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RESPONSE TO THE REVIEWS OF *FOLLOWING JESUS*

PAUL ANDERSON

I want to say thanks to the Quaker Theological Discussion Group for organizing a review of *Following Jesus: The Heart of Faith and Practice*, and also to *Quaker Religious Thought*, for publishing the reviews and inviting an author's response. This particular set of venues, I feel, serves well the thrust of the book, and it also furthers two of its primary goals: first, to articulate for Friends a historically-informed view of faith and practice centered upon a dynamic (not dogmatic) Christocentricity; and second, to testify to the world beyond the Friends movement what is the radical heart of Christianity—attending, discerning, and minding the present and convincing leadership of Christ. In that sense, the book seeks to be compelling in ways Quakerly without being sectarian or traditionalistic—features that deny the very genius of the Quaker movement, which is to be universal in its outreach and open in its outlook.

A note or two on the development of the book and its title might be of interest. Nearly a quarter of the essays were first written for the *Evangelical Friend* or for *Quaker Life*, so it was a worthy exercise to fill out the picture on each of the topics: discernment, evangelism as conviction, transforming worship, empowered ministry, sacramental living, nonviolent peacemaking, and effective witness. As I was working with the title, the last editorial I wrote for the *Evangelical Friend* was an attempt to describe the essence of the Quaker movement, which I saw then and now, twenty years later, as *following Jesus*. The passion of early Friends was not to start a new denomination or to pose a critique of British Christianity; it was to revive apostolic and primitive Christianity and to call all persons, within and without the church, to follow the way of Jesus as manifested by the Light of Christ within.

On the subtitle, Dan McCracken wondered if it should have been "The Heart of *Quaker* Faith and Practice," as potential readers might not realize that it is a book on Quakerism. That, however, is exactly the wrong point; a dynamic and radical approach to following Jesus is held not to be simply the heart of faith and practice for Quakers;

it is held to be the worthy calling of every Christian—yea verily, even those who might not (yet) see themselves as “Christians” are invited to attend the Light of Christ within and exhorted to yield to its sway—convinced by the truth. Now let me say a word about the fine reviews.

As I read Carole Dale Spencer’s review, I am reminded of her good work on holiness and transformation as central features of historic Quakerism, and I find myself nodding my head on the connections she makes. I’m also pleased that she warms to the idea of offering this book to a non-Friend, feeling that it might pose an engaging introduction to the people called Quakers; indeed, I hope that happens for many. I also appreciate the way she notes this being an attempt to put historic Quaker convictions into new language and thought patterns, seeking to do something lively and fresh with the tradition, rather than a retrospective gaze. Being informed by the past is helpful, but central to the convictions of Friends is the belief that God is at work, doing something now, toward the future, which is what we are called to embrace as “friends” of Jesus (Jn. 15). And, I might hope that the book gets a bit of traction within various parts of the larger Quaker family—among Hicksites as well as Gurneyites, among Friends in developing nations as well as North America. So, thanks, Carole for a fine engagement; good to know we’re tracking together on several key trajectories.

I also appreciate the review of my longtime friend and colleague in Johannine studies, Michael Willett Newheart. I was especially interested to know what Michael might have thought about my engagements of Scripture as a Friend, given his being a fellow Bible scholar. Yes, “recovery” is certainly what I’m trying to do, here, and his point that the book does not go far enough into all the particulars it could is well taken. I disagree, though, with his critiques in several ways. First, I do present Jesus and John as Jewish prophets; this is central to understanding their challenging of religious institutions and purification rites (and hence Friends Testimonies on Sacraments and Peacemaking), as well as laying the foundation for Jesus’ “Third Way” as outlined by Walter Wink (each mentioned five times), so I wonder how Michael missed those points. Second, I don’t see using the Lord’s Prayer as a pattern for personal transformation as “privativism;” I see the power of personal transformation as central to changing the world—becoming agents with God in effecting the coming of the peaceable Kingdom. Yes, “our Father” is communal, but agency is always personal as well as collective. Third, in giving historic examples

of Friends and peace work, my hope was to be suggestive as to how peacemaking might be embraced in future situations. I'm sorry that was disappointing, but what is contemporary today is quickly outdated, so I was hoping to be less preachy on particulars, while still calling for partnering with Jesus in putting away the sword and turning the other cheek. Michael misunderstood the point I was making about "lobbying," as Quaker witness is far more effective as a prophetic furthering of truth rather than political manipulation; and, that is why my heroes at FCNL are so successful. They testify to the truth and do so plainly and effectively. Fourth, Michael also missed the point I was making about simplicity, integrity, community, and equality; these are all valued Quaker convictions, but the historic Testimonies of Friends deserve also to include convictions about worship, ministry, sacramental living, conviction, and transformation, to name a few more. Without their spiritually empowered basis, Quaker Testimonies lose their potency and their meaning, an all too easy consequence of acronymic sound bites. Fifth, I don't understand how Michael missed my treatments of "Radical Discipleship" (the last of thirty-five essays) and transformation (the central thrust of Part III, "Worship and Transformation"). I do agree the book could have been longer, but I think there's more depth there than Willett Newheart has noticed. This book also was partially written with Kenyan and Latin American Friends in mind, whom I've visited, and in publishing five of Henry Cadbury's books and in the process of publishing fifty of his best New Testament essays, I think he might see *Following Jesus* also as a means of "translating the New Testament," in addition to his valued contributions to social concern.

I am delighted with Peter Heltzel's review from the perspective of a faith-rooted organizer! I might note that Heltzel picked up on much of the activist and communal thrust of the book that Willett Newheart did not, which is intriguing. Three things speak to me about Peter's reading of the book. First, he notes the value of not simply asking what did Jesus do, but also what is Jesus doing? Others picked up on that too, but if believers really became attentive to the present leadership of Christ—helping each other tune into and follow the Present Teacher, this world would become a very different place, indeed. Second, I appreciate Peter's connecting of spiritual disciplines with social activism. Indeed, that combination distinguishes the experience and teachings of Jesus from secular activism, and as is happening with Peter's Micah 6:8 Project in New York City, authentic

reform becomes a reality when spirit and truth come together in loving concern. Third, I concur with Peter's noting a key factor in the success of a movement, as did Spencer. While the number of Friends around the world remains modest, the impact of Friends upon the larger world has been disproportionate. I would say that the key factor in such influence is and will ever be the convincing power of truth and getting ahead of the *Zeitgeist*. And, come to think of it, that's what the risen Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit, seeks to effect if we will but attend, discern, and follow.

Finally, I am very pleased to have Ruth Pitman's review to respond to; Ruth's judgments are always worth listening to, and I agree with her points, here, including her criticisms. Yes, the book seeks to be centrist among Friends, and I really do hope that liberal Friends and evangelical Friends alike will actually read it and engage it. I also think it cuts in diverse directions, but Ruth is also correct; I've not addressed some of the thorny pieces she mentions directly, although some of them are addressed indirectly—released ministry rather than paid ministry, expressive and impressive worship, silent worship as a corporate altar call, women called to leadership as well as men, the character of sacramentality, etc. She is also correct, though, that I've not addressed such issues as God or no God, or controversial aspects of sexual ethics; I've written and will write on such subjects in other settings. What I do believe, though, is that if Friends will seek to discern and follow the present leadings of the risen Lord effectively, we may yet be led in ways liberating and redemptive—perhaps even in unity. For that to happen, though, submission to the divine will and commitment to sharing and listening empathically within community is essential.

After all, Scripture, history, reason, community, and inward attentiveness are all essential parts of following Jesus—the heart of faith and practice.