

# ...Book Reviews...Book Reviews...Book Reviews...

## PLAYING IN THE PRESENCE: GENETICS, ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY

By Jackie Leach Scully,  
Quaker Books, 2002

The 2002 Swarthmore lecture is an exciting and pleasurable read. The introduction tells us, "The last half of the 20th century saw an explosion in our understanding of genetics and molecular biology; the questions now are in what form that genetic understanding will be put to use, and how and by whom it will be controlled... about science and spirituality, and how the two are connected."

Chapter 1 begins with "A view over the territory", exploring the connections between science and spirituality. We find Michelangelo's Sophia, the personification of Wisdom, cradled in the crook of God's arm, "watching the creation of humankind with an expression of curiosity, alertness and half a smile...". Chapters 2 and 3 provide an outline of some key areas of gene technology and the associated ethical issues. Chapter 4 discusses ideas about play; "...it should become clear that this is not a digression, but provides some important clues to thinking about the ethical practice of science. I trace the path taken by my own thinking...as I identified elements important to the art of play. Finally, in Chapter 6, I try to draw these ideas together with suggestions for a Quaker approach to ethical gene technology. These suggestions are meant to be a starting point for Britain Yearly Meeting's corporate exploration, and not a blueprint for action."

Scully's deep sense of delight, beauty and play are well expressed at the end of the first chapter as she writes of her hope for the book, "...in a morally contentious area like gene technology whose effects are felt throughout society, there may never be such things as unequivocally right answers. Instead, what we should be on the lookout for are approaches, attitudes and compromises that we can agree are aligned with the good, and that most of us can live with." This very reader-friendly book is highly recommended for all who are interested in expanding their views of genetic manipulation. □

## FRIENDS FOR 350 YEARS

By Howard H. Brinton,  
Pendle Hill Publications, 2002

An inner subtitle adds: "The history and beliefs of the Society of Friends since George Fox started the Quaker movement" and continues, "with historical update and page and line notes by Margaret Hope Bacon." Since its first printing in 1952, this book, by one of the most important figures in the Society of Friends in the first half of the 20th century, has been a favourite of all who wish to know more about Friends. Now, with Margaret Hope Bacon using her vast knowledge and experience in the update, it is more useful than ever. She considers recent Quaker scholarship and takes into account the changes in attitude toward both women and persons of other cultures. The Publications Committee decided to make changes they felt, "Brinton would change himself, were he given the opportunity to rewrite it in terms of modern scholarship and modern sensibilities." And Bacon points out, "Soon the majority of Quakers worldwide will be from the Third World. Friends need to be mindful of the tendency to ethnocentricity in matters of race and class, as well as historical background, in approaching the future of Quakerism in a new century."

The ten chapters cover "Brinton's pioneering description of the birth of the Quaker movement as a form of group mysticism, the role of Quaker thought and belief and its place in the history of religious thought, the meaning of Quaker ministry, and the functioning of the Quaker meeting as both a worshipping group and a community."

This most interesting read also serves as a useful reference. I find it helpful, not being a birthright Friend, in understanding basic traditions and concepts of Quakers: the unspoken ways that are not always obvious, even after many years with Friends. Though it is focused on Quakerism in the United States, it speaks of our common condition as Friends in North America. This classic is definitely a good resource; why not put it on your summer reading list? □