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Editor's Page

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It has become something of a tradition at QTDG conferences to include in the program one or more papers on early Quaker thought or practice as a resource for understanding the topic of the conference. Many issues of QRT have also been devoted, in whole or in part, to the thought of the earliest Friends. To have the scheduled "Quaker" paper devoted to a later period of Quakerism, as a resource for contemporary thought and practice, was thus more than a small innovation at the Barnesville conference. This break with tradition was furthered by the presentation of a volunteered paper by Ruth Pitman, in the free time later in the evening on which William Taber's paper had been read.

These papers combined to make a point which has often been overlooked or questioned—that there is much to be learned from the quietist period in Quakerism, if we wish to find resources for the renewal of the people of God today. There may well have been more to quietism than the mere repetition of earlier Quaker insights or the deadening hand of tradition in a period of decline. Quietist Friends knew something that has in another way been celebrated in the contemporary musical, Fiddler on the Roof: tradition at its finest can be the dynamic source of life and strength for a community. This is not the only occasion on which I have raised the question: do we not need to be working out a fresh Quaker understanding of the place and role of tradition as a vehicle of God's action and revelation in history?

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ethics of four Quaker thinkers, scheduled for eventual publication by Catholic and Quaker Studies, I found that individual religious experience was not the primary source for religious ethics in their thought. What I did discover was "a grounding of their religious thought in the life of the religious community. I use this phrase in its broadest sense to refer both to the contemporary life of the community, in the writer's own time, and to the previous life of the community, as reported both in Scripture and in the tradition of the church." This growing realization that theology can be meaningful and alive only as it grows out of the past and present life of the community of faith was a primary motive in my decision, a year ago, to move from southern Ohio, where I was isolated from any present-day Quaker community, to Portland, Oregon, even though that move meant giving up an academic career.

Having personally experienced many of the anti-community pressures of contemporary life, including the disruption of even the primary community of marriage, I needed all the more acutely to rediscover the roots of life in the faith of a people worshiping together. A further step in this direction finds me for the coming year sharing a house with four other Christians, three of whom are fellow-attenders of Reedwood Friends Church. Having learned some of the pitfalls of too drastic a break with the existing culture, we are consciously not an "intentional community" or commune, but simply a group of Christians living together, sharing meals, common tasks, and unprogrammed conversations on the meaning of Christian life.

The lesson I have been learning in recent years is that theology is not simply an exercise of the head. All of life—including also the emotions, the sharing of joy and grief, worship and even ritual, the disruptions and the healings in our relations with our fellow Christians and our fellow human beings—is the stuff of theology. Indeed, such relationships are the fabric out of which the life of the people of God will be re-created and renewed, if such re-creation and renewal are to come at all. Even though the QTGD has been asserting the importance of religious thought in Quaker life for over twenty years, we have always recognized that theology is an instrument for the rebuilding of the church of Christ. A theology that is severed from its roots in the life of the community of faith, and from its service to that community, is no theology at all.

V. P.

The Theology of the Inward Imperative:

Traveling Quaker Ministry of the Middle Period

WILLIAM P. TABER

Recently I stood in an old, unused meetinghouse within the smell of the salt marshes in southern New Jersey. As I stood in the ministers' gallery and gripped the handrail, I suddenly realized that Joseph Hoag, that rustic Quaker seer from Vermont, had probably preached here. Then my mind was flooded with a sense of the great stream of divine caring which had flowed forth from that gallery across the years. The names of many other ministers flashed through my mind, but I focused on just a few who might have been there: John Woolman, Elias Hicks, Thomas Shillitoe, and Joseph John Gurney. Perhaps you have also been gripped, in some old meetinghouse, by a similar momentary thrill of communion with the mighty stream of life which once flowed through that place. Perhaps you have also discovered that—if we allow the feeling of awe to take a deeper hold—the was becomes is, and a rich peace settles upon us in that dusty place. Afterwards, when we step back outside into the sunlight of the twentieth century again, we are different people—not because we have felt close to the past, but because something which was in that past is still alive and vital and flowing today, if we but allow it to live in us and through us. It is in that spirit—that the was can become is—that this paper will examine the theology of evangelism and outreach of the traveling ministry of the middle period of Quaker history.

It is not easy to say just when the era of Quietism, or the middle period, ends, for one can see survivals of Quietism among Hicksite and Orthodox Friends well after the separations. If we agree with John William Graham and others that psychic sensitivity is one of the characteristics of this type of minister, then Quietism had ended for most of Quakerism after the 1850s; he, at least, found little evidence of such gifts