



Lecture 1952

William Penn

*Declaring  
the  
Everlasting  
Truth*

*A. Burns Chalmers*

William Penn Lecture 1952

# Declaring the Everlasting Truth

*Delivered at*  
*RACE STREET MEETING HOUSE*  
*Philadelphia*

by  
A. Burns Chalmers

Published by The Book Committee  
Religious Society of Friends  
Philadelphia and Vicinity  
302 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The William Penn Lectures are supported by the Young Friends Movement of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, which was organized on Fifth month thirteenth, 1916, at Race Street Meeting House in Philadelphia, for the purpose of closer fellowship; for the strengthening by such association and the interchange of experience, of loyalty to the ideals of the Society of Friends; and for the preparation by such common ideals for more effective work thru the Society of Friends for the growth of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The name of William Penn has been chosen because he was a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring “to live out the laws of Christ in every thought, and word, and deed,” that these might become the laws and habits of the State.

Requests for permission to quote or to translate should be addressed to:

Pendle Hill Publications  
338 Plush Mill Road  
Wallingford, PA 19086-6023  
Email: [publications@pendlehill.org](mailto:publications@pendlehill.org)

Copyright © 2021 by Pendle Hill

ISBN:

ebook design by the [Quaker Heron Press](#)—2021

# Declaring the Everlasting Truth

The title of this William Penn Lecture is taken from some words of George Fox. In the year 1660, on his way to visit relations in Fenny Drayton, George Fox met with some thousands of people in the orchard of John Killam. Standing on what his Journal describes as ‘a great stool’ he was speaking to the vast, expectant assemblage when two trumpeters blew their trumpets and troops advanced to disperse the meeting. The captain of the troop ordered him to come down, but George Fox said he was ‘declaring the everlasting truth’ and he stayed where he was. The meeting continued with strength and inspiration for the many present. At its end we may judge what George Fox meant by declaring the everlasting truth through reading the words which he recorded: “the presence of the living God was manifest amongst us; the seed, Christ, was set over all, and Friends were built upon Him, the foundation, and settled under His glorious, heavenly teaching.”

How can we take into our lives today this everlasting truth – ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’ – and fully set Christ over all, building upon Him, the foundation, and settling under His glorious, heavenly teaching? This is the question I would put before us all. It would be easier and perhaps more successful to take a less large subject. But if we are to be faithful to this occasion we are not at liberty to do so. In a fine phrase John Donne described poetry’s function as ‘contracting the immensities.’ Our purpose here should be no less ambitious if we remember that at the beginning of this series of lectures in 1916 the Young Friends Movement chose the name of

William Penn as the name for the lectures “because he was a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring ‘to live out the laws of Christ in every thought and word, and deed’ that these might become the laws and habits of the state.” It is to Christ, the ‘Everlasting Truth,’ then, that we direct our whole selves.

For several decades now those who have sought to know and understand Jesus Christ have been confronted by the conflicting claims of, on the one hand, the ‘Jesus of history’ and, on the other hand, the ‘Christ of faith.’ Are they really different, or are they one and the same? And in what ways, and to what extent, are these questions of critical importance to each of us and to our Society? I believe that the full meaning of Jesus Christ cannot be stated by one or the other of these emphases, but that both are needed. It is not a question of pitching rival encampments – those favoring the historical Jesus in one position and those espousing the view of neo-orthodoxy ranged opposite them. Dean Sperry claims that the forces of neo-orthodoxy “are rather cavalier in their indifference to the Jesus of history.” So let us deliberately take some assertions which come to us from the emphasis on the historical Jesus and consider their relevance to both points of view, and to us. How can we be true to the Jesus of history at the same time that we identify him with the Christ of our own inner life? Some thoughts which have occurred to me in trying to answer this question I place before you for your own reflection.

In accounting for the survival of the Christian Church in the Roman Empire, T. R. Glover says that, if he may invent or

adapt three words, the Christian ‘out-lived’ the pagan, ‘out-died’ him, and ‘out-thought’ him. In all three of these achievements, Glover asserts, and this is entirely fundamental to the main points I am considering with you this afternoon, the Christian found his strength in Jesus Himself. As Glover expresses it, “it was Jesus who was the secret of it.” What I now propose to do is to take these three words as the key to our understanding of the supremacy of Christ, not only in the pagan world of the Roman Empire but also in our own world and in our own lives. If we today are

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born

we may be steadied, and challenged at the same time, by declaring the everlasting truth as known in Jesus Christ.

### ***Jesus Christ ‘out-lives’ . . .***

Jesus Christ ‘out-lives’ any other life or kind of life we know. He out-lives the secularist’s life. He out-lives the materialist’s life. He out-lives our pagan world. “In Him life lay, and this life was the Light for men.”

