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Response by the Editors

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RESPONSE BY THE EDITORS

STEPHEN W. ANGELL AND “BEN” PINK DANDELION

We would like to thank the Quaker Theological Discussion Group for organizing and hosting this panel. It is a privilege indeed to have one's work given so much attention by such a distinguished set of colleagues. We are very grateful to Jon Kershner, Leah Payne, Paul Anderson, and Madeleine Ward for their perceptive and affirming reviews of *Early Quakers and Their Theological Thought, 1647-1723*. Their appreciation guides us toward a brief reply. Of course, some response seems in order to a few of the thoughtful observations that they made about our work.

Whilst we conceived the book and managed the process of its construction and production, our editing skills were not tested with this volume. Once we had selected our subjects, our ‘thinkers’ as it were, we were relatively quickly able to select our preferred set of authors and with one exception, they all said Yes. This wonderful collection of scholars then turned in to our mind first rate copy, much of which needed little editorial adjustment. The credit for this volume lies as much with them as with us.

Turning to our reviewers in this issue, Madeleine Ward asks if our book demonstrates that early Quakers were “doing something called ‘theology.’” We would definitely not be averse to contemporary scholars finding their thought to be theologically useful. In fact, the prospect of such usefulness is one reason that we decided to edit this book. However, when faced with the choice of naming the book *Early Quakers and their Theology* or *Early Quakers and their Theological Thought*, we decided in favor of the latter title, because their conviction that they were led by the present Christ spirit militated against their engaging in any enterprise that they would have understood as theology. In George Fox's formulation, Christ had come to teach his people himself, and they were witnessing to the lessons which had been imparted to them by their teacher Christ. As Hugh Pypers makes clear, even Robert Barclay's *Apology*, which seems to resemble systematic theology, actually is not such. He saw himself as defending “true Christianity” against various other Christian misunderstandings of Christianity. Like Samuel Fisher, Barclay objected especially to the Presbyterians' Westminster Confession of Faith. So, with the term

“theological thought,” we were stating that the early Quakers’ thought was shaped by the contentious atmosphere of theological debate that they found themselves in, but in fact was written without the intent of setting down a Quaker theology. It may be useful for Quakers and others today to think that we have a theology and even to incorporate aspects of early Quaker thought into our theologies, but we would not impose that category anachronistically on seventeenth-century Quakers.

Ward notes correctly that, in the 1690s, Whitehead presented Quaker opponents with a confession of faith. But even Whitehead, perhaps foolishly, did not conceive of himself as doing theology thereby. Whitehead complained that Quaker opponents imposed the word “creed” upon such efforts, but that they were in error, “for we should have numerous Creeds, if all Positions we write in Opposition to Opposers, must be esteemed Creeds, or Summaries and Confessions of our Faith.” (285) The orthodox-Christian-sounding declarations that Whitehead published thus were intended as an explanation of Quaker faith to outsiders, not as a regulatory exposition that would be binding upon Quakers themselves.

As is noted in both the Introduction and the Afterword, the book goes beyond a model that looks primarily or exclusively for definitions of early Quaker thought in the writings of Fox and Barclay. We sought from the beginning to include important Quaker women (Fell, Bathurst, Mary Penington, White), Quakers who were identified as diverging from the mainstream, or who had a sometimes discordant relationship with other Quaker leaders (Nayler, Farnworth, Perrot, White, Keith), and lesser-known figures who have not often been studied (Burrough, Howgill, Fisher, Farnworth, White, Whitehead), in addition to those who have previously been mainstays of Quaker histories of this period (Fox, Fell, Barclay, Isaac Penington, and Penn). By focusing solely on the latter figures, seventeenth-century Quaker history has often been smoothed out. We wanted to avoid that temptation, to show some of the significant rough spots as well. We were frustrated, and said so in our Introduction, that space limitations meant that we would have to omit some significant figures, such as Thomas Ellwood and Anne Conway, who might have had a place in such a volume. We are pleased that our critics both were frustrated by such omissions, and understood simultaneously our reasons for it.

