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Letter to the Editor

R. W. Tucker

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religious tradition. The murderer who says, "God told me to do it," is a classic case. And the adulterer who protests, "It was right because it felt right," is all too familiar.

Why should we permit Christianity rather than some other religion to shape our experience? If we examine ourselves and our civilization, we come to realize that Christianity forms the basis of our lives. It is the means by which our society has survived and from it is derived everything worthwhile that gives meaning to our individual lives. To embrace some other religion would probably be an act of rebellion unworthy of either tradition.

How should one arrive at that point of view? There's the mystery! For some it comes from necessity, for some from the fear of the Lord. Some would say it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Having tasted of the the forbidden tree, we try to understand and explain in terms of influences and hormones, but in the end faith is probably always an act of Grace.

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Letter

To The Editor:

This is written in response to the words the editor of QRT printed with approval in #59 from Arie Brouwer's acceptance speech as newly elected General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.: "In the strength of its best traditions and by reason of its place in the world, [the United States] can do more for justice, peace and freedom than any other nation in today's world."

I read these words with the same chill up my back that I felt when I heard John F. Kennedy promise that America would "bear any burden." The missionary impulse is rooted in noble purpose, but it turns into Cold War Liberalism, which in time turns into hot wars and the death of liberalism. The problem is that we don't know how to work except through American corporations which are in business to make money, not to be charitable. The problem is that we are culture-bound, provincial, and arrogant.

The great virtue of the Society of Friends, over three-and-a-half centuries, is that to an astonishing degree we managed not to be

culture-bound. We saw and opposed evils that others did not see as evil at all; we did it again and again. But we managed to do this by living within our own Quaker culture and by having a testimony against worldliness; by erecting barriers between us and the world.

Today's sad fad-ridden Quakerism has jettisoned those attitudes (in the name of relevance, of course) and I do not see us as particularly free of the surrounding culture except as to inherited testimonies from former days. The individual Christian may still hope to be freed by the Lord from surrounding cultural attitudes, but I have my doubts about our church, and I have no doubts at all about our nation. America cannot touch other nations, with whatever noble intentions, except to corrupt; this is the true meaning of American power, the final lesson of Vietnam.

R. W. Tucker

Editor's Response: There were several reasons for quoting Dr. Brouwer's reaffirmation of the "true American dream" statement adopted by the NCCC Governing Board in May 1981. I mentioned the loss of his brother Ed in the Korean War and his own disillusionment with that war. Because of space limitations I did not print what followed: "Over the years since, I have watched his country [Ed's], my country, our country, become ever more tangled in the web of superpower rivalry -- both under administrations Democratic and administrations Republican."

My own respect for the NCCC was another reason. Although the 28 years of my ecumenical service on behalf of FGC have been largely through the WCC, I think of E. Raymond Wilson and Francis Brown, among others, who gave long service to the NCCC on behalf of Philadelphia YM, a charter member of the NCCC, and Lydia Stokes, the NCCC's first woman vice-president years ago.

In the face of the fact that the NCCC almost became defunct under the combined *60 Minutes* and *Reader's Digest* attacks (with the *Wall Street Journal* thrown in for good measure), and the fact that as a result the NCCC had been through a major three-year restructuring, what Arie Brouwer was saying seemed "courageous" to me. The NCCC had also been literally "occupied" several times by groups protesting its commitments or its foreign-policy stands.

Like Rob Tucker, I am convinced of the value of traditional Quaker witness in faithfulness to the call from our Risen Lord, "Follow me." Like John Woolman, who subtitled his antislavery message "Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of Every

Denomination," I think it relevant for others as well. In spite of the difficulty of "representing" what Rob calls "sad fad-ridden Quakerism," I persevere in both ecumenical and theological work regardless of the apathy of most and antagonism of some Friends.-- D. F.