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Reviews

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Reviews

THE QUAKERS AS TYPE OF THE SPIRIT-CENTERED COMMUNITY, by William P. Roberts. Catholic and Quaker Studies, 1110 Wildwood Ave., Mansquan, N. J. 181 pp., \$6.00, paperback.

What may prove to be a major event in Quaker publication and should be of much interest to the readers of this periodical is the appearance of the first of what is intended to be a series of publications designated "Catholic and Quaker Studies." The committee undertaking this task consists of the author of the work here being reviewed, a Jesuit who prepared it as a doctoral dissertation at Marquette University, two other Catholic scholars and three Quakers, namely, Maurice Creasey, Lewis Benson, and Dean Freiday.

Roberts declares that his purposes in writing this thesis are two. Since one of the aims expressed in the recent Vatican Council meetings was that Catholics should study the thought and practices of non-Catholic Christian communities, he intends to do just that by showing that "Quakers are in a striking way truly representative of the Spirit-centered community." Secondly, he exhibits "important parallels" between Catholicism and some of the thought and practices of Friends.

In criticizing the work I wish, first, to recognize the spirit of outreach and cooperation in which it is written and the genuine effort which its author put forth to understand and appreciate Quakerism. Such a work by a Catholic thinker would have been quite impossible a score or less of years ago! It is not "objective," in the sense of being non-partisan, for it is of course written from the Roman Catholic viewpoint. As a doctoral thesis it has its limitations. It is praiseworthy for what it has accomplished; it is of considerable value as an introduction to Quaker history, teaching, principles and practices, especially for those unfamiliar with the Society of Friends. Yet from a Quaker standpoint it contains partial understandings at certain places. I will mention some points of negative criticism below and end with a general observation.

A. The only primary materials on early Quakerism used by Roberts are those taken from Fox and Barclay, the latter's *Apology* in an old, undated edition which should have been

replaced by the fresh, excellent edition of Dean Freiday. Barclay is himself treated as a Quaker authority, which of course he is not. A quotation almost unknown in Quaker circles, taken from his *The Anarchy of the Ranters*, is presented to show that Quakers, like Catholics, believe the church (meeting) to have authority to pronounce judgments which are obligatory on all its members.

B. The first chapter presents a sketch of the so-called "radical Reformation" and describes in some detail the Anabaptists as a main branch of that movement. The supposition to be made is that in doing this Roberts intends to demonstrate that Quakerism arose from this side of the Reformation and from the Anabaptist movement. Unhappily, however, he fails to trace the actual relationship! Fox himself is presented as a seeker receiving "important insights" from time to time, which jell into a unified pattern at Pendle Hill. I feel this to be an unconvincing explanation of the origins of a great movement, especially because the connections between Fox's own experiences and thought and the radical Reformation, Anabaptists, and radical Puritanism are not provided.

C. The second chapter, which attempts to establish parallels between Catholic and Quaker ideas, I find of slight value to the thesis. If one were to ask some Friends what parallels they would find, the answer might well be given in terms of Catholic mysticism, especially that of the Middle Ages. Rather oddly, since Roberts is discussing the "Spirit-centered community," he seems to find no similarity at this point, for he does not once mention such! Instead he refers to the Canonists and the Conciliarists as providing parallels, not primarily of the Spirit-centeredness of all three but, rather, of their views of church government! This appears to be a strange point at which to find the supposed parallelism! Even on this matter the differences are greater than the similarities.

D. Roberts makes the statement that George Fox is "not a theologian," and goes on to state that Fox "possesses the gift of the Spirit but is an unlettered man whose approach to theology is disorganized and unscientific" (p. 42). It is true that Fox does not, like Barclay, "treat specific doctrinal topics at great length, nor in orderly sequence." Yet, leaving aside the question of what Roberts might mean by "scientific" theology, we must disagree with his judgment on Fox if he means by it that Fox lacked a consistent body of religious understanding. It can be said with validity that Fox was not a theologian in the same sense that Jesus and Paul were not theologians!

