

1-1-2008

Front Matter – Quaker Religious Thought, no. 111

Paul Anderson

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Anderson, Paul (2008) "Front Matter – Quaker Religious Thought, no. 111," *Quaker Religious Thought*. Vol. 111 , Article 1.

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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Celebrating 50 Years of *Quaker Religious Thought*
and the Quaker Theological Discussion Group!

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Cumulative No. 111
December 2008

QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Cumulative Number 111

December, 2008

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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Quaker Religious Thought is published two times each year; the Volume numbers were discontinued after Vol. 30 in 2002, continuing with the issue # system only since 2003, beginning with #s 99 & 100.

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Quaker Religious Thought

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Subscription rates:

Individuals/meetings — per year \$16, two years \$30

Students — per year \$12; Institutional libraries — per year \$20

Lifetime subscription \$300-500

European distribution:

Friends Book Centre

Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ, England

International Standard Serial Number 0033-5088

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue of *Quaker Religious Thought* celebrates the journal's 50 years of contribution among Friends and to the larger worlds of theological and religious thought. As such, the goal of *QRT* has been to provide a vehicle of sustained theological reflection among Friends of all persuasions, seeking to address issues of long-term and timely interest from a Quaker point of view. Within this purview, the contribution of Quaker Theological Discussion Group as a means of gathering Friends for the conducting open theological discussion is also important. Whether leading the way as a venue for discussion resulting in publication, or whether the journal has functioned to stimulate discussion within gathered meetings, the relation between the two venues also deserves attention. In reflecting on "the rise and progress" of *QRT* and QTDDG over the last five decades, the musings of movers and shakers (or, should that be movers and Quakers?) within both ventures are featured directly in this issue.

It would be a mistake, however, to imply that the goal of *QRT* and QTDDG has been the mere discussion of issues and beliefs among Friends; the mission of these ventures has been, from their inception, the hope of spiritual renewal within the Quaker movement and beyond. In that sense, the journal and the discussion group exemplify one of the hallmarks of Quaker conviction: one's theory is as good as the practice it evokes. Likewise, discussion and action go hand in hand, although the best of activism is always rooted in discerning reflection.

Unfortunately, with the passing of time, input from several leaders in the theological constellation of leading Friends is no longer available. Most recently, two editors of *Quaker Religious Thought* have passed away, requiring others to comment on the highlights of the issues they edited. Therefore, we are greatly indebted to Ruth Pitman, who reviewed the issues edited by Calvin Keene (d. 2003), and to Vail Palmer, who reviewed the issues edited by Dean Freiday (d. 2008). In addition to following Vail's editorship, Dean co-edited volumes 47-54 with Vail, so their teamwork continues into this issue. Ironically, I'd been trying for over two years to get Dean Freiday to contribute an essay on the issues of *QRT* he edited, but alas to no avail. After my first request, Dean questioned having the energy to complete the assignment. When I then welcomed a shorter treatment, he exclaimed, "How can a person summarize the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 4-6

pages?” I’m sure he would have been able to do that, and more. Less than a year later Dean was hospitalized by an illness from which he would never recover; he would have relished this issue! Sadly, Wilmer Cooper also just passed away in November, and while he never edited *QRT*, he served as the first chairman of QTDG, and his leadership among Friends in terms of generating intra-Quaker dialogue and theological education is pivotal and historic; I have thus added a tribute to Wil at the end of this issue.

Our issue fittingly leads off with a treatment of the original vision and developments of *QRT* and QTDG by Wilmer Cooper, submitted earlier this year. Wil’s gathering the support needed to found and establish the Earlham School of Religion (1960) was of paramount importance in the creation of a theological nexus among North American Friends and beyond. Wil’s own contribution to theological reflection and dialogue among Friends over the last half century deserves its own treatment, but the symbiotic history of the rise and progress of QTDG and other institutions Wil Cooper has supported is impressive indeed! Kate Newlin then expands on the beginning histories of QTDG and *QRT*, providing a glimpse of the hopes and challenges of getting these venues going aided by reports and documents in the Earlham archives. Concerns expressed in correspondence, as well as a fair assessment of particular developments and their challenges, provide a helpful basis for appreciating the impressive transition from a hope for dialogue to becoming the leading venue for Quaker theological discussion and the leading Quaker theological journal.

