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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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Levinas and the Visibility of God:

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Friends and the Kingdom of God

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Gerard Guiton

Cumulative No. 113

December 2009

QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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Sponsored by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group

(<http://theo-discuss.quaker.org/>)

The purpose of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group is to explore the meaning and implications of our Quaker faith and religious experience through discussion and publication. This search for unity in the claim of truth upon us concerns both the content and application of our faith.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The three essays featured in this essay were presented in June's residential Quaker Theological Discussion Group meeting held at Olney Friends School in Barnesville Ohio. This was the first residential QTGD meeting held in the Midwest for over two decades, and it was good to be back in the home territory where much of its history developed just over fifty years ago. Indeed, it was a historic gathering, not only as a celebration of a half century of *QRT* and QTGD, but also as a first-rate set of meetings in which two dozen leading Friends shared leadership within the program, along with two dozen others also in attendance, contributing to one of the most representative Quaker gatherings I have experienced. One of the reasons this was so is the twelve presentations on the future of Friends, representing different sectors of Friends around the world. The plan is to gather those essays into a separate book-length publication. In addition to a session on a Friendly apology for the 21st century, two other sessions were held on Quakers and Levinas and Friends and the Kingdom of God; those papers are featured in this issue.

The first set of essays, by Jeffrey Dudiak and Corey Beals, build on the research that these Quaker philosophers have conducted on the works of Emanuel Levinas and their implications for ethics and theology. Jeffrey Dudiak¹ takes on the issue of Levinas and the invisibility of God, arguing that God's presence is paradoxically revealed in the face of the other, precisely because of God's absence. Corey Beals² then addresses the visibility of God, building upon the implications of beholding the infinite in the face of the other. In post-Holocaust Western society, the work of Levinas has extensive implications for ethics and theology alike, and Dudiak and Beals have not only performed a valuable service for Friends in engaging his thought; they have set a course for leading philosophers and theologians to consider and to benefit from.

The third essay in this issue, by Gerry Guiton of Australia, addresses the centrality of the Kingdom of God in the teachings and ministry of Jesus, as well as the faith and practice of early Friends. Surprisingly, the Way of the Kingdom has not been of paramount importance within the larger Christian movement since the days of the first Christians, and Guiton critiques that oversight extensively. How can Christians claim to be followers of Jesus if they do not

embrace a Kingdom ethic or seek to emulate the example of Jesus in all things? We might embrace Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, but do we uphold him as our political Lord and Savior? All too easily well meaning believers follow Jesus part of the way, but not all the way when it comes to renouncing worldly position, status, security, and means in exchange for embracing the Way of the Kingdom. For Jesus to be “Lord” of the Church and of our lives requires yet another Reformation—such is the radical vision of the Kingdom to which Guiton calls us.

In addition to those who have contributed essays for the present issue, I want to thank the staff at Olney Friends School in Barnesville for an excellent set of meetings in June, and I thank Jeff Dudiak for taking minutes at our business meeting. They are posted on the website. Also, I want to welcome Howard Macy and David Johns as associate editors of *Quaker Religious Thought*, and I likewise welcome Carole Spencer, Corey Beals, Stephen Angell, Jeffrey Dudiak, and Ben Pink Dandelion to its Advisory Council. Information will be forthcoming as to when our next QTDG meeting will be.

For now, happy (and convicting) reading!

— *Paul Anderson*
Editor

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Jeffrey Dudiak’s book, *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2001).
- 2 See Corey Beals, *Levinas and the Wisdom of Love: The Question of Visibility* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).