Thus, our challenges lay in the selection of subjects within the space constraints offered us by Cambridge University Press and then

in the chapter lengths we could offer authors, especially difficult where a chapter offered treatment of two early Quakers. We could have had fewer people and longer chapters but not, we believe, more people with even less space to do their theological thought adequate justice. We also knew we needed the context setting chapters of Doug Gwyn on the theological context, which we agree with all the reviewers he does so well, with his innovative sets of pairings of key concepts, and that of Betty Hagglund on the print culture that was so crucial to the success of the Quaker message and in particular the circulation of the thinkers we feature. Leaving out William Dewsbury and Elizabeth Hooten or Mary Fisher was not easy, although in some cases was pragmatic, given how little of their writing is extant. Van Helmont or, as Madeleine Ward suggests, Anne Conway might have been other possibilities but did not appear as influential characters in the development of the Quaker movement or in such need of scholarly interpretation, given existing scholarship.

Leah Payne contrasts the theological profiles of Margaret Fell and Dorothy White, noting that White's writings contained strong maternal imagery such as that of herself as a Spiritual mother feeding her readers with the milk of the Word of God, and that Fell's writings contained more traditional theological discourse. She offers the interesting conjecture that "perhaps the motherly image of a nursing mother did not have as much staying power as did Fell's theologizing about the Light." Other conjectures, of course, would be possible on the basis of the chapters by Michele Lise Tarter and Sally Bruyneel. Social location was important. Fell, whose first husband was a judge and whose second husband was Fox, was socially prominent in the seventeenth century. Her home, Swarthmoor Hall, was the administrative center of the Quaker movement in her earlier years. She was widely known within the Quaker movement, and subsequent histories have cemented our understanding of her pre-eminent place within the Quaker movement. On the other hand, White was largely unknown until the indexing and dissemination of seventeenth-century publications disclosed, within the past three decades, that she and Fell were the two most published Quaker women authors. Consequently, scholars have had much less opportunity to study her life and writings. During the writing of her essay, Tarter was able, with the assistance of British Friends, to determine that it is very likely that White belonged to John Perrot's dissident movement within Friends. This, in addition to her lack of social prominence to begin with, would provide an additional reason for her lack of standing in seventeenth

century Quaker history, and her invisibility in subsequent historical accounts of that period. It is one of the pleasure of working on a volume like this that we as editors can make available to our reading public much new information that is not available in other secondary sources, some of which, like the disclosure of White’s relationship to the Perrot movement, can significantly transform our understanding of seventeenth-century Quaker history.

Payne further asks, “Could one argue that some of the criticism that Quakers endured was due to the fact that their theology transgressed theological gender boundaries?” This conjecture seems very likely to be true, from our perspective. We fervently hope that our work will spark further work in the field of seventeenth-century Quaker history, and that the case for conjectures like Payne’s may be further developed (or disproved, if sadly that would be the case).

Along similar lines, Paul Anderson poses a number of questions and conjectures that would be quite worthy of further investigation: for example, to what degree the Biblical underpinnings of Fox and other Quakers were shaped by their conceptions of “Primitive Christianity;” or, whether there might be anything in Elizabeth Bathurst’s hermeneutics that would be useful to contemporary Bible scholars. Again, we very much hope that scholars would take questions such as these as prompting further study, investigation, and discovery. Nothing would please us more than that!

A number of the queries posed commendably burst outside of the immediate subject matter of the present volume, in order to propose urgent agenda items for the Quaker Studies scholarly community, and indeed the academy of scholars of religion worldwide. Thus, Leah Payne encourages more close comparative work on points of agreement between the Quaker and Pentecostalist movements, and she models that work briefly in her response. Madeleine Ward would like more scholarship on the Kabbalistic interests of George Keith. Jon Kershner would like to see more works examining Quaker theology using the historical lens, but covering eras in Quaker history subsequent to the one chronicled in this book. All of these proposed projects strike us to be very useful and urgent ones, and we would heartily encourage other scholars—indeed, our critics themselves—to undertake one or more of these projects!

We feel then that this volume has achieved what we set out to do: to present the theological thought of these early Quakers and to promote future scholarship. Leah Payne and Madeleine Ward suggest

that the nature of this volume fits with wider church history and the emergence of the study of the role of religious ideas. If we have been part of a broadening of the field of Quaker studies into greater salience and applicability to scholars outside of Quaker studies, that feels like very good news. In closing, we would simply like to reiterate how indebted we are to these discerning critics for their searching, affirming critiques of our work. We are very grateful indeed.