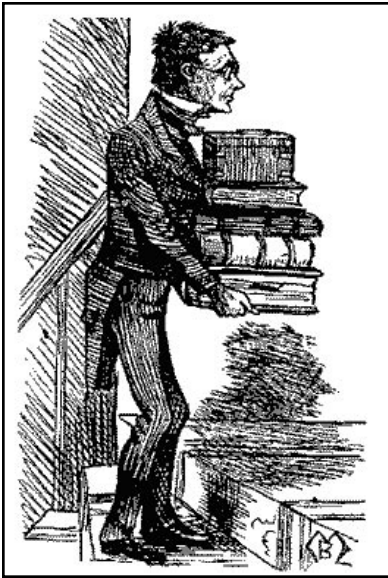


Book Reviews...Book Reviews



Trespass and Trust: Quaker Meetings and Sex Offenders

By Daphne Glazer

Quaker Books, 2004

Reviewed by Lynn Robinson

Beth Allen, General Secretary of Quaker Home Service (Britain) during the 1990s, felt there was a need for a formal record of Friends' experience with abuse. She encouraged Daphne Glazer, Quaker, prison minister (chaplain), and author, to assume the task. Daphne talked to many people and many Meetings, and she presents their accounts with decency and moderation.

As a record of the efforts of British Friends to address abuse, this slender book can be recommended unreservedly. As a guide, it must be used with caution. While Daphne has tried to provide a sensible and compassionate frame of reference, she writes with diffidence and doesn't always highlight risky practices. Still, she (and Beth) are to be commended for taking on this distressing and volatile topic.

The title is a bit misleading, since the book does not deal solely with the issue of the presence of known sexual

offenders in Meeting. It also includes survivor's stories and broader material on abuse. However, the core of the book does lie in the accounts of Meetings which have been asked to accept a sexual offender.

Each story is different. One meeting agreed to accept an offender in attendance but did not inform all parents. Another allowed attendance at meetings, but not in social gatherings. A third felt it could not offer attendance because it did not have the resources to form a Circle of Support and Accountability. Such circles (first devised by Canadian Mennonites), were offered by several Meetings, to provide offenders with friendship and guidance as well as to maintain limits and set responsibilities. In many meetings there were Friends who were quite unhappy with the decisions made, and, in some, people left the Meeting.

We can see Friends struggling in these stories, trying to let the Light in and find the right way forward. Some are frightened, others angry, some knowledgeable, others wary, some are victims, others work in prisons. We see how varied the approaches are, how many values are being examined. There is much good will, but no real unity on what guiding principles to follow.

It seems to me that both Mennonites and Native people are ahead of Friends in founding their approach to abuse on their religious principles. Both use variants of Restorative Justice lived out in community as alternatives to society's Retributive Justice system, based on blame, shame, and punishment.

I would like to suggest that Transformative Justice, already well-seasoned by Friends, is a powerful and satisfactory framework for abuse. However, it is a hard testimony to live by, since it requires both that the community be involved and that it be strong and cohesive. In fact, its cycle of confession, repentance, and restitution could become part of our everyday lives, to help us overcome our difficulties in relationship and strengthen our communities.

Transformative Justice was conceived by Ruth Morris. It sees abuse as a violation of person and relationship, which nevertheless offers opportunities for the transformative healing of all. Its key tenets are:

- Safety should be established for victim, offender and community;
- Answers should be found to why the abuse happened, and to the questions which haunt victims;
- Recognition of the wrong should be given by both offender and community;
- Grieving should be supported for both victim and offender;
- Restitution should be made to the victim for pain experienced;
- Significance should be sought so both victim and offender can make positive use of their experiences.

Members of the Abuse Committee of Toronto Monthly Meeting emphasise ensuring safety, which we describe as "Due Diligence." That phrase is a mouthful, but it really denotes just another way of caring for one another.

The two principles of Transformative Justice and Due Diligence can be powerful guides

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to discernment, as long as safety and care are always in balance. Sometimes we are too stern with offenders, preventing real healing from happening, or too supportive, putting others at risk. Friends, being very nice people, are prone to err on the side of supportiveness, and can lose sight of their responsibility for collective safety, and the safety of children in particular. This book furnishes several sad examples of Meetings where a balance was not achieved and children were put at risk.

I am very glad to have this book in my library. It offers many helpful case histories where Transformative Justice and Due Diligence were used effectively, and others where they were not. There is much to be learned from it, provided we hold firmly to the principle that our desire to support must never distract us from ensuring the safety of all. ✱

Lynn Robinson is a member of Toronto Monthly Meeting.



The Tendering Presence: Essays on John Woolman

Edited by Mike Heller

Pendle Hill Publications, 2003

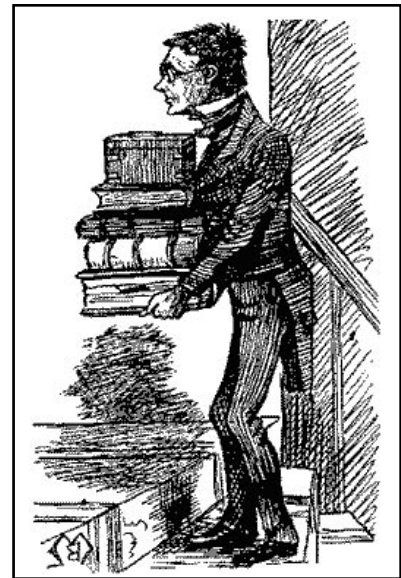
Reviewed by Keith R. Maddock

This fine anthology of scholarly essays looks at the testimony of John Woolman from several interesting perspectives, including the influences on his spiritual development; the literary, historical and economic

contexts of his writings; and issues of oppression, social change and education. Dedicated to Phillip P. Moulton and Sterling Olmstead, two contemporary editors and disciples of Woolman's legacy, it concludes with essays on their contribution to the Religious Society of Friends.

