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REVIEW: DOUGLAS GWYN, *THE ANTI-WAR* (SAN FRANCISCO: INNER LIGHT BOOKS, 2016)

LONNIE VALENTINE

The Anti-War is a challenge to Friends everywhere because it is a call to be renewed by immersion in our tradition that will reveal our captivity to cultural and religious forces we must resist. Doug Gwyn has been an itinerant witness for peacemaking within the family of Friends and for Friends' peacemaking in the world. In his introductory "Personal Testimony" we see his long effort to have Friends seek together the grounding for peacemaking by deeper study and meditation on Quaker and Christian witness. *The Anti-War*, a summary of Gwyn's work, would be a fine way for Friends to enter into discussions of what the biblical tradition and Friends' history can mean for Quaker renewal today: "The purpose here is to portray the overall structural dynamics of the anti-war, with the hope that a vision of the whole may help inspire renewed discernment and action among Friends" (92 of the "Militant Peacemaking").

The structure of the book reflects Gwyn's method. On the one "dialectical" hand, we are called to deepen our "covenant" commitments through inward transformation by the Spirit. This is an "inside-out" perspective that is the focus of the first half of the book called "Peace Finds the Purpose of a Peculiar People." On the other dialectical hand, this grounding within a united community leads to an "outside-in" perspective in the other half of the book, "Militant Peacemaking in the Manner of Friends". These are "inversely" related to one another, and both are needed. The chapters in each half mirror this inside/outside relationship. Helpfully, Gwyn offers a pictorial vision of the entire book's structure on page 51 of "Militant Peacemaking".

For the first half, "Peace Finds the Purpose of a Peculiar People", the chapters are a study of First Peter entitled "A Letter to 'Aliens and Exiles,'" "The Early Quaker Movement" addressing the emergence of the Peace Testimony, and "Peace Still Finds the Purpose of a Peculiar People Today," challenging Quakers to be again a "peculiar people"

so that the Peace Testimony is rightly ordered to the “specific identity and purpose of a religious society within civil society” (69).

First Peter shows Christians struggling with the Roman culture that found them “objectionable and worthy of contempt.” Such “honor” societies used shame powerfully to force conformity, and, failing that, suppression including death followed. For the author of Peter, any agreement with the larger society in his day was to be resisted since “the true criterion of honor is doing the will of God, not conforming to public opinion” and Christ is “the paramount example of honor” though executed by the most shameful means available, crucifixion (21). Gwyn then examines what he sees as the key passage, which is also his template for viewing early Quakerism and his pleas to Friends today:

“Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:4-5) Gwyn sees this passage and many biblical writings as urging an intense focus upon “the Spirit’s leadings” which is always “mediating God’s *shalom*”—that vision of a truly just world which is the foundation for true peace. However, our ways of mediating *shalom* will vary “in particular social contexts.”

There is, however, a tension within First Peter. On the one hand we are to obey God and not the culture that killed Jesus Christ, but on the other hand we are to “For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish” (1 Peter 2:13-15). Gwyn understands Peter to say that Christian obedience to divine will produce a “paradoxical freedom in relation to civil society”. Christians are to respect everyone, even the Emperor that might execute them, but they do not conform to the society that makes the emperor into a god. This stance “holds civil power as largely irrelevant to the divine power” that is manifest within the early Christian communities (33).

For Gwyn, meditating on biblical texts will help ground Quakers today as they wrestle with how to address the conflicts all around. To do this, we need to recapture the vision of a “peculiar people” that moves beyond our individualistic and introspective captivity to our current social order (20). If we build that “spiritual house” we

will have the communal support for living out God's *shalom*. We then challenge the larger war culture by living out "our mission, our purpose" to "reconcile the peoples of the world to one another and to the oneness of God" (38).

In the second chapter, Gwyn understands that early Quakers unveiled the power of the cross of Christ in ways coherent with 1 Peter: "(For early Quakers) their spiritual formation was a deep immersion in the 'inward cross' of Christ, the light in their consciences, which led them to convictions and commitments strongly similar to those of the first Christians (42)." Fox said: "The first step of peace is to stand still in the light" (quoted on 43) so that God will bring inward peace. Gwyn primarily uses Fox's *Journal* to argue that early Friends were a "peculiar people" grounded in the Spirit of Christ and with that inward and communal strength witnessed to the world. That is, the "Spirit-led practices" of the emerging Religious Society of Friends were based, in Fox's words, on Christ that restores people "into the image of God" and so into all "righteousness and holiness" (57).

