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Cumulative No. 108  
May 2007

# QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Cumulative Number 108

May 2007

*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

This issue contains the papers presented at the November 2006 QTDDG meetings in Washington DC. The discussions were lively, and one of the features of both sets of papers is the way that they address important subjects explicitly and implicitly. Given the state of the nation and the world, the subjects of Truth and Power seemed especially appropriate to be addressed at the meetings being held in Washington DC. Likewise, it is especially timely to have addressed Ben Richmond's new book, *Signs of Salvation*, which creates its own place somewhere between John Punshon's *Reasons for Hope* and Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*. Here, as in November, these sets of presentations make a timely combination.

On Truth and Power, we asked Newton Garver and Shannon Craigo-Snell, a leading Quaker philosopher and a leading Quaker theologian, to develop the issue from opposite directions. Garver, whose work with the Alternatives to Violence Program and political philosophy is impressive, develops "Speaking Truth to Power," an 18th century Quaker theme made popular by Stephen Carey and his commission in 1955 ("Speak Truth to Power; A Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence," a report sponsored by the AFSC). Indeed, "Speak Truth to Power" has become a slogan for prophetic movements in recent decades, and the examples of Jesus, Gandhi, King, and others demonstrate the true source of power and authority in the world—truth. Garver develops that motif with a truth-based critique of political and religious power, alike.

Craigo-Snell treats the reader to an analysis of what it would take to empower the truth within a sound-bite culture, and allegations of the proliferation of "weapons of mass deception." Wherever one stands on the political spectrum, and from whatever national standpoint, one of the most acute shortages in the land involves the availing and furthering of the truth—plain, simple, and unadorned. Even where fault is real, sincere confession of error, or even the acknowledgement of mixed motives and outcomes, becomes a refreshing breeze over the stale haze of posture-speak. Wouldn't this be a good time for the Quaker testimony of plain speaking and authentic address to catch on in the world? This is always what the Spirit of Truth is about, who in the Gospel of John not only conveys the truth of God and Christ to the world, but who also is the revelatory agent leading humans into truth—at least potentially, if we will but tune in responsively. Here the image of the

Spirit of God working as an unseen-yet-powerful “virus” gives us an image of what bottom-up power might really be like. If Jesus would have been preaching today, I imagine he might have added that image to his other metaphors of “light,” “salt,” “leaven,” and “light”—he also probably would have been misunderstood, now as then, in making the truth known. And yet, that’s the challenge we face!

In our QTDG meetings Miroslav Volf, noted theologian of Yale Divinity School, responded to our Truth and Power papers by presenting some of the material from his new book: *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Central to his contribution is the priority of remembering rightly—both the pain and the joy—if healing and reconciliation are to occur. Memory acts both as a shield and a sword, defending us from untruth and challenging truth’s distortions. In doing so, Volf showed how truth is always liberating and how the truth-furthering work of the Holy Spirit is effected within and between persons. Indeed, memory can be redemptive, but grace and forgiveness also bring one the liberation of release. Therefore, the larger truth of God transcends the wrongs that have been done and extends to the good that yet might be achieved. Buy Miroslav’s book! Better yet, discuss it in conjunction with this issue of *Quaker Religious Thought*. Upon reflection, I have added my own essay, “Truth, Power, and Christ,” building on Johannine and Quaker understandings of the issues.

The reviews of Ben Richmond’s book, then, take the matter further; they invite a discussion of the sort of saving-revealing work Christ indeed came to bring to the world. Note that here, as well as in the previous essays, truth is liberating and even healing. Re-envisioning the time-changing work of Christ in this revelational sort of way makes all things new in terms of life-changing and world-changing power! Jacci Welling and Brian Drayton each develop helpful engagements of *Signs of Salvation*—Welling from a more ecumenical perspective, and Drayton from a more Quaker perspective, and Richmond’s thoughtful response give us plenty further to consider.

As mentioned above, the interplay between the explicit and the implicit levels of these papers leads us into deeper reflection. On the explicit level, the Truth and Power essays address the political, philosophical, and theological issues related to truth and power and their impact upon each other. While they do so from a Quaker perspective, the two lead essays leave undeveloped explicit treatments of the role Christ might play as the Way, the Truth and the Life—the personal

source of liberation. Likewise, *Signs of Salvation* poses a thoroughly Quaker systematic theology solely based on Scripture with virtually no references to Quaker doctrines or history. The implicit here is likewise accessible in the explicit, but that is content that readers must add on their own.

Again, these essays make for stimulating reading and consideration; and the world of Friends and those beyond the movement are thereby helped in doing so.

Happy reading, *and* reflecting!

—Paul Anderson

Editor

**Quaker Theological Discussion Group**

November 16, 2007

San Diego, CA

All are welcome!

(see website for details)

1:00-3:30 pm    A Friendly View of the Sacraments

7:00-9:00 pm    Reviews of *Holiness:*  
*The Soul of Quakerism*  
by Carole Spencer