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Front Matter -- Quaker Religious Thought, nos. 116-117

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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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December 2011

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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 application of our faith.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Having edited *Quaker Religious Thought* over eleven or more years, it is time to pass the editorship along to another, and I am delighted that Howard Macy will succeed me as editor! This proposal was accepted at our Quaker Theological Discussion Group brief business meeting, held between our two sessions in San Francisco three weeks ago, and I am very excited about the gifts and insight that Howard will bring to the position. He is well known to the readers of *Quaker Religious Thought*, having contributed a half-dozen times since the 1970s, and he has been an active participant and leader in the Quaker Theological Discussion Group even prior to that. Having served on the *Quaker Religious Thought* Advisory Committee for over two decades, a bit more about his background and contribution is worthy of consideration.

Howard R. Macy received his Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Literature from Harvard University, and his undergraduate and graduate degrees are from George Fox University and the Earlham School of Religion, respectively. Author of *Rhythms of the Inner Life*, *Laughing Pilgrims*, and *Stepping in the Light*, Howard is also co-editor of *Truth's Bright Embrace*, and he has written a regular column for *Quaker Life* for more than two decades. He also has served as Associate Editor of *Quaker Religious Thought*, and before that, of *Evangelical Friend*, so to say that he knows well the publishing world of Friends is a gross understatement! Before coming to serve at George Fox twenty-one years ago, Howard taught at Friends University and Earlham College, and before that served in ministry capacities in Northwest, Indiana, and New England Yearly Meetings. Having been honored by George Fox University with *Professor Emeritus* status upon his retirement earlier this year, Howard has not seen the next chapter of his life as a chance to just kick back and take it easy, although we hope he does at least some of that. Rather, he continues to sense a calling to further the ministries of Friends, in service to Christ, and we are delighted that one of the key ways he will do so involves furthering the work of *Quaker Religious Thought*. So, thanks, Howard, and welcome to the editorial helm with the next issue!

Now, about the present issue, which features a number of thought-provoking pieces. Leading off, the essay by Cherice Bock tackles a text that perhaps has had greater influence on western political history

than just about any other, save the Magna Carta and the American Constitution. As the primary Christian basis for a doctrine of the divine right of kings, Romans 13:1-7 has been taken (wrongly) to bolster the unquestioned authority of magistrates, legitimating the subjugation of dissidence and the repression of all forms of even principled opposition. While the Apostle Paul based his support of authorities on a combination of conventional Greco-Roman and scriptural Jewish understandings of God's role in establishing order by means of human agencies, this is a secondary point emphasizing a more central one. In Bock's revision of her Princeton Theological Seminary graduate thesis, she effectively shows that Paul's main thrust in the larger passage (Romans 12-13) is to call for a radical Christian witness of love, seeking to win "enemies" over to the gospel by returning good for evil and love for mistreatment. It is in the service of Christian loving witness that respect for authorities is called for, not as a legitimator of structural evil or a call for non-thinking obedience to authorities against conscience. Therefore, this text invites a loving witness to the powers that be, in hopes of transforming them with the gospel of love and peace, rather than advocating blind submission.

Jon Kershner carries the theme of loving witness further as he walks us into a geo-spatial reflection on the "motion of love" in the *Journal* of John Woolman. Emerging out of Jon's doctoral work with Ben Pink Dandelion, Kershner poses a new lens for reading Woolman's *Journal* as a record of the Spirit's leadings in his life, featured most notably in his traveling ministry. Here we are helped to see something of the fruitful interplay between Woolman's challenging of political violence and economic injustice as a prophetic concern, leading him to speak out against that which should be seen as universal righteousness. Noting that most of the *Journal* covers reflections upon Woolman's traveling ministry, connections are made between inward spiritual "motions" and outward traveling movement. Part of what impresses me also is the central feature of love as the basis for the Spirit's leadings in Woolman's life and ministry. In 1996, when Chuck Fager arranged for me to see the original copy of Woolman's *Journal* in the Swarthmore Friends Collection archives, I noted that on the first page the author had later inserted "of love" to his description of the motion that had moved him to record his reflections on his pilgrimage. Attending the divine motion of love within may indeed lead to prophetic (com)motion without.

Guy Aiken then treats us to a thoughtful analysis of Rufus Jones and his place within the history of North American Friends in the

20th century. Arguing that some of the most problematic features of his contribution involved an optimistic (and somewhat naïve) anthropology alongside an inadequate (subordinationist) Christology, Aiken's thesis is worth taking seriously as we reflect on the trajectory of liberal Quakerism Jones influenced so powerfully. While Jones's academic credentials and popular appeal were unprecedented in the American Quaker movement of the previous century, his teaching that the light within is native to human nature not only departs from the "inward light" understanding of Fox and Barclay; it also neglects the central thrust of the biblical basis for the doctrine, John 1:9, where the emphasis is upon the *light of Christ* that enlightens all persons, at least potentially. One can understand, thereby, how the endeavors of Jones to reunite Orthodox and Hicksite Friends, while at the same time siding with liberal modernism, did so at the expense of evangelical Friends beyond the northeast corridor. And yet, Jones was a committed Christian and an evangelist for mystical religion as embraced among Friends, and Aiken's work helps us appreciate the complexity of this powerful Friend's contribution in the previous century and beyond.

