Contributors -- Quaker Religious Thought, no. 61

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Contributors

Although there is no question that Wilmer A. Cooper considers Richmond, IN the center of Quakerdom, he is widely known to Friends of other persuasions. His primary concern, not only during 18 years as founding Dean of the Earlham School of Religion -- the first accredited theological seminary for Friends -- but since, in a dozen other ways, has been the restoration and/or preservation of the faith content of Quakerism. He was a founder and first Chairman of QTDG (1958-1965), chairman for the ten years of its existence of the post-St. Louis Faith and Life Panel, a founder of the more recent Quaker Hill Consultations of Friends.

He and Barrett Hollister, the two American-Quaker Delegates to the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC (1968) launched the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial study of Violence, Non-Violence, staffed for the WCC by Australian Methodist David Gill. Possessor of a B.D. from Yale Divinity School and a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University, Wil's M.A. was from Haverford, his B.A. from Wilmington College.

At the 25th Anniversary Banquet of ESR in June, Wil and his wife Emily were honored by creation of a Wil and Emily Cooper Scholarship Fund to provide 10 full scholarships for ESR, to mark his retirement then. It was announced that pledges of $150,803 had already been made toward the goal of $250,000.

Wilmer Cooper has become so identified with theology that his four years in a Civilian Public Service Camp during WW-II, and seven years as Administrative Secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation tend to be forgotten.

Patricia Edwards-DeLancey serves two Friends meetings at Fairview and Martinsville in southeastern Ohio as pastor. She is a Ph.D. candidate, with course-work completed, at Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO. A more complete note appears in QRT #58.

At 70, Dorothy H. Craven is youthful in ideas and actively engaged in some teaching and in service as part of the Ministry Team at University Friends in Wichita, KS. Her favorite courses include Shakespeare, World Literature, and Quaker Literature. A recorded minister of Mid America Yearly Meeting since 1979, she serves as secretary of that YM's Christian Ministries and Vocations Division.

After elementary and secondary school teaching she became an Instructor in English at Illinois Wesleyan, then an Assistant Pro-

Friends lived and went forth in ministry. This may be contrasted with being gathered out of a particular concern as is often the case today, such as the peace testimony, or a group of social concerns. Shifting to concerns as the basis for gathering often means diversity of starting points rather than being gathered into a convenant relationship to God and to one another.

From this lack of focus and gatheredness, Quakerism appears to many (Friends and non-Friends alike) to be in essence an expression of individualism, a form of religious democracy based on the assumption that through the Light within every individual has private access to God with little or no attention given to a corporate relationship to God. Extreme examples of this differ little from the Ranterism that plagued Friends in the 17th-C England, namely, the belief that each person should seek his/her own inner leading and then act on it. This, of course, is just the reverse of the traditional belief of Friends that the corporate discernment of the gathered meeting is more trustworthy than the leading of any given individual. That is what made it possible for the group to arrive at a common sense of unity as all sought the Light of Christ together.

John McCandless has summarized the Friends' understanding of the church as a "...vision of what it means to be a people of God: a community of the committed, bearing a vision of Truth around which the community is organized, demonstrating the power of the Spirit of God, a prophetic people, a worshiping and praying people, a people on mission, a people marked by moral and ethical sensitivity."

It should also be noted that early Friends coupled this understanding with a Biblical norm to provide discipline for the group. Like the Anabaptists who preceded them, Mt. 18: 15-17 was their guide for dealing with offenders, as Barclay's Anarchy of the Ranters makes clear:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two of three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (RSV)
A Critique of Quaker Accountability

WILMER A. COOPER

The purpose of this paper is to deal with the question of accountability in the light of our need to be answerable to one another in the community of faith, which for us means the Friends Meeting.

The term accountability will be addressed in two ways: First, the question of how we exercise and balance freedom and discipline in our life together within the Meeting. Secondly, the question of whether in our faith and practice we are in historical continuity with the original Quaker vision. Thus the objective will be to assess accountability in these two respects from the early period to the present, and in the light of our performance to indicate some signs of warning as well as signs of hope for the future of the Society of Friends.

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN LIGHT OF THE EARLY QUAKER NORM

Although Friends have been in almost perpetual crisis since their beginning in the middle of the 17th C, certain conditions now prevail which make the situation different in degree, if not in kind. Furthermore, the crisis is accompanied by a sense of forboding when one thinks of what is at stake for Friends now, as well as in the future.

To evaluate the current situation it may be helpful to recall how early Friends defined their community of faith, the role accountability played in it, and some of the departures from this understanding which have taken place through the years. If we define and articulate “the early Quaker norm” we will have something against which we can assess where we are and where we are going.

