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## *Response to Comments*

WILMER A. COOPER

There are four main criticisms made by the reviewers which require thoughtful comments. *Burns Chalmers* raises an important point concerning my apparent bias for the Hebrew as opposed to the Greek tradition. He refers to this as the fear of "creeping Hellenism" among Friends. In replying to this it might help to point out that my chief interest as a student of religion and philosophy began with Greek philosophy, but in recent years it has gradually shifted to a firm commitment to the Hebrew-Christian faith and tradition. Of course, one cannot reflect upon and explore the meaning of the Hebrew-Christian faith without revealing his indebtedness to Greek philosophy and categories of thought. The biblical and early church traditions were greatly influenced by Greek thought forms. But from a Quaker perspective, as well as from that of contemporary religious existentialism, the Greek world view and metaphysical presuppositions seem inadequate and unsatisfactory. The reasoned approach of the Greeks has its proper place in religion only as long as it remains the handmaid of religious faith and experience.

Burns Chalmers points out the very fine sense in which the Greeks used the term *anthropos* to refer to man as "the upward looking creature." But the difficulty is that Greek rationalism assumes the self-sufficiency of man and declares him to be an autonomous creature. It presupposes a freedom of ultimate independence rather than the biblical idea of ultimate dependence. There is in the Greeks little trace of the feeling which one gets from reading the sixth chapter of Isaiah, where the prophet comes into the temple and experiences the holiness, majesty, and goodness of God as prerequisite to being commissioned by Yahweh to go forth and serve. The tendency in all rationalistic thought, including the Greeks, is to view such a response as a sign of weakness or "failure of nerve." It is this kind of

"creeping Hellenism" in Quakerism which is antithetical to what the writer understands to be the genius of Christian humility and our necessary sense of dependence upon God. Early Quaker religious thought and practice more nearly resembled the prophetic tradition of Israel than the calculating and mystical approach of the Greeks.

The Greek rejection of the physical realm as evil forms a dualism between spirit and matter which also must be rejected by anyone who believes that all of God's creation is good and that God is Lord of all life. The Quaker idea that religion and life (representing the spiritual and material realms) are ultimately reconcilable and bound together compels one, if he is consistent, to espouse the Hebrew view of creation as opposed to the Greek view.

But even more important in this debate for Quakerism today is that the "hellenization" of liberal Quakerism has led many Friends to the assumption that there is really no difference between Quakerism and some of the non-Christian religions, such as certain aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism. This has resulted in part from the resemblances which Quakers have noted between Greek mysticism and modes of thought, and their corresponding counterparts in the Eastern religions. Anyone who is aware of the shrinking globe on which we live must be awakened to the importance of finding some *modus vivendi* with the non-Western world and its religious and political faiths. But to suggest that historic Quakerism, which is rooted in the Christian tradition, has all along constituted a blend of these various religious faiths and metaphysical systems is to exhibit a lack of historical discernment and intellectual integrity. This is not the place to discuss this problem further but only to point out the difficulties which one encounters when the attempt is made to declare Quakerism's independence of its historical rootage in Christian faith. In trying to reconcile the conflict between some contemporary Quaker thought with its historical past, one is reminded of a recent Quaker discussion in which one member said that the reason early Friends were so much interested in the Bible was because Emerson's essays had not yet been written!

A second criticism, raised by *Duane Moon*, about using the terms "fundamentalism" and "conservatism" interchangeably, is

well taken. The problem is to find terms which correctly describe the variety of theological positions held by Friends. The labels "liberalism" and "evangelicalism" represent other terms which are also loosely used and are often unfairly applied. There is such a thing as a "liberal spirit" among conservatives and a "fundamentalist spirit" among liberals. There are minds which are open to new truth at both extremes, and there are closed minds represented in each group. Take, for example, those who identify themselves with the Evangelical Association of Friends and object to the term "fundamentalist" being applied to them. A number of these Friends have given adequate reason for their objection by the fresh interest they have shown in scholarly research and critical inquiry. Although Duane Moon's criticism is justified, he would probably also agree that it is almost impossible to apply labels fairly, or even to find labels which fairly represent the various shades of theological belief among Friends. In the original article, it would have been better to have used the term "fundamentalism" consistently throughout when referring to this non-liberal theological point of view among Friends.

The second criticism made by Duane Moon is more important with respect to the content of the original presentation. He detects what he believes to be an apologetic attitude toward the personal approach to social issues. He states his conviction that this still remains the central, as well as the most effective, approach to the elimination of social evil. In reply to this, it is my judgment that modern Friends, including Quakers of all theological persuasions, are obsessed with an individualistic approach to religion and life which is inconsistent with both Christian faith and early Quakerism. Friends are not the only victims of this, but because they have always placed such a high premium on the individual, they have more easily succumbed to it than other Christian groups. Although Christian religious experience must always be appropriated by individuals, and in the final analysis every man is individually accountable before God, there is another sense in which the Christian life is a corporate experience. Considering the Old Testament idea of the covenant community, the Hebrew concept of Israel as a chosen people, the Kingdom of God idea in both the Old and New Testament, the biblical conviction about the Lordship of Christ

over all of life, Paul's figure of the Body of Christ, and the concept of the church which developed very early in the Christian era, we are left with a clear impression of the corporate manner with which God deals with man. The Christian church has never held that man works out his salvation in isolation from other men. The Christian community is a *fellowship* of believers and doers of the will of God. It is a corporate experience and witness because all are members of one another in the Body of Christ, his church.

