed of the sacred in every soul, that Christ is present among us as we seek him, resacralizes a desecralized world without suspending the rational mind.

The second distinctive aspect of Conservative Friends' is the willingness to wait upon the Lord in worship. I need not spend much time on what makes this a distinctive practice of Friends—you are well aware of how unusual unprogrammed worship is. The idea that the Lord himself is present and active to direct his worshippers in vocal ministry, and that anyone in the community may be called of the Lord to speak, is just as revolutionary today as it was in George Fox's time. The concept is even more vital today than it was in Fox's time, however, since many human beings today have no notion of making themselves available as vessels, vehicles of grace. Yet, as Augustine wrote, "My heart is restless until it rests in thee." The spiritual hunger of our age is extraordinary; some scholars have called this the Third Great Awakening in American history.

A way of faith which points to the reality that we belong to God, we belong to one another, and we cannot slough off our responsibilities for ministry onto a paid clergyperson has extraordinary potential in our time. Clergy are realizing that we are not called to own the ministry, but to share it. The latest thinking in most mainline and evangelical churches is that clergy people exist to equip laity for ministry. The logical next step is that laity are capable of ministry whether equipped by clergy or simply directly by Christ. The ground is fertile for broadcasting the message Fox preached.

Third, the path of simplicity and/or plainness of life offers welcome relief from the consumerism of our time. Note the "and/or"—which is what makes this way of practice unique to Friends. As any observer

may note today, there is not uniformity in dress among Conservative Friends, as there is in other plain communities. Each dresses according to the leadings of the Lord. Some have been called to a plain witness; others dress with modesty and simplicity. Though differences exist, the community does not let those differences become divisive. This is key to the testimony of Conservative Friends in the present day. The conformity is not in outward appearance, but in the inward commitment to Christ. "Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile" (Mark 7:15).

And yet the witness of plainness and/or simplicity of life is distinctive in our culture, which promotes individuality, sexuality, and consumer goods as the ultimate life attainments. A group which is governed by the need to live in harmony with nature, in harmony with the divine, and in harmony with one another, is unusual indeed in our time. And for those who hunger and thirst for food and drink that is real, the way of Christ as lived by Conservative Friends meets a need for tangible practices of goodness, rather than simply theory or doctrine without action. Once again, the ground is fertile for this witness.

And finally, Conservative Friends demonstrate a commitment to the disciplines and sacrifices necessary for peace. To live in that power and spirit which takes away the occasion for war may not sound sacrificial, but in fact it is. For it calls one to sanctify one's life, to make one's life a sacred witness of the path of Christ. Instead of imitating the crucifiers, it calls for an imitation of Christ, who refused to engage in any violence, even in self-defense. This testimony cannot be separated from the whole cloth of historic Friends faith and practice. Although Friends are not the only so-called "Peace Church," Friends are known and recognized as a peaceful people—sometimes more readily than other churches may be. And Conservative Friends, who maintain not only the peace testimony but also continue a living witness to the theology which undergirds this testimony, make a distinctive contribution in the religious landscape of today.

As our nation continues to engage in pre-emptive war, we are desperately in need of more citizens who live in that power and spirit which takes away the occasion for war. For in our time the way has been lost which leads to God's grace and wisdom, especially as the elected leaders of our nation engage in war policy which is unprecedented in our nation's history.

The ground is fertile for a faith which incorporates the practice of peace. Conservative Friends show the path of Christ in a way which clearly is respectful of all persons, since it takes up arms against none. By witnessing to the way of Christ, Friends are a beacon in a dark age—a beacon of grace and peace which shines clearly and attracts others even as Jesus taught his disciples to do.

Christ has come to teach his people himself; wait upon the Lord in worship; all are chosen for ministry; all are called to live plainly and/or simply in harmony with the divine and with nature, and at peace. This is a distinctive witness, still giving life to a tradition of more than four hundred years of continuing Christian faith and practice. A continuing tradition of this kind may be exactly what a new generation of American young people is seeking. Diana Butler Bass, a noted scholar of religion in America today, said last year, "[Young people today] have been marketed to by consumerist culture all of their lives. I mean, the Gap knows how to market to them, Coca-Cola, any media company knows how to get the allegiance of these folks. And so when they come to a congregation, they don't essentially want to be marketed to. But they come in the door and they're looking for something that's genuine. They're looking for spiritual practices that will meet their needs and they're looking for a meaning in their lives. So often I think 20s and 30s say that they feel disconnected from any kind of religious tradition at all, so they want to reconnect and they also want to be able to learn about religion because they don't have any kind of grounding, typically, in a tradition. They're kind of rootless, and they're very savvy. They're not just looking for you to throw a lot of snazzy programming at them.