In defining their community of faith, early Friends used mainly Biblical images such as “the Body of Christ,” “the People of God,” “Children of the Light,” and “Publishers of Truth.” They functioned organizationally under what George Fox called “the Gospel Order.” Thus we are immediately involved in a Quaker theology of the church and a doctrine of ecclesiology.

Descriptively speaking, Friends came together out of a sense of being gathered in the Spirit of Christ which united them as the “People of God.” To be so gathered by Christ as the head of the Church provided a structured community of faith out of which fessor of English at Friends Univeristy in 1947, where she has taught ever since, becoming Professor Emeritus in 1980. She was made a full professor in 1949, served two terms as head of department totalling 27 years, and two terms as Academic Dean. She also served nine years on the Board of Advisors of the Earlham School of Religion.

Along the way, she earned a Ph.D. at the University of Colorado, and Friends University conferred an honorary Litt. D. in 1980. Her articles have appeared in Quaker Life, The Evangelical Friend, Fruit of the Vine, and Upper Room Disciplines. She shares her home with her 95-year-old father, Gurney T. Hadley.

Four months in the Philippines during the past year have done much to shape Perry Yoder’s outlook and current work on a biblical theology built around the concept of shalom as brought about through liberation and justice. Recently appointed an Associate Professor of Old Testament at Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, IN, his teaching since 1968 has been at such Mennonite institutions as Bluffton College and Bethel College in the U.S. and visiting professorships at Conrad Grebel College and Waterloo Lutheran Seminary both in Ontario.

An Oregonian by birth (Portland 1940) and a Midwesterner by vocation he was an honors graduate of Goshen College, has a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies (University of Pennsylvania), and has also studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and participated in a French Archeological Mission in Israel.

Bible study is the focus of four of his books ranging from hermeneutics to an adult study guide, and New Men/New Roles (a biblical guide to male liberation). The latter is balanced, we hasten to add, by “Women’s Place in the Creation Accounts” contributed to a volume on Women in the Bible and Early Anabaptism. His “A-B Pairs and Oral Composition in Hebrew Poetry” was published by Vetus Testamentum 21 (1971):470-489. “Biblical Hebrew” appears in Versification: Major Language Types, ed. by W. K. Winsatt (NYU Press, 1972). He and his wife Elizabeth have two children named (guess what?) Joshua and Joel. Weeklong back-packing in the Rockies and weeklong bicycling tours are favorite recreations.

Larry Kuenning, “a pacifist by birth and a Christian since age 10,” felt a need for a community embodying Christ’s peacable Kingdom. In 1972 he became a co-founder of Publishers of Truth (now Friends of Truth), a discipleship community on the early Quaker model.
quent adventures of this community led to such concerns as orderly procedures among Christian communities, the psychology and sociology of religious experience, and myths masquerading as church history. He “get his money as a typist, his recreation reading old writings of the disciple-church traditions. His wife Lisa has also written for QRT.

Editor’s Page

Accountability

Space limitations have again made it necessary to separate related papers. Ruth Pitman’s (see QRT #60) was one of three on the subject of Quaker accountability presented at the QTDG meeting in Wichita. Comments by Larry Kuening on that paper and the other two papers with their commentary appear in this issue.

In a sense, QRT #60 was a series of theological case studies of changes that have taken place in Quakerism. NYYM was singled out on the Christological versus Theistic problem which exists in several other yearly meetings as well. Ruth Pitman, on the other hand, applied an unfamiliar norm -- the Ten Commandments -- to illustrate some of the changes in Quaker practice, resuscitating the almost forgotten Hicksite, Wilburite labels to give concreteness.

The labels in QRT #61 broaden to evangelical and liberal and “some varieties in between” in an article by Wilmer Cooper with Comments by Patricia Edwards-DeLancey. His is not a case study, but examines theological shifts under pressure from Protestantism; or dissipation and deformation under primarily secular and “universalist” pressures.

Non-Quaker readers please indulge these frank examinations of some things where more clarity is needed if Friends are to survive. Wilmer Cooper’s attitude is neither rigid nor sentimental, but grows out of a conviction that if Quakerism can become theologically accountable it has far from exhausted the potential in the original vision. That vision was centuries ahead of its theological contemporaries and has an enviable history of motivation to creative and innovative faithfulness and obedience and deserves to be cherished.

Dorothy Craven’s paper carefully examines NT understandings of accountability, and her Christian horizons are broad enough to evoke resonance from the Mennonite tradition as well. Perry Yoder extends her observations in several respects.

Obviously, the term “accountability” has provided a fresh and stimulating handle on some things which have plagued us, or alternatively offered new depth of understanding where the rootage soil has not eroded as much.

Dean Freiday