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Review--Quaker Religious Thought, no. 75

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REVIEW

John Woolman: Spirituality and Social Transformation in Colonial America. Philip Laurence Boroughs. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms Int'l., 1990; 349 pp.

Reviewed by Rebecca Thomas Ankeny

John Woolman epitomizes the union between Christian spirituality and social conscience in this dissertation by Philip Laurence Boroughs, S.J., Ph.D. Boroughs came to the study of Woolman through recognizing a similarity between the relationship of spirituality to social change in Quaker history and in the Society of Jesus, described as an apostolic order of contemplatives in action. The contemporary phenomenon of liberation theology demonstrates the present relevance of Woolman's synthesis of mysticism and social activism.

Boroughs explores Woolman's life through Woolman's *Journal* and other writings, the records provided by Quaker meeting minutes, communications between Quakers about Woolman, and by comparing his *Journal* to the journals of three other Quakers of the time.

Of particular interest is the emphasis Boroughs places on Woolman's own personal and intense relationship with God through a lifetime of prayer and several mystical experiences. There is never any question for Boroughs of the authenticity of his relationship. Further, rather than drawing Woolman to increasing inwardness, this relationship fueled his sense of social responsibility.

Another challenge to us is Woolman's commitment to the religious community of Friends even while he confronted fellow Quakers who perpetuated social evils. He was able to see both slave and slave owner with compassion, being aware that slavery damaged both.

Boroughs has written a clear if occasionally repetitive analysis of Woolman that calls us to account as well for our response both to God and the society that surrounds us.