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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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Edited by T. Canby Jones

Sponsored by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group

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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 should include an historical and a contemporary approach. The search for unity in the claim of truth upon us concerns both the content and the application of our faith.

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Editorial

Arthur Roberts' paper, "Holiness and Christian Renewal," was originally presented at the July, 1965, conference of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group held at Earlham College. The Steering Committee of the group felt that this paper was such an important contribution to the rethinking going on today among Friends concerning the experience of "Christian perfection" that it should be used as a lead article in this issue.

Some of our readers may need to be reminded that the experience of "victory over the power of sin in this life" was one of the major testimonies of the early Friends. They felt that Christ had come to rule within their lives in the fullness of his power and that nothing evil could stand in his presence. Therefore, those Friends of evangelical persuasion today who claim "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" in their lives are true spiritual heirs of the first publishers of truth. We are privileged to print this article by one of the most able exponents of this evangelical Quaker view today, Arthur O. Roberts.

In his article Arthur Roberts makes a competent survey of the biblical basis for the experience of "baptism of the Holy Spirit." In my view his presentation reaches its climax of meaning in the eight inferences from the New Testament and the seven recommendations for Friends renewal on that basis, which he makes toward the end of the article.

Arthur Roberts' contribution has inspired several reflections on the experience of "Christian perfection" which I would like to share. Whenever the subject of the Christian experience of holiness is mentioned to me, that beautiful passage from page 65 of Thomas Kelly's *A Testament of Devotion* comes to mind. It runs:

But God inflames the soul with a burning craving for absolute purity. One burns for complete innocency and holiness of personal life. No man can look on God and live, live in his own faults, live in the shadow of the least self-deceit. . . . The blinding purity of God in Christ, how captivating, how alluring, how compelling it is! The pure in heart shall see God? More, they who see God shall cry out to become pure in heart, even as he

is pure, with all the energy of their souls. . . . He who walks in obedience . . . on him God's holiness takes hold as a mastering passion of life.

Do we really long for purity of heart and life with every fibre of our being? We who have felt the tug of God's call deep within have experienced this longing. We thirst to be as pure in motive, serene, single-minded and as fully obedient as Jesus of Nazareth, whom our hearts delight to follow as Lord. It is the claim of Christianity and Quakerism that the person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness and the power to obey God in all things has his prayer answered, his hunger filled, his thirst assuaged. Seekers become glorious finders and we are empowered by grace to walk in Jesus' footsteps.

Early Friends, especially George Fox, were very emphatic about their claims to have "come up through the flaming sword into the paradise of God," and that God had given them "victory over sin in this life." Justification and sanctification were for them two phases of the one saving experience of the Lord's presence in their lives. They became as a result released, established men, who shook the country for miles around, because all inner conflicts, guilt feelings, and lack of faith had been resolved in them by the power of Christ, their prophet, priest, and inward teacher. His presence within enabled them to live "a-top of Satan." As a people they were swept forward in that "ocean of light and life" which was overcoming the "ocean of darkness and death."

In the contemporary Quaker scene I think we observe at least three attitudes toward the experience of "Christian perfection" in this life. The first is a reaction among evangelical Friends away from over-dependence on the Wesleyan teaching that the experience of "sanctification" is a second definite and entirely separate work of grace from the experience of conversion, salvation, or justification. Both Arthur Roberts' paper and the comment by Eugene Collins represent this growing conviction, which was clearly true for early Friends, that justification and sanctification are two phases of one saving experience.

A second attitude toward holiness is found among that small group of Friends who have been strongly influenced by the so-called neo-orthodox or crisis theology. This theological viewpoint is well known, in Fox's phrase, for its "pleading for the power of sin." But Friends of this persuasion have discovered that early Friends not only took extremely seriously the vastness and perversity of man's sinfulness but also witnessed that the power of Christ had fully conquered sin in their

experience. The truth is that the early Quaker emphasis is also that of the New Testament.

A third attitude, which is quite paradoxical, is found among some liberal-humanist Friends. On the one hand they are convinced of man's inherent and ineffaceable goodness and deny that sin is more than a temporary or environmental factor which can be overcome by works of mercy and social justice and by appeals to the innate goodness in men. On the other hand, strangely, these Friends are very reluctant to talk about "man as perfect" or "the possibility of perfection" in human experience. If man, as this approach implies, is "the measure of all things" and soon to be master of all, human perfection in a social sense would appear to be a logical goal or outcome. Whence, then, this paradoxical unwillingness to claim perfection for man?

I wonder if this unwillingness does not stem from modern man's conception that perfection means absolute, one-hundred-percent faultlessness. We have learned sufficient humility from the scientist to admit our finiteness and fallibility and hence do not wish to claim such absolute perfection for a creature as contingent as man. But such absolute faultlessness is a static absolute, by definition unattainable, and is therefore obviously not intended in Christ's command to be perfect or in the claim of early Friends to power over sin.

What is needed, and what the essays in this issue help us toward, is a dynamic, attainable conception of holiness suited to man's capabilities and limitations. Persons that we know, perhaps even some of us, do in fact walk in effective obedience to God under the guidance and inspiration of his Spirit. Such persons are serene radiant souls whose lives are a benediction to all whom they meet. They are fully conscious of their own weaknesses and limitations but even more conscious that they have been called to live by divine grace under his constant guidance. They are able to walk in holy obedience, able to praise the Lord at all times — through all experiences whatever the heartache, suffering or joy, and able to be single-minded, God-directed, God-blinded men and women. Our Lord Jesus calls us to be such men and women. When we respond to the call and begin living such lives we experience the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and "the power to live free from sin in this life." Walking in obedience we will know in significant part what it means to be pure even as he is pure.

T. C. J.