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Vail Palmer

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Rufus Jones and Mysticism

Daniel E. Bassuk

Comments by:

John Yungblut

J. Floyd Moore

Lewis Benson

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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 search for unity in the claim of truth upon us concerns both the content and the application of our faith.

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Francis B. Hall retired recently as director of the Quaker Hill Conference Center in Richmond, Ind., and is now a part-time member of the ministry team at West Richmond Friends Meeting, as well as leading retreats and intensive journal workshops. He and his wife Pearl Hall were formerly directors of Powell House. A Union Seminary graduate and long-time student of the works of Robert Barclay, he was the author of the major article in our issue on Barclay (Vol. 7, no. 1).

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Editor's Page

In this issue *QRT* returns to a theme which has been a favorite point of discussion within the Quaker Theological Discussion Group from its beginning. I can still remember Douglas Steere, at the first QTGD conference I ever attended, nearly twenty years ago, as he pleaded with the rest of us not to give Rufus Jones too hard a time. He had a point, for most of the founders of QTGD were the Quaker "young Turks" of the day, who had just thrown out Rufus Jones's magisterial interpretation of Quakerism as a mystical movement and were seeking, through mutual support and criticism, to build up a new and alternative understanding of what Quakerism had been all about in its origins and to re-ignite a fresh vision of what Quakerism might again become in the second half of the twentieth century.

This controversy with Rufus Jones and his mystical understanding of early Quakerism has cropped up in many articles and comments in *QRT* through the two decades of its life. Until now, perhaps the fullest development of this theme has taken place in the Autumn 1965 issue (*QRT*, Volume 7, number 2), which was devoted to the subject, "Historic Quakerism and Mysticism." Not surprisingly, the authors of two comments on Calvin Keene's lead article, in that issue, turn up again today with comments on Daniel Bassuk's article on Rufus Jones. Nor is it any surprise that they remain on opposite sides of the question.

Furthermore, the ongoing discussion in *QRT* of Rufus Jones's interpretation of Quakerism is one in which the present editor has been most "egregiously" involved. Daniel Bassuk has insured that this involvement would not be forgotten, by his choice of a quotation with which to open his article, and John Yungblut has risen to take the bait. Indeed, I wondered, as I read his comment, whom he was really arguing with. But then, as he noted in an earlier go-round (*QRT*, Volume 12, number 3, Summer 1970), I had there seemed "bent on total destruction" of his views (honest — all I was trying to do was to impale him on the needle-sharp horns of a dilemma), and so I guess he deserves the opportunity to set matters straight.

With most long-standing arguments that refuse to die, there remains something new to be said. This is certainly the case here. In *QRT* the argument has usually focused on the early Quakers and on ways to understand and interpret them. What Daniel Bassuk has done is to move the center of attention to the twentieth century and to look squarely at Rufus Jones's interpretation itself. As often happens with such changes in perspective, the outcome is that both critics and defenders of Rufus Jones have thrown fresh light on an old and continuing controversy. As the erstwhile "young Turks" of Quaker theology grow inexorably older, we welcome these fresh contributions from younger scholars such as Daniel Bassuk.

QUAKER THEOLOGICAL NEWS NOTES

This issue of *QRT* will reach subscribers too late to beat the deadline for registration for this summer's QTDG conference. Perhaps most interested persons will have received the conference flyer or read conference publicity in other Quaker periodicals. For the record, the 1978 conference is being held at Olney Friends School, Barnesville, Ohio, June 26 to 29. Theme of the conference is "A Theology of Evangelism and Outreach for Friends." Alan Kolp, Professor of New Testament and Church History at Earlham School of Religion, is giving a paper on the biblical basis of evangelism and outreach. The traveling ministry in the middle period of Quaker history is the subject of a paper by William Taber, Friend in Residence at Pendle Hill and teacher at Olney Friends School. Ronald Allen, pastoral minister of the Friendswood, Texas, Friends Church, is to address the question of a theology of effective contemporary outreach.

Recently QTDG has been attempting to get itself recognized by the U.S. government as a non-profit agency. Benefits include the ability to cut down on rising postage costs by qualifying for the non-profit organization mailing rates. As part of the effort to meet Internal Revenue Service (*sic*) guidelines, the QTDG Executive Committee adopted a set of by-laws at its November 1977 meeting; a copy will be sent on request. IRS's response to our application has been to classify the Quaker Theological Discussion Group as a business! An appeal is now under consideration; despite reduced rates from our Quaker attorney this is an expensive proceeding, and contributions toward this extra expense will be most welcome. They can be sent to *QRT* at the Alburdis address.

An exciting new Quaker publication which will be of interest to many readers of *QRT* is *InQuest*, published by young Friends in the Pacific Northwest. Those who are familiar with the magazine *Sojourners* will recognize in *InQuest* the same combination of evangelical Christian faith and radical social concern, within a specifically Quaker context. *InQuest* is published sporadically, as funds are available; a new issue has recently come out. Those who are interested should direct their inquiries to *InQuest* at 2901 S.E. Steele, Portland, Ore. 97202, or send \$5 in faith.

V. P.