It has been well said that “the greatest single man of our time has undoubtedly been Mahatma Gandhi.” In speaking of his life at the time of his death a newspaper editor wrote: “He was great, yes. But he was more than great, he was good. He troubled the world by his goodness.” This is the kind of pre-eminence in living which we understand. Transparent, self-giving, effective goodness still makes its way in reaching our sophisticated and often despairing world. F. R. Barry once

said that St. Francis is the one saint the twentieth century would canonize. The simplicity and directness of his life represents what fundamentally we honor and trust above all else. Jeremy Taylor, the seventeenth century divine, has written of “holy living” as well as of “holy dying.” Certainly St. Francis and Gandhi are examples of true “holy living.”

In considering the Jesus of history, then, the embodiment of goodness which we see in Him is one clue, but only one, in understanding his supremacy in life and the sense in which he out-lives any other life. Even though he denied that he possessed goodness in any absolute sense – “why call ye me good?” – and pointed men to God as the One who is alone good, we recognize that Jesus evidences the same quality.

Here we are, living in an atomic age. The margin for even drawing breath becomes narrower and narrower. Our day, figuratively speaking, seems not like a beautiful New England summer day, but more like what we imagine a day in a mine pit or in a submarine to be. We know that Jesus was good, but does that have anything to do with our immediate problems – with negotiating a peace having some prospect of endurance, with creating a national life having some possibility of civil rights and integrity, with bringing up children having some chance to develop the maturity, the lack of prejudice, the patience and perseverance – yes, even the goodness, which we have seen from afar but which, like Kafka’s castle, eludes us as we think we come near. These immediate problems, we are well aware, are not our ultimate problems, but there is an urgency about them which demands that they not be put aside.

In coming to terms with these practical questions, however, and the bearing which the life and teachings of Jesus have upon their solutions, the results are not as simple and easy to grasp as we are apt to expect. Those who are qualified to speak about these matters will not let us have it our own way. As Henry Cadbury convincingly explains we frequently fall into ‘the peril of modernizing Jesus.’ We are too prone to assume that Jesus thought in modern sociological, psychological, and international terms. We look wistfully to Jesus for social guidance “but do not realize that the most important difference between Jesus and ourselves is not the external social conditions but the inner ways of thinking.... We must be particularly careful not to quote him as the ally and prophet of our modern social programs and reforms.” The relation of Jesus to our problems, therefore, is more than, and other than, putting his endorsement on some modern plan. It all comes back to something more fundamental.

This leads us again to reflect on the quality of goodness which we have already cited if we are to follow even one clue to the way in which Jesus ‘out-lives’ the best that life apart from him can offer. We know that his vision, what is called his apocalyptic viewpoint, and, therefore, his ethical hope, are not the same as ours. “His primary interest,” says E. F. Scott, “is not that of making the world better, for this will be accomplished by God Himself when He brings in the Kingdom, but that of fostering an active goodness in men and women.” The same point is again put in a telling way. Jesus was concerned about ‘fostering an active goodness in men and women.’ No static, detached goodness would do,

but one which was active and, in the New Testament sense, dynamic. What a writer on Christian ethics calls ‘the strenuous perfectionism in the teachings of Jesus’ is somehow more than mere ethics. Based on the good not as a standard conceived by a consensus of the best minds but rather on the good as seen in Christ, we understand why it is strenuous and why it does involve perfectionism. It was the goodness of a Life which

...scorned on a scaffold, ensconced in His life  
The human household.

We do not begin to see the full dimensions of this active goodness until we realize that it is rooted in love – the love of God as known in Christ. Bernard Shaw once defined religion as ‘that which binds men to one another, irreligion that which sunders’ and Whitehead in one place speaks of religion as ‘world loyalty.’ Both of these definitions, however, are somewhat general. Although Christ nowhere in the synoptic gospels uses the word ‘love’ there is from his life the understanding of what love is. It goes without saying that we here do not mean romantic love, but rather love in the New Testament sense. We would agree with Paul Ramsey that there are two sources of Christian love – God’s love; and the Kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus. Jesus was convinced of the coming reign of love in God’s kingdom. This vision of the future “served as a burning-glass to bring biblical ethics to pin-point focus and intensity.” Or, as Albert Schweitzer expresses it, this expectation “is the crater from which burst forth the flame of the eternal religion of love.” These powerful figures of the Kingdom of God as a

pin-point focus and as a crater bursting forth in the flame of the eternal religion of love give us some indication of the difference Jesus makes to life, and the way in which we are to regard such words as goodness and love as applied to him.

