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HIGHLIGHTS OF *QRT* #S 72-94 (1989-2000)

ARTHUR O. ROBERTS

To follow-up on the review of the first hundred issues of *Quaker Religious Thought* (#105) Paul Anderson asked for input about “really significant” essays in *QRT* during my editorship. It’s a bit like asking a parent to choose a favorite child! But I’ll give it a try! (Quantitatively, I deem it significant that sixty-two different individuals contributed to Issues #72-94.)

In the Issue #105 review, Susan Jeffers finds constancy in regard to *QRT*’s statement of purpose, i.e., exploring the meaning and implications of Quaker faith. This FGC Friend, “who claims Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,” longs “for Friends to listen anew for what God would have of us in the world today.” Susan asserts that the “content and application of our faith” were addressed. I concur, and add that *QRT* has reflected a concern for clarity and integrity in theological language. During my editorship, significant topics included the faith covenant, creation, mission, and spirituality. I’ll address these briefly.

I. COVENANT OF FAITH

Mary Moehlman affirms the “universal and saving light of Christ” as basic to Quaker religious thought. She refutes the notion that universalism and Christianity are opposed: God’s transforming presence in the world is what the Incarnation is about! She writes, “We must consistently say to each other that we cannot be truly Quaker and not be universalist...you cannot be truly Quaker and reject Christianity... there is no unity (and no tradition) in any other definition.” (#72, pp. 12-13) In issue #80 Lucy Davenport asserts that George Fox and Robert Barclay nuanced “the Light” differently: Fox stressing the covenant community, Barclay communion with God. In #91 Hugh Pyper discusses philosophical problems and social implications arising from Barclay’s efforts to affirm *both* the universal and the particular. This tension had been illustrated in #77, as Daniel Seeger narrates how some Quakers would accommodate goddess religions on the

basis of the Inward Light. Emphasizing the Light Incarnate, however, Lauren King makes a logical case for Jesus' bodily resurrection (#84), defending it against Ronald Blackburn's "visionary appearance" view (#86). Paul Anderson draws together factual and existential aspects of the resurrection, noting that "because Christ is alive, the life of faith is a dynamic reality instead of a static one" (#84, p. 43). Earl Grant succinctly states *his* stance: he's a pluralist when it comes to the human race, a loyalist when it comes to Jesus Christ (#91, pp. 36-37). In these issues and others, the Covenant of Faith is featured and addressed from a variety of helpful standpoints.

2. CREATION

In issue #74 Gerald Wilson, Ruth Pitman, Virginia Schurman, and Dean Freiday present a variety of views of creation. Wilson clarifies the Biblical meaning of "dominion." He writes, "as God's 'image' humanity should understand its own relation to creation in the same light as the Creator's. Creation is *not* for human benefit. Rather, humanity as God's regent is responsible to extend the divine authority to the *whole* cosmos in such a manner that *all* creation experiences the divine glory and is inspired (as a result) to sing his praises!" (p. 19) Pitman chides Wilson for catering to feminism by substituting "humanity" for the more generic "man," but affirms his correction of the often misinterpreted term "dominion." She asserts forthrightly, "Man must now stop his arrogant abuse of creation and environment." (p. 23) Schurman summarizes George Fox's "openings" about the creation and its creatures: "Christ, as the Word of Wisdom, restores dominion by first 'recreating' the person and then teaching the recreated person how to use the creation according to the purposes for which God intended." (p. 35) Freiday cautions, "While creation has integrity, it is not an alternate object of worship.... One needs the mind of God, the plan of God, the values Christ preached and lived to arrive at any adequate theological basis for managing or guarding God's handiwork." (p. 44) Therefore, creation and its care has been an important theme dealt with in these issues of *QRT*.

3. MISSION

In Issue #78, David L. Johns, Robert Hess, T. Canby Jones, Ron Stansell, and Anna Nixon discuss Everett Cattell's missionary ministry. The theology of mission Cattell expounded and practiced, according to Stansell, rested upon "the biblical triad of service, proclamation, and fellowship." (p. 35) Johns notes: "While continuing to embrace the superiority of Christian revelation, Cattell nevertheless allows for the mercy of God to address justly those who have never heard the name of Jesus." (p. 10) Jones appreciates Cattell's tenderness toward people of other cultures and his understanding that the *imago dei* is "marred but not destroyed" by sin. Writes Jones, "The Quaker position affirms that the Seed, Christ, is found in every person, no matter how much distorted...by sin. This is Cattell's position and it is distinctively Quaker." (p. 30) Issue #79 addresses cultural impacts upon mission. Daniel Smith believes contemporary, privileged Christians lack insights from the biblical exile, whereas early Quakers could resonate with today's persecuted, disenfranchised, and oppressed persons. Smith warns against taking our places "as welcomed patriotic citizens of the throne rooms of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, and the chapel of the Pentagon." (p. 17) Missiologist Harold Thomas challenges Smith's intimation that missionaries lack social awareness, detailing instances of Aymara Quakers boldly confronting corporate evil and working for justice as well as for personal conversions. Russian Quaker Boris Sudarushkin, on behalf of politically oppressed Christians, writes "like ill, hospitalized persons who need the friendly understanding of healthy persons, we need spiritual support from those Friends who are free both spiritually and politically." (p. 42) Thus, these issues of *QRT* provide a helpful window into a theology of mission from a Quaker perspective—a genuine service to this important concern.

4. SPIRITUALITY

Certain issues focused upon the spirituality of Quaker worthies, early and late. In #81 Michael Graves finds Stephen Crisp's "Long travel from Babylon to Bethel" a noteworthy example of mystical literature. Using light/dark and ascent/descent imagery, Graves writes, "Crisp has distilled the classic Christian presentation of the overall sequence of the spiritual journey: purgation, illumination, and union." (p. 19) Issue #85 features a perceptive review of Thomas Kelly. T. Canby Jones,

E. Glenn Hinson, Elaine Prevallet, Howard Macy and Richard Kelly draw insights from this twentieth century Friend. Here's Richard's summary of his father's spiritual journey: "Thomas Kelly came full circle; back to the roots of his religious heritage, tempered and honed by the historical and philosophical thinking of the twentieth century." (p. 55) How, or whether, his spiritual journey becomes a model for Quakers today remains an open question. In issue #90 Carole Spencer describes how and why the Holiness movement captivated American Quakerism. The movement resonated with Quakers, she writes, because both traditions were rooted "in the contemplative, inner life of devotion and prayer." (p. 20) This vision for Christian perfection renewed an historic Quaker dialectic of grace and works, contemplation and action, and provided "an outlet for a vibrant, activist, reforming spirituality." (p. 29) Important within these treatments of spirituality is the Quaker concern for the outward journey as well as the inward, including its social implications as well.