The section dedicated to "spirituality" is introduced with an objective though appreciative appraisal by Philip L. Boroughs, SJ, beginning with the intriguing statement, "John Woolman inspires me." He continues, "When I read his journal or essays I find that his witness to that of God within him stirs that of God within me. Consequently, my faith grows stronger and I experience hope."

It is important for Friends to realise how extensive Woolman's influence has been beyond the predominantly Quaker world that he knew best and to which he addressed his admonitions. Boroughs' second dimension is "social," looking at Woolman as a member of the human family within Creation, and the implications of his faith for the transformation of the world. This includes such themes as God, the true proprietor of the earth; God's gracious design for creation; universal love; trust in Providence; and following the example of Jesus. The individual "dimension focuses on uniquely personal aspects of Woolman's spirituality, how he experienced God in his life, his ethical mysticism, and how his unique religious experience emphasised God's action in itself. Boroughs concludes, "Woolman



writes his journal not to provide a normative experience, but as an encouragement to others to let God work in them."

Lisa M. Gordis' "Spirit and Substance: John Woolman and 'The Language of the Holy One,'" argues that Woolman shared the early Friends' concern to find a pure language capable of expressing divine perfection, and to interpret the implications of such perfection in the flawed world of human experience and communication. Humility is crucial to this understanding, as Woolman learned to distinguish "the language of the pure Spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart" from verbiage that is simply an expression of the ego. The ability to communicate in such language is tied to disciplined silence. Silence feeds the soul, creating "a language that is transparent to divine will, capable of communicating the Inner Light unobstructed by human intervention."

Michael L. Birkel's essay, "Preparing the Heart for Sympathy: John Woolman Reading Scripture," is an important contribution to our understanding of Woolman's bibli-

cal grounding in pure language. He found images in Scripture to articulate the spiritual realities of his own experience, as evidenced by hundreds of references to biblical texts in his work.

The nature of religious life is always inward and outward, intimate and social. Biblical images of inward conversion, including sacrifice and baptism as dying and rising with Christ, point to the essential ingredient of love in the process of spiritual transformation. Love is the “motion” that inspired Woolman to write his *Journal*, as well as to act on an impulse to visit the Delaware village of Wyalusing during a period of intense warfare on the western frontier.

A further point that Birkel makes is that Woolman practiced a meditative, imaginative reading of Bible. He writes, “There is a powerful link between an imagination cultivated by such Biblical meditation and an imagination which could radically re-envision society as more righteous and peaceable.”

John Woolman explicitly relates his inspiration to universal love, which blossoms only after experiencing “the death of one’s will.” This point leads naturally into Margaret E. Stewart’s essay, “Thinking About Death: The Companionship of John Woolman’s *Journal*”. She finds a union of mystery and familiarity in the *Journal* that yields emotional energy, ethical insight, and transformative power. Acceptance of the mystery of life’s end leads into a new sense of self, a new identity in which death entails growth. Woolman saw death as an essential component of his life experience, an opening to transcend separateness from the larger body of life. Whenever Woolman made death ‘a

part of life,’ “he found that his life became part of Life — that his individuality, including its demise, became part of a vibrant, inclusive whole.”

In a short book review, it is not possible to do justice to all the contributions in such a comprehensive anthology. However, it would be a serious oversight not to mention Mary Rose O’Reilly’s “The Unconstructed Self,” in which she describes Woolman as “a rather uncontaminated petri dish in the spiritual economy.” She notes that he seems to have been a rare soul, born into a tender and loving faith community that he never felt the need to abandon. Instead of an intellectual struggle, we find a “beautiful and quiet unfolding of spiritual destiny.” John Woolman was so aware of God’s mercy that he was able to be gentle with himself and therefore with such people as slave owners, “that they go away from conversations with him changed in heart.” No one was exempt from the tenderness that defined Woolman’s spiritual identity. She writes, “In some mysterious way he called out to their better natures and co-opted them in their own conversion. When assent has arisen from within us, rather than being cajoled from outside, how deeply indeed we assent.”

Another essay worthy of special mention is Jean R. Soderlund’s “African Americans and Native Americans in John Woolman’s World,” in which she writes, “Woolman addressed social problems on a personal level, as individual behaviour to be changed because God abhorred it, not as social ills to be bemoaned and generally ignored”. He always hesitated to preach whatever he could not fulfil in his own life.

On the topic of education, valuable

insights are offered by Anne Dalke’s “Fully Attending to the Spirit: John Woolman and the Practice of Quaker Pedagogy,” and Paul A. Lacey’s, “Answerable to the Design of Our Creation: Teaching ‘A Plea for the Poor’.” Dalke may come closest of all to sharing a critical response to Woolman’s example, protesting her inability to empathise with a level of spiritual insight that she herself has never experienced. “For Woolman,” she argues, “Truth was the moving of the spring of Christ in every person; with him, I affirm such a conception, but I want also to insist that such movement needs always the testing, the guidance, and the affirmation of the larger community ...”

It would be a mistake to approach John Woolman as a “Quaker saint” who stood alone in the unwavering assurance of Truth. He must have had his own moments of discouragement and doubt that are left unexpressed in his writing. Nor should we overlook the fact that he conscientiously submitted his work and his openings for clearness to the oversight of his Meeting. His legacy is an incomparable witness to spiritual growth, faithful discipleship, and committed social action in a past era. The written account of his journey is best read today as an invitation to reflect on the motions experienced in our own lives as we try to find our way through a much more complicated world than he knew, often without the common grounding in tradition and community that gave substance to his vision of universal love. But that may be a theme for a different anthology than this one. ✱

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