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Exchanges

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The conception of theological dialogue which informs the composition of *Quaker Religious Thought* — that what can be said about a religious question is disclosed through talking to one another with honesty and listening to one another with respect — also implies our recognition that this dialogue within Quakerism today, this questioning of the bases of our faith, is not confined to the pages of our own publication. As an expression of our responsibility to participate in a more inclusive conversation, we send copies of each of our issues to the editors of other Friends' magazines, both British and American (such as *Inward Light*, *Concern*, *The Seeker*, *The Friends Quarterly*), and we in return receive theirs. That such an exchange can make possible a "talking-back" which might otherwise not occur was shown when a year ago *The Seeker* published a review of our issue on Quakerism as an historical religion. Now I in turn should like to point out the relevance of *their* October, 1962, issue to *our* concerns, indeed, to many of the same basic questions raised by Maurice Creasey's article on Friends and the Sacraments.

The essays in this number of *The Seeker* are themselves quite self-consciously part of a dialogue, a response to a pamphlet published a year earlier by the British Home Service Committee entitled *Worship and Witness*. The pamphlet itself was written out of a strong conviction that the Society of Friends is a Christian body and as a protest against our unwillingness to argue for "the Christian revelation and particularly the Quaker understanding of it (as) more true . . . than that of any other religion or humanistic creed." It points to the decreasing number of convincements as a symbol of the present failings of our Society, believing "that what is living grows." As its title would suggest, the inquiry into the possible sources of this ill-health and decline focusses on the center of our corporate life, on worship, on the question of whether our meetings for worship provide "true spiritual nourishment." It asks whether we, who often seem without that "irresistible and burning experience" of God's presence felt by the early Friends, may not be left with "nothing to fall back on" in meetings for worship which offer no formal reminders of Christ's presence such as communion service or a programmed *teaching* ministry does. The articulation of the

concern voiced in this pamphlet reveals a strong sense of our responsibility as Friends to participate in the ecumenical movement, a participation which would demand our considering "how much, in the interest of unity [we] are prepared to give up," how many of our peculiar testimonies we would be willing to modify. Essentially, it asks us "to see with fresh eyes what we have for so long taken for granted."

It is this challenge which is taken up by the October, 1962, *The Seeker*, where it is met by *another* question, "Do we seek something in a strange land or cross our thresholds suddenly awake?" A fear is expressed that we are being called to look for God as "a glory glimpsed in the sanctuary" rather than in the common day, in "dogma" rather than "experience," outside ourselves rather than within, as identified with an image of God rather than known beyond all man's imaginings.

The writers of each essay seem to start from a willingness to recognize the truth of the assertion that we are indeed left with "nothing to fall back on." Yet, rather than stressing that the recognition of God's presence is *always* a matter of faith (at the communion table as much as in the meeting for worship) and that faith cannot be based on any physical reality nor on the inward self, but is rather the perception that these are not to be given our ultimate trust — that is, rather than emphasizing how radical the Quaker conception of faith is — they seem to mean only that there is nothing to fall back on *outside ourselves*. This dichotomizing of "in" and "out" pervades the journal; throughout, the reality of the individual's hearing and responding is regarded as somehow in its very nature set apart from Christian commitment, as though belief in Christ does not mean precisely faith that God cares for and speaks to man. In Julian Harrison's essay, "Need We Believe Anything?", a "belief in" Jesus is spoken of as something *added* to a relationship with him. Belief is defined as either scientifically verifiable *or* based on dogmatic authority; there seems to be no recognition that belief might be not a knowing-about but a personal relationship, that of trust. That this conception of faith as an inward experience means that very little value can be placed in "someone else's experience" is suggested in Hildegard Forres' essay in which she speaks of the "greater clarity (of) solitary meditation" and which she fills with references to "the esoteric mind," "the advance party," those "destined to the inner search."

And yet the last essay, by John Bailey on "A Shared Ministry," is a very real attempt to understand how there can be a speaking about faith which instead of creating barriers between people brings them together and strengthens their con-

viction. Here we are beyond the dualisms, beyond "theology" or "psychology," beyond even a too-easy separation of agnostic seeker from the most faithful members who are "settled in their beliefs and sustained by the worship and fellowship of the Meeting"; here, truly, is a recognition of the mysteriousness of grace. There is a loving care to preserve that which is unique to Quakerism, that which inspires our conception of a truly lay ministry, that which lays upon each of us the responsibility for letting God speak through us and listening to what he might have to say to us through others and not only in so-called "religious" settings. Bailey quotes Ronald Gregor Smith as saying grace is "nothing else than the capacity to share with complete harmony in the feelings of other men."

Yes, without grace it is impossible; nevertheless, the way leads through our willingness to listen and to respond whenever the fundamental beliefs of Quakerism are seriously considered.

Chris Downing