As with 1 Peter, Gwyn notes the struggles within the early Quaker movement around how to deal with the ruling authorities. Though Fox's *Journal* states that in 1651 he rejected any participation in war when offered a commission in Cromwell's army, Gwyn acknowledges that a number of Quakers and Quaker leaders were in the revolutionary forces. However, Gwyn states that though early Quaker writings indicate "some affinity for the army" we need to understand that those Friends support the army "in its role as a juridical person rather than a military force" (46).

Whatever the case for those pre-1660 Quakers, the 1660 Declaration to Charles II provides clear rejection of war as arising from the "lusts of men" (James 4: 1-3) "out of which the Lord has redeemed" Quakers: "All bloody principles and practices, we, as to our own particulars, do utterly deny, with all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world" (quoted on 53).

However, this did not mean a rejection by Quakers of the civil authorities' use of force. As Fox said to Cromwell in 1655, the "magistrates' sword" is to be a "terror to the evil doers who act contrarily to the light of the Lord Jesus Christ." However, the Quaker mission was "to turn people from the darkness to the light and to bring them from the occasion of war and from the occasion of the

magistrate's sword" (quoted on 46). As with 1 Peter, this "Anti War" stance does not solve all specific questions about how Quakers were to engage the larger society since they, like early Christians, had first to be rooted in Jesus Christ and seek guidance by that Spirit which will speak anew in changing situations.

Gwyn closes this second chapter with the claim that this early "crucial juncture in Quaker history established the basic pattern of Quaker faith and practice for the next 150 years" (57). Thus, in the third chapter Gwyn argues that Friends can be renewed by immersion in this early history of Friends, just as we must be renewed by meditating on the Bible. Such immersion in tradition is not to find ready-made answers to our theological and political and cultural problems, but to open us for the leadings of the Spirit of Christ. The problem Gwyn sees is that our identity is "diffuse" because "we no longer strive to be a peculiar people" that keeps its distance from the societal values that "liberal Friends" have "read into the Religious Society of Friends."

In conclusion to this first half of the book, we are asked how "our activist impulses have kept us grasping for social relevance rather than living in radical faithfulness...and letting the conflicts and talking points develop from the ways we puzzle and often offend the mainstream." To do this, we must first to seek the Kingdom of God which is "answering the call to an otherworldly holiness" (78). This means we will find ourselves "standing still in a place of integrity, peace, simplicity, and equality" ready to engage the world (79).

From this foundation of inward attention to God, the second half of the book explores the outward expression of "militant peacemaking." As in the first half of the book, Gwyn begins with a biblical meditation, this time on the Book of Revelation, and then moves to outline early Friends' view of the "Lamb's War." This is followed by an analysis of our current time of trial in the third chapter, entitled "Capitalism, Empire, and the Military-Industrial Complex." Gwyn adds a fourth concluding chapter, "The Anti-War," exploring how Quakers today must hold the dialectic of inward rest in the Spirit with militant peacemaking to advance the Kingdom of God's *shalom*.

The long-abused Book of Revelation is eschatological not in the sense of predicting the future, as many popular interpreters have argued, but "as a vision of the demonic nature of an oppressive empire and God's victory over it" (4). It is a revelation of the true character of the Roman empire of John's day and any empire of any day. So, as

the call of 1 Peter is to distance oneself from the oppressive culture and open oneself to the grace of God, Revelation is a call to make Christian opposition known to empire: Revelation “clearly seeks to intensify early Christian conflict with Rome” (7). The letters to the seven churches are warnings to these Christians to reject “Babylon” because God brings down such empires, as John’s vision shows. Clearly, the churches are not to take up arms against empire, since nowhere in the vision are Christians portrayed as taking up the sword. Rather, by standing fast as witnesses for God’s *shalom*, the empire will fall because of its oppressive internal contradictions.

Gwyn touches on the issue of how God’s “wrath” brings down oppressive structures. He argues that the vision of Jesus slaying “by the sword of his mouth” and not a physical weapon means that God does not “will” but “allows” the empire to self-destruct: “(This wrath) may be understood as God giving up Rome, along with the inhabitants of the earth who accede to its power, to the destruction inherent in that system, to the consequences of free human choices” (9-10). Does this imply that God has the power to intervene in preventing such horrific oppression but chooses not to do so or that God is not all-powerful and so is unable to override the freedom that is in creation? Much popular readings of Revelation say that Christians are either to wait and watch while God intervenes through Christ’s “second coming” or they are to join this final war to end all wars. For many liberal Christians, Quakers, and humanists, the view that either God directly causes such massive suffering or “allows” it leads them to reject such a God and rely instead on human vision and action. However God acts, Gwyn sees Revelation as supporting a nonviolent “mode of conflict” that is “theological and spiritual rather than physical” (19). So, Friends’ witness is to focus less on activism in our usual sense of “physical” though nonviolent opposition to empire, but rather on building an alternative theological and spiritual community that by its very existence reveals the contradictions of empire for all to see.

