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The purpose of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group is to explore the meaning and implications of our Quaker faith and religious experience through discussion and publication. This search for unity in the claim of truth upon us concerns both the content and application of our faith.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In this issue we have several features that will be of interest to the reader, and each of them provides something of a bridge between topics discussed formerly and in the future. At the outset, we have an engaging response to our previous issue on the legacy of early Quaker women. Dean Frieday’s essay embellishes some of the good points made by David Johns on the topic of Quaker saints, and yet he takes the matter further and provides something of a historical backdrop as we consider aspects related to Quaker interests in (and aversions to) hagiography.

The main features of this issue, however, take us in a couple of other directions. First, the reviews of Linda Selleck’s book on contributions of Quaker women during the post-Civil War Reconstructionist era continue the theme developed in the previous issue, in which the legacies of Quaker women have been explored. Extended reviews by Shannon Craigo-Snell and Thomas Hamm (first presented at our November 1999 Boston QTDG meetings) afford the opportunity to take the discussions beyond the scope of Selleck’s book, and thus are far more serviceable than a mere endorsement. Likewise, her response carries the concerns raised further, from the subject of her book to its implications. Perhaps the heroic example of Quaker women’s responses to racial issues in the Reconstruction era will provide the seeds of future endeavors to address racial and socio-economic challenges of contemporary society. These issues continue to be pressing ones indeed, and one hopes the prophetic, problem-solving contribution of Friends has not seen its last day.

Next, Paul Buckley’s fine essay on the presentation of “Darkness” in the Journal of George Fox builds a bridge toward the central theme of our next issue, which explores early Quaker uses of Scripture. In this essay, Buckley helps us understand the hermeneutical backdrop behind the “Light” metaphor in Fox’s Journal by means of exploring his treatment of its converse metaphor: “Darkness.” In so doing, the texture of meanings becomes all the richer, and present-day interpretive moves are challenged and confirmed by means of such an exercise. Part of what comes from Buckley’s analysis is a greater appreciation of the philosophic and scriptural background during Fox’s day, and these insights help us “get it right” in seeing ourselves as following in continuity with the movement begun by Fox and the early Quakers.
Finally, a couple of substantive letters to the editor further our consideration of issues raised in recent issues. Wil Cooper’s letter in defense of Among Friends: A Consultation with Friends about the Condition of Quakers in the U.S. Today is well taken. The report indeed provides “a collection of grass roots voices expressing fears, hopes, and insights about American Quakers in general and ESR in particular,” as Roberts has said, and this accounts for the diversity of opinion represented in the report. As both Cooper and Roberts suggest, the real task now remains for interpreters of the survey: to employ its contents meaningfully, addressing the spiritual condition of the Religious Society of Friends, and likewise, the world beyond. Then, Larry Ingle’s letter challenges Sally Bruyneel’s essay for some of her judgments. Ms. Bruyneel has thus been asked to respond to Mr. Ingle’s letter, and I have too, as his criticisms are levied also at the editors of QRT.

Future topics for consideration include Quakers and Scripture and Quakers and science. As endeavors from a variety of directions have been challenging the dichotomizing of science and religion, society is moving closer to a posture Friends have embraced all along: all truth is God’s truth, and by understanding more about how the created order functions, one enhances the dual likelihoods of glorifying the Creator and serving humanity more redemptively. Papers on either of these topics are invited, and the latter will be the topic of our next Quaker Theological Discussion Group meetings November 16-17 in Denver, Colorado. More on the program will be included in our next issue.

Happy reading, and may you abide in the Truth!

—Paul Anderson
February 2001