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An Introduction to Quakerism (review)

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An Introduction to Quakerism. By Pink Dandelion. Cambridge University Press, 2007. xv + 277 pp. Illustrated, graphs, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. Paper, \$19.99, cloth \$85.

This fine book is a genuinely new kind of introduction to Quakerism. It attends to the present as well as the past, and it draws profitably on the author's expertise as a sociologist of religion.

This sociological perspective results in a creative focus on three themes in Quaker history that he traces from the early days of the Quaker movement through the Quietist period, the schisms of the nineteenth century, and the diverse expressions of the twentieth.

The first is what to do with time, how to wait in the interim. Pink Dandelion acknowledges his debt to Douglas Gwyn's interpretation of the early Quaker movement as a "realizing eschatology," an "unfolding endtime." In this scheme of understanding, early Quakers believed both that a second coming could be experienced inwardly and that the world would be visibly changed. Pink Dandelion finds this helpful to explain the current challenges that Friends face. "The history of Quakerism is best understood in terms of its changing relationship to this founding experience of endtime and the necessary internal shifts which take place as a sense of endtime is replaced by one of meantime." Once transformation of the world seemed less imminent, when the New Jerusalem did not materialize in England's green and pleasant land, endtime shifted to meantime, as evidenced by solid meetinghouses built to last in the 1670s.

The second theme is how spiritual intimacy, including direct divine revelation, is experienced and described. The third is how to define and relate with the world's people, that is, non-Friends. Across time and theologies, Friends have regarded the world as a mission field, the abode of apostates, a danger to be avoided, or a society to be alternately affirmed and reformed.

The historical presentation is an excellent summary of much recent scholarship—almost to a fault, in that some readers may desire to know more of the author's evaluation of competing scholarly interpretations, which he frequently offers without comment, humbly keeping his own opinions understated.

The second part of the book is a thoughtful portrait of the contemporary situation through the examination and comparison of extracts of representative texts from across the theological spectrum in Quakerism. A strength of the book is that Friends in the southern hemisphere are included. Issues explored include the authority of Scripture and experience, ecclesiological authority, particular beliefs (God, Christ, the Light), worship, decision

making, testimony, mission, membership, diversity, and ecumenism. After conceding that the differences are great, he finds three commonalities: emphasis on inward encounter, business method, and testimony.

True to his other important studies of Quakerism, Pink Dandelion is insightful and thought-provoking. Quaker readers of many sorts will recognize themselves in his portrayal of their type of Quakers, though they may also find themselves challenged by some of his conclusions.

In short, this work makes a valuable contribution to Quaker studies, is a worthy companion and complement to Thomas Hamm's *The Quakers in America* (Columbia University Press, 2006), and deserves to be read widely.

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How the Quakers Invented America, By David Yount. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield. 2007, xix + 159pp. Bibliography and index, \$19.95.

Yount, a Quaker, author of nine previous books on religion, and a newspaper columnist with a potential readership of twenty-five million, paints an attractive portrait of today's unprogrammed meeting Friends. Most of this book is a series of inspirational essays about basic Quaker beliefs—silent meditation, Jesus, Bible, eternal life—that should appeal to many Friends and might attract outsiders to attend meetings for worship. This review is not about his idealistic vision of liberal Friends that serves to provide an introduction to Quaker beliefs and practices. Instead, it will concentrate on those chapters dealing with history and his title, "How the Quakers invented America." American history includes copious amounts of militarism, racism, sexism, greed, and oppression, but Yount does not wish to hold Friends responsible for these, and so he at times tones down his thesis to say that Quakers "contributed more than any other group to the founding ideals that sustain our national life." If true, how flattering to Friends, but the claim is more an example of his Quaker hubris than accurate history.

Yount's history fails the most basic tasks of a newspaperman: to be accurate and to check sources. His claim that Quakers made a greater contribution to American ideals than "any" other group is simply preposterous. There are so many exaggerations and factual errors in chapters 1 and 7 where he attempts to prove this thesis that readers would be well advised to skip these chapters. Pennsylvania was not the "model" for the U.S. and the Bill of Rights was not based on a "Quaker-drafted constitution of Rhode Island." In fact, there is no such document. I can't imagine where Yount learned that William Penn was the "greatest swordsman in Ireland," that seventeenth-century Quakers produced only one theologian, Robert Barclay