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Front Matter--Quaker religious Thought, no. 83

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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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Phil Smith

RESPONSE: *Elise Boulding*

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Edited by Viggo Mortenson

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The Transforming Power of Grace

By Thomas C. Oden

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Letter to the Editor

Larry Ingle

Volume 27, No. 1

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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Somalia and War	5
<i>Phil Smith</i>	
RESPONSE: <i>Elise Boulding</i>	
New Roles for the United Nations: Problems and Opportunities in Haiti	23
<i>Lon Fendall</i>	
Human Welfare: Economics and Theology	35
<i>Thomas D. Paxson</i>	
RESPONSE: <i>Tom Head</i>	
Reviews	49
Krieg, Konfession, Konziliarität Edited by <i>Viggo Mortenson</i> <i>Dean Freiday</i>	
The Transforming Power of Grace By <i>Thomas C. Oden</i> <i>Colin Saxton</i>	
Letter to the Editor	54
<i>Larry Ingle</i>	

Cumulative No. 83

Volume 27, No. 1

QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Cumulative Number 83

Volume 27, No. 1
September 1994

Sponsored by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group

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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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue of *Quaker Religious Thought* addresses certain political and economic issues within a theological context. Quakers focus on practical rather than ritual righteousness, and so we resist compartmentalizing conscience into separate spheres of personal and public morality. Consequently, Friends experience cognitive dissonance when confronted with issues not easily conformable to Kingdom righteousness, such as the use of military force to prevent starvation or genocide. On biblical and historical grounds we resist ascribing necessity to tragic moral choice. We reject ethical relativism and its theological partner, cheap grace; although on the basis of a love ethic such relativism has been rationalized among us recently, especially in respect to personal morality. To some observers Friends seem more zealous for ideal political behavior than for personal holiness, more pragmatic about human foibles within intimate circles rather than within impersonal ones such as nation states (a curious reversal of the Augustinian taxonomy of moral accountability fading proportionally to social distance).

Nevertheless, although we may have fallen into situation ethics, Quakers have intended rather to stress situation grace in the context of God's moral law. To affirm this goal practically has not been easy as the following articles make evident.

Phil Smith sets the stage for a dialogue on practical peacemaking with a probing article on "Somalia and War." Elise Boulding sharpens the issues with her critique, and Smith with his rejoinder. Lon Fendall offers a perspective on the difficulty of peacemaking from his personal experiences in Haiti. Tom Paxton reminds us that economic activity has a spiritual dimension and, Woolman-like, shows us practical implications. Tom Head's response reinforces these insights. Reviews by Dean Freiday and Colin Saxton offer collateral insights.

—A. O. R.