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Front Matter -- Quaker Religious Thought, no. 114

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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

A Friendly Apology for the 21st Century

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Cumulative No. 114
April 2010

QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Cumulative Number 114

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Sponsored by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group

(<http://theo-discuss.quaker.org/>)

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

This issue features two papers by David Johns and myself, presented at the Barnesville QTDG meetings last June addressing the topic, “A Friendly Apology for the 21st Century.” As Robert Barclay’s masterpiece outlined a constellation of Quaker convictions for the intelligentsia of Europe to consider theologically a quarter century after the movement began, the question for Friends now is: “What sort of message are we prepared to declare to the world today?” That is a topic worth thinking about in every generation, and at the beginning of a new century and millennium, as well as a third of a millennium (as Stephen Angell points out) after Barclay’s original *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, that venture is a timely one, indeed!

Johns and I, however, approach the issue in rather different ways. Johns questions whether a Quaker apology is possible on behalf of Friends today because of the huge diversity among us. His question is well taken. Who speaks for Friends in the world today, let alone in North America? A second question follows: who is the audience needing to be addressed, given that we live in not only a post-denominational era, but a largely post-Christian one? Johns offers some important ways forward, even if Barclay’s project seems out of sorts with today’s situation and need. My approach, however, is to stay with Barclay’s general outline and to ask how many of the Scriptures he cites might be relevant in today’s world. That being the case, I argue an apology for “authentic spirituality,” rather than “the true Christian divinity,” as the former seems of greater and broader interest for today’s audiences.

These papers are responded to by Arthur Roberts and Stephen Angell in what becomes a lively and fruitful exchange; David and I may want to respond to these responses in the next issue of *QRT*, as the issues raised are significant ones. The other two responses in this issue engage the essays of Corey Beals and Jeffrey Dudiak on Levinas and the Quakers, appearing in *QRT* #113. They are contributed by Rachel Muers, an emerging British Quaker theologian, and Richard Wood, a leading Quaker philosopher, educator, and cross-cultural leader in America and Japan. Responses by Beals and Dudiak may also be serviceable, so keep your eyes open for *QRT* #115 this fall, as well!

I want to say a big THANK YOU to Susan Jeffers for developing and maintaining our website over the last several years; she will continue

on the Advisory Committee, but the managing of the website will be assumed by Wess Daniels, to whom we are also grateful! Wess blogs and writes a good deal about Quaker interests and concerns, and he is pursuing a Ph.D. in theology at Fuller Theological Seminary while also serving as pastor of Camas Friends Church in Washington state. So, thanks, Wess and Susan for your helpfulness, and to so many others, who keep the venture of Quaker theological discussion and thought a lively interest and pursuit!

— *Paul Anderson*

Post Script: Several months ago we learned the sad news that Ted Perkins, the former Business Manager of *Quaker Religious Thought*, had passed away. I appreciate Arthur Roberts' preparing this brief statement of appreciation for Ted Perkins in memoriam.

IN MEMORIAM: THEODORE PERKINS (1917-2010)

Theodore (Ted) Perkins, a North Carolina Friend, passed away January 14, 2010, at the age of 93. From 1987 until 1997 Ted served as business manager for *Quaker Religious Thought*, faithfully attending to details of publishing, subscriptions and mailing. A recorded Friends minister, he had a varied ministry—librarian, teacher, and pastor of several North Carolina meetings. His autobiography, *This I Remember*, tells the rich story of his life; our condolences are extended to his wife Eugenia and the rest of the family. The March-April, 2010 issue of *Quaker Life* carries a more extensive account of his life and ministry.

In deep appreciation,

—*Arthur Roberts*