Put in its simplest terms, among the reasons why Jesus ‘out-lives’ all others are his supreme ways of showing forth goodness and love. We must be clear about this and understand the contrast with other ways of looking at life. As a writer has recently suggested, if one looks at three basic views of life, the mechanistic can be likened to the treadmill, the humanistic to the saga, and the Christian to the pilgrimage. If these are the choices we have, certainly the treadmill seems to offer least scope for the qualities of goodness and love. The saga does give more scope, but with all its heraldry and men of distinction there is something static or, at least, backward-looking about the saga. Only the conception of the pilgrimage seems capable of including the ongoing continuity and the active, dynamic quality which expresses the way of Christ. Understood in this sense, if we think about the life of Christ we are being given an ‘invitation to the pilgrimage.’

When we talk about goodness in the life of Jesus we must keep constantly in mind the kind of sharp corrective contained in these words of Reinhold Niebuhr: “Compared to (the) Christ who died for men’s sins upon the cross, Jesus, the good man who tells all men to be good, is more solidly historical. But he is the bearer of no more than a pale truism.”

It would indeed be missing all that is most important if we now accepted ‘a pale truism’ in exchange for our starting point of George Fox’s words ‘declaring the ever lasting truth.’ We must never settle for a pale truism when we are trying to understand the everlasting truth. What we must somehow realize is that our problem is not that of choosing between the Christ who died for men’s sins upon the cross and Jesus, the good man who tells all men to be good, but rather that we are sure we include both aspects in the unified and complete ‘ever-lasting truth.’

Actually we are in a situation of overpowering need, and we must ‘put on the whole armour of God’ if we are to deal with this need. By virtue of the fact that we all partake of *human existence* we have this common need to which Jesus Christ speaks. Much is made these days, especially in Europe, of some form of existential philosophy. Actually there has always been a Christian *existentialism*, which is at the same time much deeper and much more comprehensive than contemporary secular existentialism. It is the existentialism of Kierkegaard and Karl Barth with their cry to present day man to come to the point of decision, in the present moment, for or against God and Christ.

Christian existentialism affirms that the total Christian message is speaking to us and demands that we take it or leave it. Jesus points to the situation in which people actually are and, therefore, the condition out of which they seek for the Kingdom of God. It is a “situation of existential conflict – the conflicts in the very depths of our human existence of longings, of anxiety, and of threatening despair.” For the Christian existentialist Jesus Christ has the answer, he is the

10

everlasting truth without which we cannot begin to deal with problems of desperate world struggle and individual frustration.

### ***Anxiety and Our Human Situation***

Let us take as an example of our human situation the sense of anxiety about the meaning of our existence which has hovered over man as man, perhaps with increased intensity during the past century. Paul Tillich has pointed out that our contemporary great literature uses many names for this phenomenon. It has been called “Wasteland,” “The Age of Anxiety” or “No Exit.” Other characterizations speak of “The Neurotic Character of our Times,” “Man Against Himself,” and “Encounter with Nothingness.” The Christian message, centered in Jesus Christ, has the answer. It proclaims the ‘healing reality.’ It provides the courage to say “Yes” in the encounter with nothingness, anxiety, and despair.

Jesus urged his disciples to put anxiety aside: “Do not be anxious about your life ... Therefore do not be anxious.” This familiar teaching in part had its grounding in a firm belief in God’s constant watching over and care for his creatures, which would produce an attitude of trust and doing away with anxiety. But another source of this teaching is not based on observing the birds of the air and the lilies and grass of the field. As we in our contemporary world consider the extent of tyranny, the menace of totalitarianism in all parts of the earth, the widespread character of ‘man’s inhumanity to man,’ and the drastic limitations on civil liberties and human freedoms, it is difficult not to be overcome by anxiety. In this

situation we would do well to remember that it is not to God's love in nature that Jesus points us in the words "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." This injunction not to be anxious is rather based on the confidence of Jesus in the coming reign of love in God's kingdom. The reign of love can be here and now.

This is a risky universe. The Christian certainly will not be able to explain the element of chance in each incident of life, but he can believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God." The Christian message as understood through the life of Jesus Christ is the message of "a new Reality in which we can participate." Our answers will take many different forms, depending on the individual and social situations, but they have in common this possibility of participating in a new Reality. Each situation affects our view of the present moment and our view of history. As Herbert Butterfield says: "History is not like a train, the sole purpose of which is to get to its destination; nor like the conception that my youngest son has of it when he counts 360 days to his next birthday and reckons them all a wearisome and meaningless interim, only to be suffered for the sake of what they are leading up to. If we want an analogy with history we must think of something like a Beethoven symphony – the point of it is not saved up until the end, the whole of it is not a mere preparation for a beauty that is only to be achieved in the last bar. And though in a sense the end may lie in the architecture of the whole, still in another sense each movement of it is its own self-justification, each note in its particular context as valuable as any other note, each stage of the development having its

immediate significance.” With this view of the importance of each moment and of each individual and of each act we know that it is always possible to participate in the new Reality through the new and living way opened by Christ. Anxiety, frustration, despair, annihilation are ‘stubborn facts’ and shattering realities, but they are not the final words for “there is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition.”

