Quaker Religious Thought

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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.

Edited by Chris Downing

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Editor's Page

Vail Palmer's essay in this number of Quaker Religious Thought is the first in a series of papers scheduled to be published in our pages on various issues in the field of social ethics.

The Quaker Theological Discussion Group had as the theme of its annual conference held at Powell House in mid-July, "The Search for a New Morality." On the basis of the papers presented there and the discussions they provoked we look forward to publishing soon issues focussing on Quakerism and situational ethics, and on drugs. R. W. Tucker's article on the theology of Quaker service and Ross Flanagan's on corporate witness will also fall under this same general rubric.

Our deliberations at Powell House also suggested the appropriateness of setting up task forces in two other areas which might well lead to the calling of later conferences, the scheduling of discussions at Friends General Conference or Friends United Meeting, and eventually to something publishable here. Susan Bax (15 Walmer Rd., Apt. 1006, Toronto 179, Ontario) has agreed to convene a group to explore how sex-ism has distorted the faith and practice of Friends; a convenor is being sought for a task force to work further toward articulating "a Quaker view of sex."

John Sexton (6202 Northwood Drive, Baltimore, Md. 21212) will serve as program chairman of QTDG next year while our chairman, Canby Jones, is on academic leave from Wilmington College. John would welcome suggestions as to appropriate topics (and leaders) for discussion groups or panels we might be invited to set up for next summer's meetings of Friends United Meeting or Friends General Conference.

Wilmer Cooper, dean of the Earlham School of Religion, has asked us to announce a new service to be provided by the school's Institute of Quaker Studies. In conjunction with the Quaker Collection of Earlham College they are providing a
repository for unpublished research documents on Quakerism. They believe that there are many important manuscripts which are produced but never published which should be made available to persons doing research and study in Quakerism. They reserve the right to decide which documents are worth filing and would not encourage persons to send just anything they had written. They may later have to provide some guidelines but at present will receive what comes and decide whether to keep it on file. When they collect enough manuscripts they will catalog them and perhaps occasionally publish a list describing the material available at the Earlham library.

Speaking of unpublished manuscripts — we at QRT would welcome a chance to consider essays for publication in our journal. Manuscripts may be forwarded to the editor who has taken a pledge to read them carefully and promptly, and with equal promptness to return them to their authors with comments (and gratitude).

C. D.

The Spirit of the Nation

T. VAIL PALMER, JR.

“For God and country” — is this just a popular slogan, or does it represent something more far-reaching? Has the nation itself become a god — or even God? Is this God still a living reality — or is He dead? What implications do these questions have for the future of the Christian faith?

To deal with these issues, we need to develop a style of prophetic historical analysis of the powers at work in society. By discerning how and where God is at work, the church can better know where and when it should act. Would such a prophetic social-historical analysis actually confirm the widespread belief that the nation is one of the most fundamental and effective social units in our world, and its corollary, that we should look to the organs of the national government as bearers and executors of the basic moral values of our society?

If so, then presumably the church’s mission should include a large dose of lobbying and work in electoral politics, in order to assure that Christian values are actually put into practice in the policies and acts of the national government.

A Christian prophetic analysis of society would, presumably, find its source in the Bible — in the insights of biblical writers and in the biblical understanding of human history and society. In our modern age, however, most of us are inclined to discount the Bible as a possible supplement or alternative to scientific methods in telling us about the nature of our physical or social environment. Certainly, the church has committed grave errors and lost much influence, in its attempts to use the Bible too simply and directly as a textbook in astronomy or biology — or even in objective history!

Yet, as we look today at the social and psychological sciences, in particular, the question cannot escape us: How far can we get, through purely “objective” analysis and research?