E. Roberts discusses views of Quakerism held by modern Friends. As one recalls the lack of agreement on what constitutes Quakerism among contemporary Quakers he may well ask whether any generalizations are possible, without much discussion and qualification! Further, with only two exceptions, Roberts makes no reference to the important contributions made by *Quaker Religious Thought* in which our best recent religious thought is to be found, and he fails also to mention the writing of such Friends as Lewis Benson, Maurice Creasey, and Douglas Steere.

Finally, fundamental and therefore vital issues between Catholics and Quakers, as Roberts sees them, are described in a brief appendix entitled "Prospects for Christian Unity." Friends may not be surprised to discover that for Roberts the greatest sources of conflict between Catholics and Friends are those of theology and church governance. The "crucial issue," he states, is that of the Trinity — "whether the Quakers see the Father, the risen Christ and the Spirit as three distinct persons who are united as one divine being, or whether they view Christ and the Spirit as merely two different manifestations of the one divine person, the Father." "A clear answer to this problem," he continues, "is of vital importance in any serious attempt to reach mutual understanding. . . ."

A closely related problem, for Roberts, is that of the way in which the "work of Christ" is understood. He states that Catholics hold an "incarnational" view of redemption according to which the Son took on human flesh, passed into risen life, and now gives his Spirit to us, partly through the seven sacraments. Friends, he asserts, deny special sacraments and make sanctification the result of "the working of the Holy Spirit in us and our response to Him." This view, he believes, implies that there is no necessity for the risen Christ to give the Spirit to us through the sacraments. Further, Roberts indicates that Quakers hold a radically different view of the priesthood and reject both the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic church and the liturgical aspects of Catholic worship which centers in the Eucharist.

Of course Roberts is correct that these differences in belief and form exist, some of them between Catholics and all Protestants. The deeper problem between us is not explicitly stated, I think, namely that Friends believe or believed that George Fox proclaimed a new Gospel for his day which arose out of his own experiences — a new Gospel which was the original Gospel of Christ himself, a "new beginning on a new founda-

tion" as Lewis Benson recently described the situation. Fox was not primarily a moral reformer nor an ecclesiastical reformer, says Benson, although both moral and ecclesiastical reform grew out of his teaching and labor. The "revolutionary conception of Christ" held by Fox, that "Christ has come to teach his people himself," included a unique understanding of the meaning and way of "salvation," different from that of either Catholics or Protestants. Fox had delved beneath the theological "notions" and nearly dead forms to the living, spiritual root of Christianity which carries life and power.

If it is insisted, by Roberts or others, that in order for Friends to come into worthwhile discussions with Catholics they must give up those insights, experiences, and interpretations which are peculiarly their own, then it is being implied that cooperation between Catholics and Quakers is possible only as Friends surrender their genius and become, in effect, Catholics! In other words, the entire Reformation was a mistake, and Quakers with it! And if this is what Roberts is suggesting (and I am not sure it is) then the attempt to find bases of cooperation may well be abandoned.

I do not, however, believe that this needs to be said. One finds in the Catholic church today a most intense desire to penetrate below the words and forms, just as Fox wished to plunge beneath them to the real life of Christianity. I consider such contemporary theologians as E. Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, Karl Rahner and Hans von Balthasar to be examples of Catholics who in much of what they write "sound like Quakers" in their deepest insights. On their side, some Friends find it possible to experience spiritual reality in Catholic worship, including the Mass itself, and find truth for living in Catholic thought and forms. What Catholics may discover in living Quakerism was illustrated some years ago at a conference in which the famous Catholic scholar, the late John Courtney Murray, had lectured on the inner meaning of the Mass as the way to God. Asked where Quakers might find a place within his understandings of Christianity he replied, surprisingly, that the Mass and the Sacraments exist precisely to do that which Friends seek for in their silent worship! In approaches to each other such as these, which emphasize not theology and church forms as much as the movement of life within, Friends and Catholics should have much to say to each other!