This is a time of fabulous achievement, when industrially the ‘sinews of war’ and the sinews of peace are erecting impressive monsters of power, Gargantuan colossi, throwing off space-dispelling jets and sabres, and setting off blinding, all-destroying detonations of atomic power as the modern way of flexing mammoth muscles. But behind this terrifying, incredibly ominous, facade are the encouraging though often ‘invisible, corpuscular forces’ – fresh understanding of new ways of agreement through the social sciences, new bridges of beauty through consummate engineering skill, vast research and discoveries in medicine and in both mental and public health, studies of natural resources leading to sober reflection and action of a social and technical nature. These all re-direct the focus of men’s thought to meeting human need, and to helping create a more sane, honest, and courageous political climate. These are only a few of the more hopeful signs that come to mind. These remedial forces are so exciting; so salutary, and so significant that it is readily understandable if many of the most sensitive and best equipped people in our day find them all-absorbing, all-demanding, and all-sufficient for their lives.

These efforts are a part of, but not all of, what it means to be a Christian today. Christ does not solve our problems but through his life and faith he ‘out-lives’ the pagan world, whether of the Roman Empire into which he came or of our own contemporary culture.

Jesus, thou Joy of loving hearts  
Thou fount of life, thou Light of men,  
From the best bliss that earth imparts  
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

This realization of the limits of even ‘the best bliss that earth imparts’ turns us, unfilled, again to Christ, the everlasting truth.

### ***Jesus Christ ‘out-dies’ the pagan world.***

Each one of us, I suppose, has certain phrases, or certain chords of music, which have special and unique meaning for him. This is true for me of the opening words of the Bach chorale “O Sacred Head now wounded, with grief and shame bowed down.” We have been considering a few suggestions regarding the supremacy of the life of Jesus. But what are we to say when this life is mortally wounded and is bowed down with suffering – what for us is the meaning of the Cross? of the death of Christ?

Although we often, and often rightly, say that a person’s life speaks for itself there is a profound sense in which, to use Douglas Steere’s phrase, ‘death illuminates life.’ “Everyone,” says Luther, “must do his own dying” just as,

certainly, he must do his own living, and the connection between the way of living and of dying is very close indeed.

Through his death Jesus gave tremendous re-enforcement and courage to his followers as they sought to carry out what he had lived for. In the face of death it was noticed by the pagan world that the early Christians displayed a new and unshakable fortitude. The historian Tertullian who saw Christian martyrs die said: "Every man who sees it is moved with some misgiving, and is set on fire to know the reason; he inquires and he is taught; and when he has learnt the truth he instantly follows it as well. No one would have wished to be killed, unless he was in possession of the truth."

Tertullian did far more than set down the record in an impersonal, scholarly fashion. Persuaded and converted, when many fled in the face of mob violence he said: "I stay here." The secret of it was that Jesus Christ, the friend, who had gone through it all, was on the other side of the fire.

The death of Jesus, it has been claimed, has caused men to think more than any other happening in the life of the human race. This is true in spite of the fact that some of this thinking has been either negative or inarticulate. It is reported that Carlyle, passing a road-side crucifix in Brittany, commented: "Poor chap, his day is done." John Milton, who wrote so beautifully and grandly on Christ's nativity, tried to write on his death, but then gave up because it was too much for him to put into words, and he left his effort unfinished.

## *The Cross and the Nature of God*

Beyond the sheer magnificence of the courage, faithfulness, and independence which men recognize in the death of Christ stands the assurance that it speaks of the nature of God. When early Christians pondered on ‘the dreadful thing that had happened’ they thought of the redeeming love of God. If we express this in a word of doctrine we are now talking about the Atonement, just as in my first major point in this lecture, about the life of Jesus, we are concerned with the Incarnation.

Whatever else it is the Christian doctrine of the Atonement is not a wooden, static, arbitrary theory which is unrelated to our present experience and needs. Quite the contrary. It is profoundly relevant to our human situation, which we cannot really understand apart from this message about human sin and divine forgiveness.

