

HELLER, Mike (ed.), *The Tendering Presence: essays on John Woolman* (Wallingford, PA; Pendle Hill Publications, 2003), pp. 340, ISBN: 0-87574-940-2, Paper \$21.00.

The continuing and increasing relevance of John Woolman is a singular phenomenon in the history of the Religious Society of Friends. The preparation and publication of *The Tendering Presence* is an important response to Woolman's enduring and growing presence among us. Mike Heller has assembled a range of studies on Woolman, that while scholarly, also reflect the commitments of their authors to human betterment and do full honour to Woolman's legacy. I think it is correct to say, this book is the most comprehensive and substantial volume on Woolman to yet appear. Each author deserves to be read with deliberation and a wide margin of reflection.

Mike Heller obviously worked hard to craft a collection that is internally unified, and in this he certainly succeeded. The picture of Woolman and his place in both Quakerism and in American cultural studies that emerges from this book is a significant advance and will provide ready access to key sources for research and classroom use. A few notes on selected essays will give an idea of the range it offers. (Notably, Heller includes none of his own work on Woolman, although it is repeatedly cited by contributors.)

The book is organised into three main sections, 'John Woolman's Spirituality', 'Literary, Historical and Economic Texts', and 'Issues of Oppression, Social Change and Education'. The fourth and closing section is devoted to work by and about Sterling Olmsted and Phillips P. Moulton, and is appropriately titled, 'Scholars Who

Became Disciples'. The entire book is presented in honour of these two scholars who have contributed so significantly to the study of John Woolman over the past half century.

Anne Myles' essay, "'Stranger Friend': John Woolman and Quaker Dissent' takes up the difficulty of liberal religion's universalising impulse – the wish to harmonise cultural differences and conflicts within a great vision of universal justice and good will. As colonial politics developed in the Philadelphia area, and Quakers became more a dissenting voice and less a controlling voice, Woolman exemplified the Society's conscience on relations with Aboriginal and African peoples. However, as tender as Woolman was in this regard, he was also, according to Myles, brought to a stop in his movement toward identification with the oppressed. She writes; 'With all the good will in the world, at some level he must remain a stranger to these strangers, and they, likewise, strangers to him'. The reality of this difficulty is not, of course, just historical. It is as contemporary as the day's news. We all stand with Woolman, wondering how disparate cultures can be reconciled in human solidarity.

Lisa Gordis contributes an essay which focuses on the quest for a language that transcends language – the effort exemplified, for example, in Wordsworth's quest for an 'unmediated vision'. Quakers too, and especially John Woolman, as Lisa Gordis explores, have worked to create a mode of expression that mirrors 'the language of the Holy One'.

Margaret Stewart contributes an essay titled 'Thinking About Death: The Companionship of John Woolman's *Journal*'. This essay is so rich, so suggestive, and prompts so many lines of reflection that I was continuously underlining and making entries in my notebook. It develops a thoughtful understanding of how war is rooted in a denial of death. It shows how Woolman came to see death, not as the great leveler, but as the great connector. These are just two threads of the many from which this essay is woven.

Jean Soderland's essay ('African Americans and Native Americans in John Woolman's World') recounts in detail Woolman's personal, social, and economic relationships with African Americans and Native Americans. While his witness against slavery and for fair dealings with Natives grew into major concerns, and his personal response to economic exploitation led to great simplification of life, it remains a fact that 'Woolman could not extract himself from the Euro-American economic system without threatening his family's welfare. Soderland writes, 'he refused to criticize publicly the thousands of new immigrants settling the frontier, nor to condemn even the wealthy land-speculating Friends and associates who lusted after domination of North America and the fortunes to be obtained by selling lands'.

J. William Frost ('John Woolman and the Enlightenment') takes up the intriguing question of Woolman's relationship to the Enlightenment and the universalising modes of thought that flowed from this cultural upheaval. Woolman's own record is of little help in this regard, but it seems unlikely he was unacquainted with Enlightenment thinking. Certainly, he must have read Penn who combined a classic enlightenment sensibility with the Quaker ethos. Frost's study is a meticulous account of what can be reasonably assembled on this subject.

