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Response to Comment

LISA BIEBERMAN KUENNING

The thrust of Lorena Tinker's attack on "Christ's Wife" is that I and my fellow Publishers of Truth don't use the right words. My language, she says, is not the "vernacular," is "awkward and downright ridiculous," uses "models which at best must be translated and at worst are unmentionable," "is a play with words which does disservice" to my sources, "gushes," and places "semantic boundaries" on experience. By contrast she, along with an unspecified collection of women described as "thoughtful," are recipients of a truth which "requires semantic expansions." I guess that means that while Lorena Tinker doesn't yet have adequate words for her truth, such words as she has are much better than mine. Now if only we Publishers of Truth could learn to talk the way she does, our women would spend less time in the kitchen, and our men would spend less time at the office!

Since Tinker shows no awareness of how our women and men actually live, and since she also tells us little about the practical experience of those who follow her philosophy, let's introduce some reality into the conversation.

Publishers of Truth, now in its seventh year, is a community without human leadership for which Christianity is a total way of life. None of our members will use violence against another person, as by calling the police. We will not sit on a jury or sue a person at law, because these systems are in bondage to powers of death that Christ came to overthrow. None of us will carry a draft card. All of our members refuse war taxes to the extent that we have opportunity.

We are people who consider nothing we have to be our own. Without a formal communalism, we make all our resources available for immediate use in response to Christ's leading. It is commonplace for hundreds of dollars to change

hands at short notice. We do not use state welfare or buy insurance. We avoid exploitative uses of money such as lending at interest or owning rental property.

Publishers of Truth think a trade is for bread and service is free. We are not professional do-gooders; we do not occupy institutional slots or hang titles on our names; we are not climbing a career ladder. Only one of us (a woman as it happens) has a "full time job." We do not have fund-raisers or take contributions from non-participants. The emphasis is on readiness to respond to Christ's leading; we are under no authority but his. Publishers drop everything and travel on short notice and receive funds or child-care help from other members when needed.

Sexual oppression (I am speaking of how we live, not of the use of an approved vocabulary) simply does not exist in this community. My husband has done the larger share of our cooking, cleaning, and laundry since we married — not because we made a point of it but just because it worked out that way. I have tended to earn a bit more money than he — not that it matters who makes more money where all resources are at the service of a common purpose. In community decision-making we seek the word that is from Christ. It's my impression that this word comes through a woman at least as often as through a man, and I know, as a matter of everyday experience, that women's leadings are taken every bit as seriously as men's.

Publishers of Truth are not snowed by the great network of institutions that dominates civilization. We don't rely on them for our security, health, or fulfillment, nor share their illusion that they own the earth. We don't patronize their priests — the lawyers, psychiatrists, etc., who make fat salaries telling people how to live. We have experienced Christ's power to heal and have dethroned the medical profession — one of society's most arrogant and sexist institutions.

I've been blowing my horn about my own group because I find it outrageous that a seminary graduate lectures me about radicalism and thinks she has George Fox on her side. When it comes to defying the powers and principalities

Publishers of Truth have no apology to make to doctrinaire liberals such as Lorena Tinker.

Where is there a Friends meeting that can make these claims? Tinker's religion is what has dominated FGC Quakerism for the past fifty years, with its mystical, impersonal Light or Spirit divorced from prophetic history and especially from the messianic claims of Jesus of Nazareth. The addition of feminism has not changed its nature; it is just an example of this religion's tendency to follow the trends of the larger society. Where is there any power in this to remedy the helplessness of isolated lives and nuclear families caught in the current?

What Friends meeting has real solidarity? Corporate testimonies not just minuted but practiced by the whole body? Economic sharing that goes beyond "contributions"? Disengagement from violence on all levels? Freedom from professionalism, careerism, and the worship of the dominant powers in modern society, such as technology, bureaucracy, and psychologism? Independence from middle-class guarantees of security? Equality of women and men that is lived and not just talked about?

I searched in vain for this kind of community life during the five years I was a Quaker. Lorena Tinker writes, "Many women, even those married to 'good Quaker men,' raise saliently the inequities of their condition compared to those of their husbands." By her own admission then, "good Quaker men" dominate their wives. And I believe it. But Publishers of Truth men do *not* dominate their wives. We must have something going for us.

What we have going for us is what I tried to explain in my paper, and I think, despite Tinker, that I did so in reasonably plain English. (At least I didn't use the religious clichés she imputes to me, like "original sin" and "accept Jesus Christ as saviour.") This brings us to the heart of the issue between me and Tinker, which, though it may surprise her, is not about words at all.

The heart of the issue is a flesh-and-blood historical person whose name in his own language was Yeshua han-Notzri and whose personality and aims are almost totally unfamiliar to

most people today, the more so if they have learned a caricature of him from the apostate "Judaean-Christian tradition." This man claimed to be establishing a new political reality on earth in which captives of all sorts would be freed and oppression brought to judgment and people would treat one another with love and justice. He was sufficiently threatening to the powers of his time that they executed him as a revolutionary. Now, did he get up out of the grave, as his friends insisted? Is he still alive and talking? Does he have the same mission, and is he able to complete it? Does he regard the institutional religions that use his name as a travesty on that mission? Is he capable of leading those who seriously want to follow him — of solidifying his organization? Does it work? Can he overcome the fear, pride, and selfishness at the root of men's oppression of women and of every kind of oppression? Can he ravish men and women with a love so totally dominant and exciting such joyful surrender that other dominance/submission relations melt away?