Recently I have been re-reading the book by D. M. Baillie entitled “God Was In Christ.” Among many valuable insights and analyses which he gives one of the most outstanding is this. He points out that the authoritative Jewish scholar Claude Montefiore set himself to see whether there was anything quite new in Jesus’ teaching, anything which no Jewish prophet or rabbi had ever said before him. He singled out as distinctive the picture of the Divine Shepherd going out into the wilderness to seek a lost sheep, the picture of God as not merely receiving those who turn to Him, but as taking the initiative in seeking those who have not turned to Him. That Dr. Montefiore termed ‘a new figure’ and ‘one of the new excellences of the Gospel.’ this

kind of God whom Jesus ‘discovered,’ a seeking God whose very nature it is to go the whole way into the wilderness in quest of man. We are apt to think too exclusively of the human quest for God but Jesus clearly believed strongly in the other direction of the search, in the divine initiative. There is, of course, a ‘double search’ going on. In the Bible there is a good deal about men seeking God, but there is much more about God seeking men. God is not a ‘remote and unaggressive Being, who leaves men to work out their own affairs.’ The Bible proclaims rather a divine visitation and revelation, the kind of understanding Francis Thompson expressed sensitively in writing of the ‘Hound of Heaven.’

Jesus, then, tells us of God as the Divine Shepherd, and in the Crucifixion we see the lengths to which God will go. In the imaginative words of a hymn:

Although the road be rough and steep,  
I go to the desert to find my sheep.  
But none of the ransomed ever knew  
How deep were the waters crossed,  
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed  
through  
Ere he found the sheep that was lost.

God is ready to forgive freely but there is need of costly atonement. Really understanding this would put us at a far remove from the dying Heine with his frequently quoted words: “God will forgive me: that is His business.” It has been said that the death of Socrates stopped the moral rot of Greece. The death of Christ challenged the moral rot of the

Roman Empire. But it did far more. It opened up to men a new understanding of the nature of God.

### ***Estrangement and the Modern Man***

In asserting that the death of Christ thus understood makes a difference to each of us I would like to emphasize this point strongly in a special way. It unfortunately falls to the lot of most of us to undergo in some form the experience of estrangement. This is a concept which everyone understands, this concept of estrangement: from oneself, from the other man, from the other group, from our heritage or from our destiny. Estrangement is an experience which the modern man recognizes. In spite of our enormous advances in communication we are too often estranged from the people with whom we could so quickly communicate. Frequently we use our highly developed means of communication to convey messages designed to underline our achievement and power as a nation fully as much as our capacity for understanding and friendship. On the other hand, sometimes the message is sound but the means of communicating it is entirely inadequate. Using the title of a recent book we may well ask ourselves the question: "Is Anybody Listening?" Like the sense of futility, which is a related experience, the sense of estrangement is one of the great unsolved psychological and spiritual problems of our day.

In speaking to you, in my first point, on the way in which Jesus 'out-lives' the pagan world I sought to use as an example the manner in which Jesus deals with the sense of anxiety, so obviously one of our own human problems. Now, in speaking of how Jesus 'out-dies' the pagan, secular world,

I use as an example the way in which Jesus deals with the sense of estrangement.

Some years ago an able secular thinker rather lightly suggested that we satisfy the claims of Christianity by declaring, and holding every now and then, a Be Kind Day, on which everyone would make a conscious effort to be a little more pleasant – and that would he that! Undoubtedly it would be desirable if more of us could succeed in being a little more pleasant, but Christianity goes far beyond this and is on a much more profound level. George Fox ‘declaring the ever-lasting truth’ is challenging us to a different dimension of life than a superficial contemporary declaring an occasional Be Kind Day. Estrangement is not solved by periodic kindness. It is so pervasive and deep-seated, so much a recurring fact of human nature, that it is God as the Divine Shepherd who takes the initiative in confronting estrangement. It is costly beyond our comprehension. No half-hearted gesture, like the kindness proposed, will do. Christ ‘out-dies’ the secularist, and also we see unmistakably the nature of God in dealing with estrangement through the death of Christ.

My contention, therefore, is that what I am calling this sense of estrangement is more fundamental than our quantitative problems and requires men of faith in full stature to meet it. Estrangement is sin. The paradox of the present is that we can bridge distance on the ground, in the air, under the sea. We can do this with sound and with light, with persons and with materials. But so often we cannot bridge the chasm of estrangement, the spiritual voids which defy the

manipulation and dexterity of our slide-rule accuracies and our hard, brilliant minds.

To recognize the dimensions of the problems of estrangement we have only to consider some of the social results. Take the large-scale homelessness of millions of people today, uprooted and dispossessed, displaced and expelled, as the result of war. This century has recently been called ‘the grim century of the homeless man.’ It is more usually spoken of as ‘the century of the common man’ because submerged people everywhere are in a state of revolution. It is ‘the century of conflict’ because of world wars on an unprecedented scale. But back of the common man and his aspirations, back of the conflict, stands the homeless man – estranged from his physical and spiritual home. Responsible newspaper articles report that mass deportations to labor in mines, as many as 9,000 during July and August from one Czech city, are taking place. It is a ruthless, effective police weapon. Families cannot, however, be torn apart without leaving scars that do not heal. In the West, also, the problem is one of staggering proportions. Although a majority of the deportees in Germany have somehow found work, they have not found a home – material or spiritual. In this century those who are homeless are so numerous that they constitute one of the great nations of the world.