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Instead, they're looking for real people who are on a real spiritual journey that they can join into and find a way to live their lives with meaning in a very chaotic world... [There's] a shift away from entertainment-oriented, program-based megachurches among younger adults to wanting to be part of a genuine spiritual community where they can learn a tradition, school their children in tradition... and where they can connect with other people in community who are the same age and who are interested in some of the same things they're interested in." (Religion and Ethics Newsweekly interview, July 8, 2005)

When I first visited Ohio Yearly Meeting a year ago, not even sure what I was doing here except that I felt led here, I was one of those young people. I believe I am not alone. Having heard about Conservative Friends, I was thirsty to learn more. I believe there are thousands more like me, who simply have not yet discovered this way of life and faith. I know this meeting is small, and I read online that there are only about a thousand Conservative Friends worldwide. But I remember the parable of the mustard seed. And I believe that within this movement is the germ of a seed which has the potential to grow into a manifestation of the kingdom of God. So I quote from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 4: And he said, "With what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or what parable shall we use for it? It is like

a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Others who are more knowledgeable than I have spoken of the witness of early Friends as they sowed the seed of the kingdom in the world—I refer most recently to Jack Smith's words about the Lamb's War which were offered at the Wider Fellowship gathering. I here only add my own thoughts on reflecting on Mark 4; twice Christ says, in these brief sentences, that the mustard seed has strength "when sown upon the ground." That says to me that as the inheritors of this faith, and those who practice it today, you are called to sow it in the world, to publish it abroad, to spread the seed of truth which God has asked you to steward on His behalf. As you do, you will also have to make ready to continue to welcome those like myself who come from the wider world, with our own past history and difficulties, to seek the gospel and the way of Christ among you. We will need to be taught, for we do not know what you know—we have not lived as you have lived, or received this faith as a legacy from our ancestors. But what we need is here. Only the Lord can know our journey's end.

Nurya Love Parish

Nurya, her husband David, and their two young children live in Grand Rapids, Michigan. They were visitors at the 2006 Ohio Yearly Meeting, where Nurya spoke on this topic.

From Christian Friends Conference, Western Region

Our quarterly gathering on 12/09/2006 in Berkeley, California, opened with reading epistles concerning gospel order by Isaac Penington and George Fox. After Bible reading in the manner of conservative Friends, we were deeply blessed by waiting worship, which lasted just over two hours and in which we were favored with sound and refreshing ministry. We were reminded of Christ's promise that He is the good shepherd who will lose no one His Father has given into His care, and we were exhorted to do our part in bringing people to him.

In the afternoon Max Hansen led a mini-workshop on one aspect of gospel order (Mt. 18:15-17).

Friends suggested that before speaking with a Friend about a troubling behavior, we first pray (always) and then consider these queries: Do I know the facts? Am I interpreting the facts as charitably as possible? Have I considered the other person as if he or she were myself? Am I being troubled by something that does not trouble God? Am I called to perform this communication? A subsequent role-play exercise led to animated discussion. We were reminded that accountability works best within a community whose members have explicitly covenanted with each other to give and receive correction. After a planning session, we parted in Christian love.