These are the questions that divide me from Lorena Tinker, and they are not about semantics, "models," or "analogues"; they are the most practical of questions. No group can function coherently for long without leadership. Publishers of Truth get ours from the risen Messiah, whom we find to be an effective leader and to be doing among us the kind of things he came to do. And yes, we are in love with him. Tinker calls this "beyond belief"; she might less presumptuously have said it is beyond her experience. Not everyone would think the two things equivalent.

A few historical points should briefly be mentioned. First, there is a vast difference — morally, politically, and doctrinally — between prophetic Christianity and standard-brand Protestantism or Catholicism and no informed basis for confounding them. Tinker's grotesque allusion to Billy Graham, as well as the evangelical jargon she has introduced into her "logical" arrangement of my thesis, shows that she has completely failed to make the distinction. This distinction has been sufficiently discussed in my paper and should be familiar enough to readers of a journal that has printed, *e.g.*, Rob Tucker's "Revolutionary Faithfulness" and the double issue on

"Christ as Prophet," that it does not need re-explaining. My point about it here is that between the first and the present centuries we find only one community gathered to the prophetic Christian gospel: the early Quakers. This is the only historic, post-apostolic society that Publishers of Truth have identified with — a community which flatly repudiated all the institutions of Christendom as sixteen centuries of apostasy. So Tinker's "millenniums of patriarchal societies" are not chargeable to them or us.

Second, the notions, that Fox's revolutionary gospel was simply "that of God in every human being" and that he taught a "universal Christ" distinct from the Jesus of history, are such tired and such thoroughly discredited myths that it is embarrassing to see them in print at this date. Most *QRT* readers will be familiar with some of the published evidence on these points¹ — but one need only read any volume of Fox's own writings.

Third, the emancipation of early Quaker women, which was truly remarkable in its setting, was rooted in the same unique prophetic Christian gospel that underlay the many other radical features of this movement. In particular it was rooted in the experience of a liberating Messiah who ended, by fulfilling in himself, a whole range of human dominance relations including that of male over female and who was personally known as husband by all his disciples. This is not the concept that Lorena Tinker learned from her teacher-nuns in Corpus Christi, Texas; for Quakers marriage to Christ was not limited to celibates nor was it mediated through an ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Publishers of Truth don't go to seminaries, but we do believe in doing our homework when we tackle a historical question. That early Quakers saw both the earthly woman and the man as belonging to the female part of the marriage union with Christ is the point to which I devoted the greatest space, with documentation from seven volumes of Fox's works and several other seventeenth-century sources. Tinker claims I have misrepresented Fox in this, and she offers by way of evidence her "considered judgment." Frankly, I can't tell that Tinker has even read Fox. Perhaps she feels this unnecessary

in view of her confidence that "if Fox were alive today" he would believe exactly as she does.

In her attempt to identify with the founder of Quakerism, Lorena Tinker ignores Fox's own self-understanding and holds it a "disservice" when I take him seriously. Also, she saddles him with concepts foreign to his thinking. She is driven to distort history in this way because the real dynamic behind the early Quaker phenomenon is totally unfamiliar to her, so much so that, when a contemporary reports it as a matter of living experience, Tinker can only label the account "incredible." In all this she is completely typical of modern Quakerism, which is why those who seriously desire to lay hold upon the source of moral strength and community that empowered the first Friends are having to start over from scratch.

In these concluding paragraphs I want to address those who seek more than modern Quakerism has to offer, who are not content to remain in the helpless chorus of domesticated, insured, secured, government-inspected, credit-card-carrying, hymn-singing liberals, desperately scrounging for a scrap of freedom by changing the words of the hymns. I would like to extend a serious invitation to join the messianic revolution.

Christ is alive! And he is out to take over. He means to have the whole creation, to remold it in every detail according to his will, and to utterly destroy whatever stands in his way. He is kindling a fire in the earth ahead of him; governments and war machines, banks, estates and corporations, courts and prisons, degrees and professions, "churches" and meetinghouses, programs and committees are all for its flames — and it will be hard for those who put their trust in such things.

He will make wars to cease all over the earth, and no one will hurt or oppress another, and no one will be in need. Men will be truly gentle without being the less strong, and women will be truly strong without being the less gentle. Death will be no more and all infirmities will be healed and all tears wiped away. Best of all is that he will have his way and be satisfied.

You who long for a world where human beings can live the life they were created for — you don't *want* to go

through life calculating the risks of every decision, choosing "lesser evils," hedging your bets on every side with doctors, lawyers, and statisticians. You do it because you think you have to, because the world you see around you is a howling wilderness of powers — boasting, wrangling, climbing on one another's backs — and you think that's just the way it is. So you hook up with one power or another and try to squeeze a little good out of it, and you try not to think too much of what it's doing to you, still less of what maintains it in existence.

The good news is that the Liberator has come and he is stronger than all those powers together. He is setting up a whole new order of things, and anyone who chooses to can enlist in it now. Your complicity with the powers has become so tangled as to be crippling? — never mind, he can untangle it. He is not a dreamy idealist; he is a solid person, with an eye to the practical and concrete. He has a community of people living in this new order now.

1. Tinker is echoing the popular residue of Rufus Jones's mystical interpretation, which, as Vail Palmer has written, "is simply to display one's ignorance of the past forty years of scholarly study of Quaker origins," *Quaker Religious Thought*, Vol. 12, no. 3 (Summer 1970), p. 25. The definitive studies are still Lewis Benson's (see Note 1 of "Christ's Wife," this issue); for a recent well-footnoted examination of the same topic see Daniel E. Bassuk, "Rufus Jones and Mysticism," *Quaker Religious Thought*, Vol. 17, no. 4 (Summer 1978).