We are rightly against the limiting and power-seeking features of nationalism. But here we have people comparable in number to a large nation who do not have roots in a home, and whose sense of belonging and kinship is impaired or limited thereby. It is of course true that those who are

homeless often put to shame those of us who are blessed with homes. The real answer is that their home is in God and in Christ. I can myself testify to having seen personally in the French internment camps of ten years ago some courageous people who took part, regardless of privation and discouragement, in Bible groups which represented their real home. But it takes more faith and bravery than the ordinary man can muster. At the turn of the century Eugene V. Debs said, from prison, that as long as there was a person in prison he was not free. If we really grasped our Christian responsibility perhaps we would say, from our homes, that as long as there is a person who is homeless our sense of being at home is not complete.

This homelessness, with its often enforced estrangement of many kinds, affects man's capacity for spiritual understanding and makes it hard to see connections we believe are there. As finely expressed by Arthur Clutton-Brock: "Nothing is so beautiful as a light in a cottage window, except the light of the stars; and when we feel the beauty of the cottage light we know that it is of the same nature as the beauty of the stars – and our desire is to be sure that the stars are the lights of home with the same spirit of home behind them."

There is obviously no panacea for the correction of the pervasive reality of homelessness in our world. Out of Berlin, from a conference of the Christian Churches, comes a hymn which they sang and which points the way:

Now is the time to dare to practice mercy!  
Enough wounds have been struck in strife,

But he who serves us and reconciles us with God,  
Wishes that we become brothers on God's earth.  
Now is the time to win the victory through love's  
power!  
Hatred and War can only create a hell for man!  
But Christ's victory in the War of Grace,  
Wishes that we become brother on God's earth.  
Now is the time to hope unto death,  
God's door is open to our brother's need.  
Who dares the step? Who comes along?  
We may still become brothers on God's earth!

### ***Reconciliation and Grace***

There is no sure way to explain how the marvel of reconciliation takes place where there had been estrangement before. Some alchemy which cannot be completely analyzed takes the given elements of fear, distrust, misunderstanding, and wrong-doing and infuses into them the elements of divine forgiveness, suffering and love whereby a new relationship comes into being. As we strive so imperfectly to be good parents to our children or good children to our parents we realize that our strivings take us only so far, which is often not very far. But through the grace of God a new level can be reached. God is speaking to man through the death of Christ. His death is 'the most potent reinforcement of righteousness in human history,' which has strong contemporary meaning for us.

George Tyrrell in opposing tyranny and ignorance could well say: "Again and again I have been tempted to give up the

struggle, but always the figure of that Strange Man hanging upon the Cross sends me back to my task again.” We also see what goodness in a divine or ultimate sense means, and can say with Coventry Patmore: “The way to be good, in fact the only way to be good, is to be heroically good.” This goodness increases rather than diminishes through its apparent loss. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” Unamuno in “The Tragic Sense of Life” captures something of this truth in his admonition: “Sow yourselves, sow the living part of yourselves, in the furrows of life.”

Henry Cadbury writes that sometimes when he sees the familiar symbol of the cross his fancy simplifies all the historical and theological suggestions of which it is reminiscent into the familiar arithmetical symbol which it often resembles. We may say that the sign of Christianity is a plus sign, therefore, which calls for what is extra, that is the extra-ordinary, beyond what we now offer. With such an inexhaustible meaning we may repeat the words – ‘in this sign you will prevail.’

### ***Jesus Christ ‘out-thinks’ the pagan world.***

We are frequently inclined to regard Christ as a do-er and not as a thinker. On the whole the secular world would respect his actions and sometimes even his judgments. But in the intellectual realm the sheer weight of amassed knowledge, even in microfilm form, since the time of Jesus makes some people wonder if he knew enough to throw light on our problems. And yet the phrase ‘the mind of Christ’ represents a formidable and superior wisdom. As Whitehead says:

“Wisdom should be more than intellectual acuteness. It includes reverence and sympathy, and a recognition of those limitations which bound all human endeavor.” To have the mind of Christ means to learn of him how thinking and living should be done.

In a sense thinking and doing should always go together. Bergson’s way of putting it: “Act as men of thought; think as men of action” states this clearly. Christ says that “he that doeth truth cometh to the light.” We cannot say something is right in theory but does not work in practice. No true theory could be wrong in practice. In his recent book “Friends For 300 Years” Howard Brinton points out that the undoubted influence of William Penn’s ‘Holy Experiment’ on the Constitution of the United States was because his theories had been carried out in practice and not just been written in books. When we look at Rodin’s statue “The Thinker” we do not always see what the sculptor wished us to see – ‘the tremendous concentrated power of a mind bent truthward, the fact that thought is itself the intensest form of human action.’