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REASON, MORALITY, AND RELIGION, by Richard S. Peters (The Swarthmore Lecture). Friends Home Service Committee, London, 1972.

Awe and reason are joined in Richard Peters' response to the conflict in moral decision-making between established authority and "doing your own thing." To overcome this opposition of the "traditional" and "romantic," Peters turns to an exploration of our experience, and finds within both general moral principles — such as impartiality, respect for persons, truth-telling, and freedom — and the religious experience of awe. Emphasized and placed in wider context by religious awe, these moral principles, in being general, avoid the detailed codification of tradition, and in being principles, avoid the subjective preference of romanticism.

Peters is to be congratulated for applying philosophical acumen — suspect among many Friends — to our moral and religious experience, and finding there both reason and awe at work. To go beyond this dichotomy of objective authority and subjective preference do we not need, however, a much more radical exploration of experience than Peters' rationalism provides? Is there not an abstractness in this appeal to general moral principles which withdraws us from the concrete moral situation — wherein alone this conflict is resolved? Does not moral experience occur in man's relation to other men and to himself within the wider context of the world, and moral reflection involve man in becoming aware of himself in this inter-relatedness and in searching out the responsible act to perform? To focus on general moral principles is, however, to concern ourselves more with the accurate delineation of principles than with the search and self-awareness of persons. When we do relate to persons (others and myself) secondarily, we do so in terms of principles we hold, rather than of the full-bodied persons we are. This subordination of persons to principles is evident in Peters' claim that the "predicament of the perplexed" is less important than "the emergence of general criteria for assessing people and situations" (p. 11), and that the experience of pleasure, now or later, is less important than "how it is conceived" (p. 68).

Principles, to be sure, are a significant part of our moral experience. But we need to go beyond their general discrimination to an exploration both of the diversity of uses of principle-language in actual moral situations and of the source

of these principles in the self. To probe to the foundations of the self will be to discover not only — as Peters rightly remarks — that principles are not consciously chosen, but beyond this, that they emerge as rational patterns within varying circumstances from the whole complex web of precognitive or unconscious commitments. We would find that such tacit commitments undergird our moral living and language and orient us in a unique manner of response to persons and our world. If we can come to a better understanding of the relation of principles to the precognitive in the lived situation, we will be in a better position to go beyond the extremes of externally imposed codes and mere subjective preference; we would understand that the principles within our moral experience are not externally imposed but internally emergent, and the precognitive commitments are not mere subjective preferences but the source of these general principles.

When Peters turns to the religious underpinnings of moral experience, he considers the much more concretely personal, such as the experience of awe before the inexplicable and contingent, the experience of worship that provides a context in which to express this awe, and of love and hope that share in the joy and bear the irremediable suffering of the human predicament. But, as in Kant, the religious is here subordinated to the moral; the religious does not transform but merely emphasizes and provides wider scope for the principles of morality. In fact, the inner light is defined in terms of the Kantian principle of autonomy, the freedom to adhere to general moral principles.

We need, however, to understand religion in its own integrity. If we were to investigate how awe — the definitive religious phenomenon for Peters — comes to expression in religious language at work within concrete situations, we would see that it functions primarily in ways other than underscoring moral principles. It is not moral principles but faith — curiously absent from Peters' deliberations — that religious language fundamentally expresses. To raise the question of the use of religious language is to go to the source of our deep-lying trust or distrust in that awesome mystery that surrounds the world and founds the self, and is to consider the ongoing transforming of our lives through the use — not of concepts characteristic of Peters' discussion but — of metaphors and images, parables and stories.

A philosophical investigation will resolve the conflict between objective authority and subjective preference only if

it carries us beyond a rational morality underscored by religious awe to a phenomenology of our entire moral and religious life and language, to an exploration of how moral principles articulate precognitive commitments and how religious language expresses faith in awesome mystery.

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