In addition to publishing several excellent unsolicited essays, I invited essays from long-time contributors to *Quaker Religious Thought*, Ruth Pitman and John Punshon. Having heard Ruth share from time to time about her consternation over the reunification of the five divided Hicksite and Orthodox yearly meetings, I invited her to expand on her observations and concerns. Indeed, she has done so with penetrating insight and poignant care. With a keen, critical mind that is as sharp as ever, Ruth Pitman shares from first-hand experience with a wide spectrum of American Friends how she sees the essence of Quakerism being reflected and also threatened from various angles. John Punshon then treats us to some of his reflections on Friends witness to the rest of the Christian movement from within the household of faith—what ecumenism furthers. Again, the importance is to get Friends history, and theology, right. If Friends welcome the Light of Christ as reflected in other faith traditions, can't we do so among our Christian sisters and brothers? As we rethink Fox's rhetoric of apostasy, perhaps we can embrace also his more generous valuations of other forms of Christian faithfulness, despite alternative packaging. Punshon here reminds us that thinking about faith is key—hence, the need for doing Quaker theology, and even more importantly, the need for doing it well.

Richard Taylor walks us into an appreciation for the integration of science and religion, learned at the feet of master-teacher, Ted Benfey. What we learn from this essay in gratitude is to appreciate the critical quest for truth, which comes to us via scientific method but also theological reflection. Just as the scientist weighs evidence seeking to ascertain the truth about a subject, so students of religion seek to understand the truth of the human-divine relationship as well as desiring to discern God's saving-revealing work within human history. Rather than be swayed by false dichotomies, seeking either to prove or counter a religious tenet—or even the existence of God—Taylor reminds us that the map is not the territory. Therefore, the subject of our faith-thinking, God, should not be blamed for or credited with the foibles or glories of our limited understandings. We do as well as we can, but we also appreciate humbly the limitations of our best attempts to contemplate the divine. One thing Quakers may yet contribute to the scientific study of religion is the value of what Sir John Templeton referred to as “the humble approach.” In reluctance to say more than we can experientially affirm, perhaps we can also refrain from eschewing what we cannot experientially disconfirm. We are thus free to be genuinely open, both to God, and the ways God addresses and is understood by humans.

Finally, Wess Daniels reviews two very important and timely books on Friends, slavery, racism, and social justice—must-reads for any interested in social justice and Quaker history. And, the letter to the editor sets a few things straight that should have been picked up by the editor in the previous issue (my apologies!) and more importantly clarifies the value of seeing our calling as Friends as walking cheerfully over “the world”—challenging its ways and operations, not simply “the earth”—as though we were called to a travelogue. The care and thoughtfulness of Friend Edminster are greatly appreciated!

As I reflect on my years of editing issues 95-117 of *Quaker Religious Thought*, the scope of issues and the quality of their treatment is genuinely impressive. As a continuing resource, several topics deserve consideration for further discussion—in meetings or study groups—as they are of enduring value, and I might encourage individuals and groups to make use of any and all of the back issues as they find serviceable. Here are topics covered over the last decade or so:

- On the historical Jesus, see Issues 94 and 98
- On the leadership roles of Quaker women, see Issues 95, 96, 97, 99-100
- On the uses of Scripture by early Friends, see Issue 97
- On interpretations of Quaker history, see Issues 99-100, 102, 106-107, 108, 110, 113, 115
- On discussions of truth, see Issues 101, 102, 108
- On discussions of peace and nonviolence, see Issues 101, 108, 110
- On social justice (MLK, Woolman, etc.), see Issues 101, 103, 104, 113, 114, 115
- On cross-cultural Quaker outreach, see Issue 104
- On Friends Testimonies, see Issues 105, 106
- On consensus decision-making, see Issues 106-107, 112
- On the sacraments, see Issue 109
- On discussions of former issues of QRT, see Issues 105, 111
- On a Quaker theology of education, see Issue 112
- On Quakers and Levinas, see Issues 13, 14, 15
- On Quaker spirituality, see Issues 102, 115

Again, I am deeply grateful for the privilege of serving Friends in seeking to bolster and further theological discussion within the Quaker movement and beyond it. I am especially grateful to Phil Smith for doing so well at getting the issues mailed and keeping the subscriptions up to date, to the members of the Advisory Committee and the Associate Editors for their guidance and helpfulness along the way, to the participants in the Quaker Theological Discussion Group and the authors of the essays in *QRT*: *they* have made the journal the fine piece it is, and finally to our subscribers—individual and institutional—who have kept the journal going and have made it available to a broad international readership. It has been a pleasure to serve, and my hope is that the truth will prosper under the new editor's care.

Happy reading, reflecting, and discussing!

—Paul Anderson

Editor