The early Christians were called ‘sons of fact.’ They were committed to a great propaganda, to telling about Jesus and his life and teaching. There was no place for an ignorant Christian. He had to give the reason for his faith, he read and knew the Gospels. There must be a perspective for interpreting life which will naturally spring from a creative relationship between ‘men of devotion’ and ‘men of wisdom.’ The combination is important.

## *Christ and the Individual*

If we go directly now to consider ways in which Christ ‘out-thinks’ the pagan world we soon come upon his inexhaustible belief in man, even though it was said of him ‘he knew what was in man.’ The rationale for this belief in the individual was simple enough. Each person is a child of God, and therefore is of the greatest worth. This is of high importance to us because the individual is increasingly submerged in the mass. Even of the nineteenth century Carl Becker remarked that the human individual became once more ‘securely imprisoned in the social process.’

As far as we can tell, Christ placed the highest of value on the individual. We cannot begin to estimate the immense significance to the modern world of this clear and high valuation of the individual. All that we mean by conscience, all that we mean by non-conformity because of devotion to principle, are involved. Here we have the real security of the state. “No state,” says Harold Laski, “is ever securely founded save in the consciences of its citizens.”

Through the eyes of Jesus St. Paul looked at man and saw him as ‘a new creature.’ This was far different from deTocqueville coining to this country in the nineteenth century and seeing the American as ‘a new kind of man.’ The difference between the new creature and a new kind of man is striking. It is the difference between the Christian and the secular view. The sad point is that the new kind of man becomes an ordinary man.

The view of man which we come to hold is determining and far-reaching for us. David Riesman as a social scientist has recently analyzed three types of contemporary persons, which to my mind show the deterioration of the secular new kind of man, unless he can become the Christian ‘new creature.’ The three types which Riesman describes are the tradition-directed, the inner-directed, and the other-directed. In the western world, which he characterizes as a decaying civilization, we are now unfortunately in the grip of an overwhelming trend toward the third type, the other-directed person. The automatic response to the authoritarian command, so sharply etched in George Orwell’s word pictures of our world in “1984”; the irresistible pressure toward conformity – these trends clearly reveal us as other-directed persons. We have no psychic or spiritual gyroscope of our own. Even in education, that province of free inquiry and independent thought, so often the professor can no longer be defined as ‘one who thinks otherwise.’ David Riesman paints a grim picture of our authoritarian age and the other-directed person which it produces. He adduces massive testimony and exhibits brilliant powers of analysis in bringing before us the plight of the dehumanized individual in the ‘lonely crowd.’

The big question which Jesus raises for us is whether the individual can be a child of God in full stature or must become merely an other-directed cipher, being pushed in a vacant state from one position to another. Can the person today at least revert to Riesman’s more hopeful second type and be ‘inner-directed?’ As members of the Society of Friends if we are to be true to our heritage and present faith

we must continue unremitting, intelligent effort on behalf of the Christian conception of the individual.

Jesus does more than raise the question. He makes the affirmation of respect for personality in ultimate form – “But I say unto you, love your enemies” and then the words which follow. Jesus’ estimate of human personality as the supreme value in our universe is borne out by all that wider knowledge and accumulated experience can offer. Brotherhood among races and classes and nations, democracy, equality and intellectual freedom – all are based fundamentally on this high estimate of personality. In writing on ‘our threatened values’ Gollancz calls respect for personality ‘our value of values,’ and so it is. But it is this most essential value which is most threatened today.

Christ leads the way in declaring, and living on the basis of, a firm belief in the value of the individual. In his light may we see light and move on toward the goal of becoming ‘a new creature.’ From one of the vilest prisons of his day George Fox showed his deep understanding of this point in writing: “Walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every person.” In the book of Isaiah are the words: “A man shall be like the shadow of a mighty rock in a weary land.” In a desert country a rock gives shelter and shade to the new shoots of growth which are struggling to develop. In the weary land of our present world the individual man must, like the mighty rock, nurture the new life of free, responsible opinion, of better community relations, of more hopeful negotiation, of a more spiritual understanding of life. He must stand on his own feet without fear as a son of God.

Christ 'out-thinks' other views in placing this unswervingly before men.

### ***Christ and Culture***

The relation of Christ to culture has always been one on which there have been widely differing views. What is Christ's relationship to the world? Do his words: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" include his thought about the complex environmental and inherited factors that go to make up what we call culture?

