

Quarterly Yoke Letter

Volume XLVII

September, 2004

Number 3

Renewing The Spirit...Renewing The Mind...

Trueblood Yokefellow Academy
Tel. (952) 473-8877

125 E. Wayzata Blvd., Wayzata, Minnesota 55391
email: jnewby2915@aol.com

Dear Friends,

To be human is to need to perceive ultimate meaning in life. The question, “Why am I here?” is a universal human question that we ask throughout our life time on this earth. Is it to make money...to build a fortune? I don’t think so. Is it to use as many and as much of the earth’s resources that we can before we die? Again, I don’t think so, though many in our world seem to be living as though this is where they can eventually find ultimate meaning. As important as all of the other academic disciplines—psychology, sociology, biology, etc., I believe that it is only in the area of theology that we can begin our pursuit to understanding meaning in life. In brief, when we begin to think theologically I believe that we are beginning to move toward an answer at the core of the “Why am I here?” question.

When I was Editor of *Quaker Life Magazine*, I solicited an article from a former colleague of mine at the Earlham School of Religion. Before his retirement, John Miller was a Professor of Theology. He would define his discipline as simply, “the intellectual love of God.” In the article he wrote, he shared these words: “In each of the three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we have reported an exchange between Jesus and Pharisees which is extremely important for our understanding of theology. In Luke’s Gospel an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘What is written in the law,’ he replied. ‘How do you read it?’

“He answered,” ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your *mind* (emphasis mine), and your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and live.’ (Luke 10:25-27 NIV)

“The word we translate into English as mind is *dianoia* in the Greek. *Dianoia* was commonly used to designate the inward organ that perceives, apprehends, or gains an insight into something. It is what we would call the intelligence, or the intellect or the mind. Thus, we are called to love God with, in, and through the intellect.”

To love God with the intellect or mind leads to the examination of one’s life. Examination leads to questions. Questions lead, in the end, to spiritual growth. And it is in the general category of *spiritual growth* that I believe we can begin to get at an answer to the “Why am I here?” question. Examination of one’s life can come at many entry points in our lives—the result of human failure or tragedy, transition or triumph, or just a deepening hunger to know and be known by the Living God. Whatever the impetus to life examination, the consequence can only be *spiritual growth*.

Much of my current ministry is centered in the teaching function of the church. I am convinced that the local congregation is a place where practical theological discourse begins. It is here where we can ground theological discourse in the practical life experiences of everyday Christians. But where do we begin?

One model which has just been developed where I am serving is called, The Wayzata Center for Faith and Learning. The purpose of the Lay Academy portion of this Center is to provide a wholistic approach to adult Christian religious education. It consists of four primary areas—*Bible and World Religions, History of Christian Thought, Theology and Spirituality*, with courses offered throughout the school year.

Bible and World Religions

Introduction to Hebrew Scripture...This class offers an overview of the books in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures, and responds to these questions: “How was the Hebrew Canon formed?” “Who were the authors?”

“What are the major divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures?” and “What do the Hebrew Scriptures have to tell us today?”

Introduction to the New Testament...In this introductory course participants have the opportunity to learn about the Gospels... “How are they alike?” “How are they different?” Students learn about the writings of the Apostle Paul, as well as study the other letters and books included in the Canon. At all times the question is asked, “How do these writings relate to my day-to-day life?”

Introduction to World Religions...In this class participants are given an overview of the world’s major religions—Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Christianity, where they can ask about the major differences as well as the similarities. Always students seek to understand how each major faith impacts the world in which we live.

History of Christian Thought

Introduction to the History of Christian Thought...This class looks at how the Christian faith was formed, and studies the various councils and church fathers and mothers who were influential in its formation. The question, “What were the major challenges that the early church had to face?” is asked, and a look at the major divisions within Christianity and the rise of the various denominations follows.

Theology

Introduction to Theology...In this course participants learn about the evolution of this academic discipline, and how they can make this discipline practical by beginning to develop their own theology. “What do I believe?” and “Why do I believe it?” are focus questions.

The Great Questions of Theology...The great questions that theologians have struggled with over the centuries continue to be asked today: “Is God unchangeable?” “Does God predestine our lives?” “If God is love, what about the problem of evil?” “How personal is God?” These questions are the focus of this course, as well as how such issues/questions impact our lives today.

Spirituality

Introduction to Spirituality... “What is spirituality?” “How do we define it?” This course asks these questions, as well as looks at the various avenues i.e. spiritual disciplines that are available for our practice in the ongoing process of spiritual growth.

Spiritual Autobiography...Each of us is on a unique spiritual journey. This course helps us to reflect upon our lives and to understand them as a progression of spiritual insights. “How is God at work in my experiences?” and “What spiritual lessons am I to learn?” are the focus questions. Participants will also write their own spiritual autobiographies.

Elton Trueblood once said, “We can create a new form of learning suited to the needs of this age.” By developing a Christian education program or lay academy that at least consists of the above areas, such a form of learning can begin to be created. The consequence can only be *spiritual growth*.

Faithfully,

James R. Newby

