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Guest Editorial--Quaker religious Thought, no. 35

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Guest Editorial

Dean Freiday's study of "The Early Quakers and the Doctrine of Authority" is part of a series of studies undertaken by the Faith and Life Panel of Friends of which he is a member. This project is one offshoot of the 1970 St. Louis Conference of Friends, which was probably the most widely delegated gathering of American Friends ever held. It was initially called by a group of Evangelical Friends who had met at the Congress on Evangelism in Minneapolis the previous year. The surprise was that virtually all Yearly Meetings in America responded to the call with up to five representatives to the St. Louis Conference.

No one can yet judge the historical importance of that conference, but it seems to have taken place in an atmosphere of sufficient openness and honesty to surface major issues which divide Friends, and to set in motion a means by which these issues can be openly and honestly explored. Designation of a Central Planning Committee of Friends representative of the major groups of Friends in America was the first immediate result of the St. Louis gathering. This committee was to be serviced by and function under the auspices of the Friends World Committee for Consultation as facilitator of its work.

When the Central Planning Committee met, it in turn set in motion two important means of further consultation. The first was a series of Faith and Life Conferences held across the country between 1971 and 1973 to draw together all Friends in the regions to become better acquainted and to probe further some of the issues which have kept Friends apart. Second, a Faith and Life Panel of nine Friends representing major groupings of Friends in America was appointed to explore in depth the theological issues which surfaced at St. Louis and which it was recognized must be dealt with if we are to find common ground among Friends. The two most important

issues were: What is the Quaker understanding of Christ? and What is the Quaker understanding of Authority? Subsequently it was felt that another area should be explored: What is the Quaker understanding of Ecclesiology? In terms of faith and order nomenclature, the first two deal with faith questions and the third with order.

Seven Regional Faith and Life Conferences will have been held by the fall of 1973. For the most part they, like the St. Louis Conference, have borne fruit and have been a pleasant surprise to Friends who have assumed too long that there is no basis on which we can meet and take each other seriously. This has been possible because of a large measure of good will that has been exhibited in a spirit of open search for truth and understanding. Also, since 1970 the Faith and Life Panel has had two meetings as well as carrying on correspondence and preparing a set of working papers to be published in 1974. These will include three papers on Christology and two on Authority. There will be queries at the end of each, designed for further discussion and study.

The next step will be a second, though smaller, delegated conference of approximately 75 Friends appointed by Yearly Meetings, to take place as a Faith and Life consultation at Indianapolis, October 13-14, 1974. The above publication will serve as the basis for prior study and further in-depth dialogue at the conference. If this proves fruitful there will probably be further publications of working papers and consultations of Friends on a wider regional and national basis.

An abbreviated form of Dean Freiday's paper on Authority will be included in the published Faith and Life booklet next year, but it was felt that the longer form, including extensive footnotes of scholarly importance and significance, should be offered to *Quaker Religious Thought* for publication. We are grateful to *QRT* for undertaking this project and making this research available to a wider reader audience.

Wilmer A. Cooper, Chairman
Faith and Life Panel