This and similar questions are important ones, because various peoples everywhere are more than ever self-conscious about culture. Matthew Arnold regarded culture as the best that men have thought and said. But that has been revised by our contemporaries such as T. S. Eliot who writes on 'toward a definition of culture.' One of our problems is that culture is now being used for specialized ends, such as that of becoming an instrument of national policy. Culture is recognized as the basic but subtle background out of which comes such desired goals as 'intercultural penetration.' At least we have gone beyond the bare-faced and superficial attitude attributed to the booster of a certain city in our country who is alleged to have said: "Wait until we get a hold of culture. We'll make it hum."

H. Richard Niebuhr, in his book "Christ and Culture," says that there is at least a constant dialogue, an endless give and take, between Christ and Culture. In this process the followers of Christ, in seeking to interpret his mind, have supported five recognized positions: Christ against culture,

the Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture.

In this fascinating study Richard Niebuhr places Quakers, along with Tolstoy and others, as those who believed Christ to be against culture. Sound as this position is, in view of our conviction as to the possibility of human perfection, I believe that we should also follow the Christ who is the transformer of culture. If Christ 'out-thinks' our culture he converts it fully as much as he opposes it. As followers of him we must therefore give ourselves with heart and mind and act to nothing less than the transformation of culture, until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of God and of His Christ.

Frederic Denison Maurice is given as an example of one who believes in Christ as the transformer of culture and Richard Niebuhr quotes from him with approval: "I am obliged to believe in an abyss of love which is deeper than the abyss of death: I dare not lose faith in that love ... I must feel that this love is compassing the universe." How similar this is to George Fox's familiar words: "I saw ... there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness." Certainly to both men the 'mind of Christ' impelled them to transform the world.

If we are to judge by the Friends World Conference at Oxford the Society of Friends today believes in Christ as the transformer of culture. It is heartening indeed to ponder these words from the Statement to All Friends from the World Conference:

“For our Peace Testimony is much more than our special attitude to world affairs; it expresses our vision of the whole Christian way of life; it is our way of living in the world, of looking at this world and of *changing this world*. Only when the seeds of war-pride, love of prestige and the lust for power and possessions – have been purged from our personal and corporate ways of living; only when we can meet all men as their friends in a spirit of caring and sharing, can we call upon others to tread the same path.”

***“To all who received him, he gave power”***

By the eternal Christ and by the historic Jesus we are confronted with what is highest in life, in death, and in wisdom. If we point to him and live in him, it is always possible to take part in declaring the everlasting truth.

How can I fitly greet Thee, how rightly Thee extol  
Of Man the Best Beloved, Thou Treasure of my soul!  
O Lord, I pray thee carry the torch to light my way,  
That I may know Thy pleasure, and serve Thee day  
by day.

(Bach Chorale-No. 5)

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old,  
by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not.  
He speaks to us the same word: “Follow thou me!” and sets  
us to the tasks He has to fulfil for our time. He commands.  
And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple,  
He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the  
sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship,

and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own  
experience Who He is.

(Albert Schweitzer)

## About the Lectures

The William Penn Lectures started as a ministry of the Young Friends' Movement of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. In the beginning of the last century, "Young Friends" was the community of young adults from both the Hicksite and the Orthodox Philadelphia Yearly Meetings, which reunited in 1955. The Young Friends Movement began the lecture series "for the purpose of closer fellowship; for the strengthening by such association and the interchange of experience, of loyalty to the ideals of the Society of Friends; and for the preparation by such common ideals for more effective work through the Society of Friends for the growth of the Kingdom of God on Earth." The name of William Penn was chosen because the Young Friends Movement found Penn to be "a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring 'To live out the laws of Christ in every thought, and word, and deed; and that these might become the laws and habits of the State.'"

The first run of William Penn Lectures were given between 1916 and 1966, and are warmly remembered by Friends who attended them as occasions to look forward to for fellowship with our community, inspiration, and a challenge to live into our faith. The lectures were published by the Book Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has granted Pendle Hill and Quaker Heron Press permission to reproduce the lectures as free ebooks.

Although it was [announced](#) in 1960 that the series would be discontinued several lectures were published in the early '60s. It appears that the lectures given between 1923 and 1931 were never published. If we come upon manuscripts of these lectures, we hope to publish them in future.

In 2010, the Young Adult Friends of PYM revived the series, officially launching the second run of the William Penn Lectures in 2011. [The series was renamed](#) the *Seeking Faithfulness* series in 2016, as part of the Young Adult Friends of PYM's concern for dismantling racism within the yearly meeting and the wider society. It no longer felt rightly ordered to have a major event named after a slaveholder. The [Seeking Faithfulness](#) series is hosted by the Young Adult Friends for the benefit of the whole yearly meeting community, and invites a Friend to challenge us all to explore new ways to practice our Quaker faith. The Seeking Faithfulness series seeks to nourish our spiritual lives and call us to faithful witness in our communities and throughout the world.