Doug Gwyn fills in some of the story as to the continuing development of Quaker Theological Discussion Group and its pattern of meeting in conjunction with the Friends Association of Higher Education and the Friends Historical Association. My essay covers the move to annual meetings in different parts of the country, after several years of inactivity. For the last ten years, QTDG has met in conjunction with the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature meetings, as well as holding two residential meetings; the essays and reviews in *QRT* over the last decade feature the papers presented at those meetings primarily. Hugh Barbour then provides an analysis of the historic contribution QTDG and *QRT* have made to Quakerism over the last half century. While recent history is far more difficult to assess properly, in contrast to those events that have withstood the test of time, Barbour performs a valuable service. He combines a sense of the original vision and its

developments, while at the same time pointing the way forward to larger issues needing to be addressed. In doing so, he raises our sights beyond an interest in recovering the highlights of a rich Quaker past and levies a challenge to address the pressing theological issues of the present and the future. And, as I think about it, that's not a bad way to do Quaker theology!

The second part of this issue invites the editors of *QRT* and a couple of others to comment on highlights from the issues they edited. This idea came to me after Shane Kirkpatrick and Susan Jeffers so ably reviewed the first 100 issues of *QRT* in issue #105. As Arthur Roberts and Dean Freiday (among others) expressed their appreciation for the reviews—reminding later audiences of good material worth revisiting—the idea of inviting the editors to do the same was received warmly. As mentioned above, appreciation is extended to Ruth Pitman and Vail Palmer for their willingness to review issues 1-10 and 55-71, given the loss of Calvin Keene and Dean Freiday. The other issues are covered by the editors themselves: T. Canby Jones (#s 11-20), Chris Downing (#s 21-38), Vail Palmer (#s 39-54), Arthur Roberts (#s 72-94), and myself (#s 94-111).

As I reflect upon the contents of all 111 issues of *QRT*, I am impressed with the synergy between the distinctive contributions of the editors and the particular needs of the audiences. Under Calvin Keene's leadership (1959-63) a set of solid Quaker approaches to classic Christian doctrines is developed, seeking to provide a common theological basis for Quaker faith and practice. To a considerable degree, this was achieved in the early issues. Under Canby Jones' leadership (1964-68) the mining of early Quaker writings as a basis for Quaker renewal in later generations made significant advances, including the addressing of several Friends Testimonies, as well. Under Christine Downing's leadership (1969-74) one can see the broadening of issues engaged to include contemporary issues in Christian theology, posing Quaker responses to relevant and pressing subjects. Under the leadership of Vail Palmer and Dean Freiday (1974-1989) these sets of interests continue to be developed, including the addressing of historical, practical, and ecumenical concerns as engaged theologically. Under the leadership of Arthur Roberts (1989-2000) a broadening of perspectives can be seen—including universalist and evangelical perspectives, and also including the poles of spiritual renewal and social concern. During my service (2000-present) a variety of important theological issues are addressed from a Quaker perspective, and we

see the emergence of regular book reviews focusing on a particularly important Quaker theological book for that year.

As we prepare for a residential QTDG meeting held again in Barnesville, Ohio (June 22-24, 2009), our hope is to address three important themes and to provide an open session or two. These themes include “The Future of Quakerism,” “A Friendly Apology for the 21st Century,” and “Quakers and Levinas.” We will also feature a special session on “The Rise and Progress of *QRT* and QTDG,” drawing upon *QRT* #111 as a resource. All are welcome to attend, and proposals for the open session, or on any of these topics, should be submitted before March 1. The details on both conferences are listed below; meantime, happy reading, engaging, *and* discussing!

In service to the truth,

— Paul Anderson

Quaker Theological Discussion Group

Olney Friends School

Barnesville, Ohio

June 22-24, 2009

Sessions:

- 1 The Future of Quakerism
- 2 A Friendly Apology for the 21st Century
- 3 Quakers and Levinas
- 4 Open Session and Call for Paper