If one turns from the Bible and church history to our contemporary understanding of man through the behavioral sciences, the evidence is equally compelling that we must look upon man not as an isolated individual, but as a member of a community involving interpersonal relationships and responsibilities. Such an interpretation of the nature of man and society lends weight to the religious affirmation that the Gospel is two-dimensional, that it is both personal and social in its implication and application. Moreover, the Christian ethic is both a personal and a social ethic. It is two-dimensional in the sense that man acts as an individual person as well as collectively in certain institutional roles and relationships in society. In these collective relationships of community, business, government, etc., men act corporately to achieve their desired goals. Indeed, it is through human collectives of this type that most of the work of the world goes on. To suggest that such an arrangement is bad is really no help, for this is the way modern society is organized and no one really expects to change it. It is important, therefore, to understand something of the power structure of social and political organization and to accept moral responsibility for appropriate social and political action.

One may hazard a guess that much of the individualistic element in conservative church thought today stems not from our biblical or church heritage but from the influence of the political and social *laissez faire-ism* of classical liberalism. Advocating an adequate social philosophy which recognizes the importance of social and political action is not to regard the personal approach as *passé*. Certainly every man has a responsibility to do all he can in his personal capacity to further the interests of love and justice in society. Moreover, it is obvious that

Friends have been particularly gifted in exercising the personal approach. As Burns Chalmers noted, we have had our John Woolmans who have made a remarkable impact upon history. Although more of us should become John Woolmans in the twentieth century, the fact is that the complexity and enormity of organized modern life makes his approach increasingly difficult and ineffective. By the same token, this fact points up the necessity of working through the corporate relationships and structures of our social institutions to correct injustice and social evil.

It is of significance that contemporary studies of early Quakerism are revealing increasingly the corporate, as opposed to the individualistic, approach characteristic of early Quaker thought and practice. Although this point of view is chiefly concerned with a re-evaluation of the early Quaker view of the church as a gathered community, still it has bearing upon our view of society and our collective responsibility for correcting the evils in it. Certainly the experience of early Friends in this respect has little to say about the power relationships of social and political organization and ways of achieving justice under these circumstances, so here is a whole new area which modern Friends would do well to explore in order to see what contribution they can make to this problem.

Careful scrutiny of the comments by *Edna Hall* may provide the most formidable, though somewhat obscure, analysis of my article. She seems to be chiefly concerned about the use of impersonal terms as "the image of God" and "the light of Christ" to express the God-man relationship. She prefers to use such terms as grace, faith, trust, dependence-in-freedom, election, covenant, and sonship to express the personal and spiritual relationship proper to the biblical and Christian understanding of God and man. Likewise, she takes issue with such terms as light, holiness, righteousness, wisdom, image of God, etc., which imply for her a strictly ethical relationship on the one hand, or a mechanical relationship on the other. She also makes the very interesting observation that the terms which early Friends used, such as the light, were inadequate to express their basic religious presuppositions.

If this is a correct interpretation of Edna Hall, I find myself in close agreement with her. The difference seems to lie in the use of terms which imply one thing to her and another to myself. It is quite possible that the image-of-God symbolism is too impersonal, though the way in which it was used and interpreted in the original article was intended to convey the dynamic, spiritual, God-man relationship which she seems to favor. The use of "fellowship-in-love" and "holy obedience" were also intended to convey the primacy of man's spiritual relationship to God as over against his moral relationship of ethical obligation. The ethical bond and imperative, however, must follow upon man's personal and spiritual relationship to God, which was an emphasis somewhat lacking in Edna Hall's comments. The use of the word "holy" was intended to imply the converse of the "sin relationship" between man and God. Both are relational concepts—the first expressing man's intended relationship with God, while the latter expresses his defiance of God. Moreover, because "will" is central to the biblical understanding of the nature of God, it is imperative that the God-man relationship carry with it the concept of obedience, which is the reason for coupling "obedience" to the idea of "holiness" in order to convey the full meaning and intent of man's responsibility to God. I quite agree that the proper relationship with God is that of sonship, and it may be that such an expression is preferable to the idea of holy obedience. The term used in the Anabaptist tradition, and recently adopted by some Quakers, is that of Christian discipleship, though any such term should never be used legalistically or moralistically so as to supercede the primacy of God's grace in the God-man relationship.

Certainly the original article, the commentaries, and my rejoinder by no means exhaust this discussion of the various Quaker approaches to the doctrine of man. This should be a continuing dialogue for Friends who are concerned that we rethink our estimate of man in the twentieth century.