This is how Gwyn, in the second chapter, presents the early Quaker vision of “The Lamb’s War.” He draws upon James Nayler in addition to Fox since Nayler is seen to have “articulated more fully the political meaning” of the early Quaker struggles. The Quaker “nonviolent conflict” with Babylon “was materialized through their words, both spoken and published, and their actions” (28). Quakers spoke and wrote much, and that got them into trouble with church and state.

Gwyn notes that the actions undertaken by early Quakers arose from their distinct religious views that challenged the underlying

ideological justification of the state religion. To challenge the ideology was to challenge the entire system. So, by actions that were “everyday resistances” such as refusing hat honor, refusing to swear oaths, recognizing women as ministers, and holding Meeting openly in violation of the law, Gwyn sees that Quakers were “obeying a sovereign authority alien to the consciousness of mainstream society.” Thus, the Lamb’s War “enacted *infrastructural politics* that Friends believed would be more transformative than the superstructural politics” offered in the revolution (35). This means that the political, economic, and military structures must be faced at their religious roots. Gwyn now moves to see if we can rise “to meet the challenges of a new age of empire” (40).

In this third chapter on “Capitalism, Empire, and the Military-Industrial Complex” Gwyn briefly presents the “internal contradictions” of our current system that we are all pretty aware of at this point. However, he urges us to examine the underlying ideological foundation. Rather than dismiss the religious alliance with empire as mere propaganda we need to take this theological and spiritual substrata, this “infrastructural” foundation, very seriously. He quotes Mussolini on this: “Whoever has seen in the religious politics of the Fascist regime nothing but mere opportunism has not understood that Fascism besides being a system of government is also, and above all, a system of thought” (quoted on 64). Therefore, Gwyn urges that the “fascist religion of empire today must be confronted and countered with a religious language that offers a radically different understanding of *the same religious traditions and texts utilized by fascist ideologues today*” (64).

In the final chapter then, Gwyn pleads with us to reclaim the radical religious perspectives of the early Christian movement and our early Quaker way of being in the world but not of it. It needs to be radical, going to the roots, if we are to manifest God’s will in our actions: “If we mirror the logic and match the tactics of the present system, we are defeated from the start. The anti-war of the Lamb and his community is an inversion of the violent social order” (66). We need the inward individual and community work to give us the foundation for our witness. However, this separation for discernment does not make our opposition into a “dualism” where there is no connection to society at all. Rather, we can find those of other faiths or none in the space between the horrible excesses of capitalist empire run amok and our faith community. We look for an “intermediate” space to work with

others who are not totally in the grasp of fascist politics, economics, militarism, and the fundamental ideologies of this system.

In conclusion, Gwyn argues we must counter the cultural captivity of many Friends in a middle class life of uneasy peace in the capitalist empire with the rich resources of the biblical and early Quaker witness. Here he specifically lifts up simplicity “as the preeminent testimony of Friends” for our day. This shift means a reassessment of our peace testimony so that it is more deeply rooted in our community spiritual life. Gwyn suggests that the witness of Quakers “active in small business, organic farming, artisanship, and localist networking is reclaiming our traditional social profile” (78-79). In this way we connect to others working in the space between the ruthlessness of empire that wishes destruction of *shalom* for the profit of the few and the vision of God for a world of *shalom*.

GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Are there other ways the Bible understands “government authorities”, different from First Peter, such as the Gospels or the genuine letters of Paul? How do we study and meditate on the Bible?
2. How do we translate for our day the language of 1 Peter, other biblical imagery, and early Quaker writings? For example, what does “Christ,” being “living stones” or a “priesthood,” “spiritual sacrifices,” standing “still in the light,” and “inward cross” mean for us today?
3. Gwyn states that God, as in some biblical and Quaker writings, “allows” though does not “will” the destruction of empires and people in them. How do we understand God’s way of interacting with human history and creation?
4. First Peter and Fox present the view that the state may rightly wield the sword as a “terror to the evil doers.” What do we think of that in our day?
5. As Gwyn acknowledges, how to view the significant early Quaker participation in armed rebellion is debated among historians. Does this make a difference in how radical we view the Quakers, post-1660? Does it matter now?

6. What are Friends' "social values" that are accepted in our country? Do these advances change the way we engage the government? What social values are we to challenge within ourselves and our society?
7. Given Gwyn's conclusions, do we need to speak up and act up more in the face of our current "principalities and powers," especially those who call themselves Christians and yet support empire?