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Comments on "A Call to Perfecting Our Faithfulness"

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PERFECTION

On the topic of perfection, it seems to me that Nancy Jackson has stressed the reasonable arguments in favor of perfection, following the style of Barclay the Apologist, and has slighted the ecstatic imperative for holiness felt by the early Friends. We all know that George Fox replied to those who wanted to make him a captain in the Congregationalist New Model Army: "I told them... that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars." I live in it! It lives in me! To live in that kind of transforming experience is to be a Quaker who trembles before the Lord, and who becomes filled with the glory of God.

To the dismay of some who love me, I have described myself as a thorough-going mystic. By this I mean that the details of how Christ becomes our Savior are a mystery to me. I don't know exactly why or how it happened, but somehow, we will all know face to face. Another aspect of my mystical perception of the Way of Christ is that I believe that when we are in the Spirit of the Lord, we do not always do what seems rational. "Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield!"

There are times when the Holy Spirit will lead us into song or symbolic action just as much as to well-spoken prayer or testimony. And we know that sometimes we may, like Paul, be taken into the heavens and shown things — "inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (2 Cor. 12:4 NIV). "In the same way the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness. We do not even know how we ought to pray, but through our inarticulate groans the Spirit himself is pleading for us" (Rom. 8:26-27 NEB).

And we must, as Nancy Jackson says, stress the present and active nature of salvation: Jesus Christ is perfecting us now! I am being lifted up now! Perhaps I ought properly to be labeled a neo-holiness Quaker!

This may sound dangerously like a reliance upon feelings...
This is an excellent query for radical, revolutionary Christians, who ought to look at each of their so-called conflicting loyalties and shatter them into little pieces, just as the mighty stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream smashed the giant statue (Dan. 2:34). As the old song goes:

I'm looking for the stone that was hewed out of the mountain,
That's tearing down the kingdoms of this world.
King Jesus is the stone that was hewed out of the mountain,
That's tearing down the kingdoms of this world.

A rational, balanced attitude toward sin and perfection is undoubtedly the right one to take. There should be no static resting in some attained state of grace (or damnation, for that matter). But it seems highly improper to suggest that our response to the call to faithfulness should be nothing more than lukewarm compromise. This is an area where we should not settle for being a little bit faithful: we are clearly called to be as sharp as salt on the tongue, as startling as light in darkness.

Especially now, especially within this nation, the faithful community must be different if it is to make a difference (the Son of Man comes to bring a sword). There is enough of a discrepancy between the foreign policy and the economic order of the United States today, and the social order of the Kingdom of Heaven, that it might be appropriate to set these words of Jesus (John 14:15-18 JerB) against the reign of Mammon:

If you love me you will keep my commandments.
I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him;
but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you.
I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you.
In a short time the world will no longer see me;
but you will see me, because I live and you will live.

When we are bold enough to become the faithful community, we may respond as John Audland did. In Bristol in 1654 "he stood up, full of dread, and shining brightness on his countenance, lifted up his voice as a trumpet, and said, 'I proclaim spiritual war with the inhabitants of the earth, who are in the fall and separation from God, and prophesy to the four winds of heaven.'"

When we are about the Father's business, I believe that perfection will come unasked for; then "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream" (Amos 5:24 RSV).

Notes
2. Ibid., p. 76.
5. Moffatt translates this: "let justice well up like fresh water, let honesty roll in full tide."

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