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## Front Matter -- Quaker Religious Thought, no. 90

Arthur O. Roberts

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**Cumulative No. 90**

**Volume 28, No. 4**

# QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Cumulative Number 90

Volume 28, No. 4

January 1998

*Sponsored by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group*

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 the application of our faith.

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

A major threat to Christian faith communities, currently, is the fragmentation of their historic witness. Especially in America and Europe Christian churches face enormous cultural pressure to loosen the covenantal ties that have bound them to Christian faithfulness and corporate accountability. This is the case for Friends, as well as for others. The lead article, “The Search for Unity in Diversity among Friends,” by Wilmer Cooper is both a keen analysis of our brokenness and a passionate and discerning plea for renewal.

The other two articles offer historical analysis and theological perspective concerning the issue of Quaker identity at the end of the millennium. Carole Spencer poses, and answers, the question, “Why did the American Holiness Movement captivate nineteenth-century Quakers?” In so doing she offers a new look at the role of mysticism in that historic shift of Friends’ focus, with some evocative insights.

David Johns’s article, “Ritual Management of Presence and Absence: The Liturgical Significance of Silence,” probes the theological basis for rituals, high or low. The Quaker claim to be “ritual free” is challenged, not to diminish Quaker testimony about worship but to clarify its meaning.

The theme of worship has been a debated (argued?) topic on Quaker Internet chat groups recently. We think these three articles will instruct and probe, and offer new directions for both faith and practice.

Even Apostle Paul had to defend himself on occasion. So Dean Freiday has weighty precedent for a short but adroit defense of his *Barclay’s Apology in Modern English* as a definite edition. Freiday’s book has become a standard reference for many scholars, the definitive edition. Dean will be pleased to discover that in her essay Carole Spencer cites this version, a practice we hope others routinely follow.

—Arthur O. Roberts  
Editor