Gerald Sazama ('On Wooman's "Conversations", Ethics, and Economics') presents a thorough discussion and analysis of Woolman's 'Conversations on the True Harmony of Mankind and How It May Be Promoted'. Woolman's primary thinking on economics and social change is wonderfully condensed in this text, recently made available through the work of Sterling Olmsted. According to Sazama, Woolman is mainly interested in income distribution – fair wage and just price – and the kind of social changes that will lead to greater equity in the sharing of wealth. Of particular note is the fact that, unlike his contemporary, Adam Smith, who saw the organisation and operation of the economy as a matter of the 'invisible hand', Woolman saw it as a matter of human choice – property, financial and commercial relationships that are always subject to adjustment and change. Many other aspects of economic philosophy and practice are covered in this essay making it a good introduction to Woolman's thinking in this area.

Vernie Davis ('John Woolman and Structural Violence') contributes an excellent analysis of structural violence and the method of social change redress that Woolman practised and so well articulated. The richness and detail of this essay elude summary, but two points are particularly notable: Woolman pioneered the idea that oppression can be effectively countered by direct appeal for moral growth in the oppressors, and that those who have the opportunity to witness at that level should act accordingly. Woolman aimed to create cognitive dissonance (before it was so named) as a prompt to moral growth and social change. Secondly, his approach is proof against burn out. 'He reverses the means/ends perspective of Alinsky [radical social change strategist] because for Woolman the means are the end. The moral imperative for Woolman is to do what is right regardless of outcome'.

Susan Dean's essay, 'The Figure of John Woolman in American Multicultural Studies', brings Woolman to the classroom. Dean describes how in her own teaching, and in American Studies generally, the reality of the European invasion into Aboriginal cultural regions is a prominent focus. Here again we meet the circumstance raised by Anne Myles noted above – the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between privilege and oppression and the insupportable structure of Western 'universals' in the context of multicultural reality. Right sharing economics is, perhaps, the answer to privilege and oppression, but what can be done about our precious 'universals?' Susan Dean suggests the following: 'When the oneness of creation is felt, the barriers of finite will and understanding are dissolved'. In this transformation '[we] experience the love that life makes possible. Deep love is the vital intelligence that Woolman holds out today to individuals who despair at the vision of cultural oppression that they see themselves born into. I think this intelligence is one that many of us are seeking at this time in our history, as we work to respect cultural relativism and be suspicious of false universals, but at the same time yearn to experience again a oneness beyond the reach of oppression'. She goes on to describe the human-earth relationship that emerges from Native-American spirituality and suggests that if Woolman were among us today he would be in full dialogue with this world view.

Anne Dalke ('Fully Attending to the Spirit: John Woolman and the Practice of Quaker Pedagogy') presents a spirited account of teaching Woolman in the class-

room and of Woolman 'teaching' classroom conduct. She writes: 'I find four key concepts in Woolman useful in my teaching practice: his counsel against overworking, his counsel to work outward from a motion of love, his conviction of the mutuality of the learning process, and his conviction of the necessity of humility in the teacher'. She demurs, however, with regard to the prophetic mode which colours much of Woolman's writing. She writes: 'I am too conscious of the partiality of individual insight not to insist that we rely, always, on our common dependence on one another'.

And lastly in section three, Paul Lacey's contribution ('Answerable to the Design of Our Creation: Teaching "A Plea for the Poor"') provides a succinct teaching outline, with commentary, of 'A Plea for the Poor'. It is only thirteen pages in length but bears the imprint of a master teacher and of a skilled writer. It is a distillation ready for classroom use.

The fourth section collects a brief description by Mary Moulton of her life with Woolman scholar, Phillips P. Moulton, a short essay by Phillips Moulton on the contribution of Woolman to human betterment, a tribute to Sterling Olmsted by colleague, Neil Snarr, and a fitting conclusion by Sterling Olmsted on the 'Yoga of Peacemaking' – in which Woolman and Gandhi are shown to be at one in their melding of the spiritual quest and devotion to human betterment.

*The Tendering Presence* also includes essays by Philip L. Boroughs, SJ, Paul Anderson, Michael Birkel, Mary Rose O'Reilly, Christopher Varga, and Michael P. Graves.

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