Quakers and the Broader Christian Movement ................. 7
Arthur O. Roberts

The Quaker Vision and the Doing of Theology ............. 21
R. Melvin Keiser

Christian Dialogue in the Seventeenth Century .......... 39
Dean Freiday

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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 the application of our faith.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

We include in this issue three very fine essays that all have to do with doing Quaker theology. Despite the common theme, however, they were presented within different contexts, and the reader will notice the distinctive ways each of the writers approaches the subject. Such differences are appropriate, as they address real life, and yet each essay also points the way forward in its own helpful way.

The lead essay is by QRT editor and longtime Quaker historian/philosopher Arthur Roberts. The essay included here is the keynote address delivered the opening night of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group meetings held on the George Fox University campus June 19-22, 1996. As we overlapped with the Friends Association of Higher Education meetings, many were able to get in, at least somewhat, on both sets of meetings. Here, Arthur introduced the theme for us lucidly: “Quakers and the Larger Christian Movement.” In his essay, he points the way forward for meaningful Quaker engagement with the broader set of faith- and practice-related discussions within the larger Christian world. The trajectories outlined in his essay describe some of what is already happening well, but they also provide guidance helpful to those of us seeking to be always improving our witness and engagement among other seekers of truth.

A pleasant note: Howard Macy and I had been scheming (along with 23 other writers and other project supporters) to present Arthur with a collection of essays in his honor at the rise of his address. We hoped he would be pleased, and we tried to keep it a secret. As far as we can tell, both happened, and that got the conference off on a celebrative note. So, order your own copy of Truth’s Bright Embrace; Essays and Poems in Honor of Arthur O. Roberts, available from George Fox University Press (also the first volume in the new series). You won’t be disappointed.

The second essay was presented by Mel Keiser at the 1996 FAHE meetings also held in Newberg. As the theme of the FAHE conference related to exploring the Quaker witness and contribution across the disciplines, Mel very appropriately explored the topic of Quaker contributions to doing theology. Mel approaches the theme with both liberal and conservative Friends in mind and offers considerable
food for thought regarding the kind of theologizing that emerges out of a life lived in the Spirit. His essay brings together in a rare mix a helpful combination of subjective engagement with objective content, of which all sound theologizing has a healthy mixture.

Dean Freiday’s essay invites the reader on a rich excursion into the history of Quaker-Christian dialogues in the seventeenth century. Both in his description of the issues under discussion and in his historical outline of events, he illustrates the Quaker theological enterprises described by Roberts and Keiser and punctuates them with graphic clarity. Freiday’s essay is also historic in the sense that it reflects present dialogues between Quakers and broader Christian communities within the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches. For the first time in the history of the movement, at least in this particular way, Quaker views are solicited and welcome at the table of larger faith discussions within the church, and there is no telling what may be built upon groundwork laid during these days. This, of course, was one of the motivations for setting the recent QTDG theme.

In fact, the papers at the conference were of a very high quality, and we have asked that many of them be recrafted for publication in the next few issues of QRT. Therefore, we anticipate the next two issues to be dealing with Quaker-Christian dialogues in matters of sacramentality and peace, and Marge Abbott’s work on liberal Quakerism with responses will follow.

During our business session, we felt led to pursue other QTDG meetings in the future, about every two or three years, but no particular time for the next meeting was suggested. In the meantime, Gayle Beebe, who was appointed as the other associate editor of QRT (as well as myself), has put forward the idea of holding a Quaker Theology seminar on the Quaker view of the Light of Christ and its representations in non-Christian traditions. He has in mind several who could treat the topic well, and we are currently exploring the idea of holding a Quaker Theology seminar in San Francisco November 21-22, 1997. Parallel to the last topic, “The Light of Christ and Non-Christian Traditions” extends our deliberations further, although it would not be a full-fledged QTDG conference. Members of QTDG, subscribers to QRT, and other interested persons are welcome. The interest here is neither that of relativizing Christian convictions nor of showing uncritically how various paths might “lead up the mountain.” Rather, the hope is to explore the
universal implications of the Light of Christ, which illumines beyond our accustomed expectations, and to do so within a sustained, reflective context. Thus the appeal and value of doing theology with intentionality, and spiritual sensitivity—the sort of enterprise Friends have supported.

Our next issue of *QRT* will contain more information about the 1997 seminar and will explore further the theme of sacramentology and the character of *Koinonia* fellowship. Our hope is that Friends will not only thereby be better enabled to respond thoughtfully to issues of sacramentology within intra- and extra-mural discussions, but that our deliberations might also bear fruit beyond the Quaker world. It is a topic in need of centered reflection now as much as ever; but presently, let’s get on with the broader issue of Quaker-Christian dialogue on matters of faith and practice.

—*Paul Anderson*

*Associate Editor*