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The Power of the Lord

Today 's culture tempts us Christians to appear independent, seeming to rely on our own strength rather than on the Lord's to discover and live in Truth. The Hebrew prophets, as well as the early followers of Jesus, knew otherwise. They recognized that we are all poor desperate people, in dire need of the Lord's guidance, through which we can develop a positive relationship with the Holy One and experience His love. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed with ardent fervor: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." (Isa.: 40: 28-31)

Jesus teaches us to love each other as God loves us. He loved those who obeyed his commandments, referring to those disciples as His Friends, who knew the Master's voice. Today many of us do wait on the Lord for love, grace, and Truth, as well as for the power to become adherents of our loving God. Like the apostle Paul, we know that Christ Jesus offers us a special grace, enabling us to discern right from wrong. This grace encourages us to overcome evil within ourselves and outwardly. The Lord affords us His power, but only if we listen with open hearts. When we open our hearts to both God and His beloved Son, we live in spiritual liberty and learn the essence of comradeship

Although the Lord's grace supplies us power to become His true disciples, we will, nevertheless, know suffering. Early martyrs did not escape imprisonment and even death while serving the living Christ. We are God's servants and His witnesses. The Lord

expects us to be examples of the truth that overcomes evil. We need to be prepared to serve in the grace and light that He provides.

The Lord is waiting for us to develop the gifts He has given us. He expects us to live without violence, as He did, thus becoming witnesses to people reluctant to embrace true pacifism. He is also waiting for us to address the needs of our neighbors. Jesus shows us that if we are open to His love, we can welcome strangers in our midst and meet their needs. God expects us to become more caring about the troubles of other humans. Once we demonstrate our faithfulness, this King of kings will increase our capacities to help in trying situations. When we pray for His help, do we listen to the Lord's response? Do we experience His presence as we minister to others?

As we taste of the power of God when we obey His promptings, we must remember that we are not the Almighty. We are still human beings in faith, hope, and love. Christ might not call on us to finish a task we have begun but will empower others who have demonstrated their faithfulness to extend the Lord's blessing upon people. The Lord is constantly teaching us outwardly, in addition to inspiring us with His Spirit. Recognizing our limitations, Christ works to increase our capacity to serve our fellow human beings. God is waiting for us to love Him completely.

Arthur Berk

Arthur lives in New York City. He is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (OYM) and worships when he can with Keystone Fellowship MM.

From Ripley Christian Quaker, U.K.

Since we began to meet as Ripley Christian Quakers, we have felt our meetings to be enriched by the Power of God. We have been thankful that Christ has led us out of contention and strife into a deeper spiritual place, meeting as Christian Friends.. Christ is preparing us for the challenge of taking an authentic Christian Quaker message to our community. We are busy, (we trust in the Lord's work) preparing/gathering leaflets, pamphlets and posters. We

are in the process of putting up posters in the local libraries and tourist offices, and thinking of other ways of making ourselves known. We are not complacent about the very hard work that lies ahead of us, but we have a clear sense that if we are faithful, the Lord will prosper us. We can only sow the seed, but it's the Lord that ploughs it in. Our website is rcquakers@lomaxes.me.uk

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Forgiveness

If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Mt 6:15) If we do not love those who trespass against us, desiring their return to the right way, we are not in a forgiving spirit. There is a difference between bearing no ill will toward anyone through Christ's forgiving spirit in our hearts, and attempting to forgive through a presumptuous spirit without divine directions. Oh, this is a subtle snare some have fallen into and one which we all need to guard against.

Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2) Bear all things the Master lays upon us for His service, whether it be the infirmities of the weak or the burden of the sins of others. These states we must bear, but not attempt to forgive so as to make individuals feel that their peace has been made with God when it has not been.

What hardness of heart must be the cause of the unwillingness of any to forgive wrongs or to let go of feelings of dislike. If there is anything of this kind in our hearts, we need to pray earnestly to have it re-

moved and so abide under the power of Christ that it will not come back.

Forgiveness is granted to the penitent. We need to be careful that we do not harden anyone or encourage anyone in a wrong course. God is the judge of all. It is not for us to judge except as we are moved by the Spirit of Christ to do so, and then it is not we who judge but Christ within us. Let us beware of that spirit which hastily condemns the faithful laborers in the church. There is a place for forgiveness and there is a place for labor. We each one need to stand in our places and not condemn what we do not understand nor undervalue the righteous judgments of God.

If there is anything which is the cause of our not receiving the forgiveness of God, that should be removed. We should frequently examine ourselves in the light of the Lord to see if we have forgiven those who have trespassed against us. We should not hold feelings of ill will toward any, for that is dangerous.

Adapted from a Tract Association pamphlet by Phebe Hall, a recorded minister of Ohio YM who died in the 1970's.