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Buckley's "Twenty-first Century Penn: writings on the faith and practice of the people called Quakers by William Penn" - Book Review

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Buckley, P., (ed.), *Twenty-First Century Penn: writings on the faith and practice of the people called Quakers by William Penn*, Richmond, IN: Earlham School of Religion Publications, 2003, pp. ix + 415, ISBN 1 879117 13 4, Paper, £13.50/$19.95.

With this work, compiling five separate works by William Penn, Paul Buckley joins a recent 'boom' of translating early Friends' writings into modern English.

The effort taken to make these theological, mostly apologetical works available to the modern reader, (*The Sandy Foundation Shaken; Innocency with Her Open Face; The Christian Quaker and His Divine Testimony Vindicated with A Discourse on the General Rule of Faith and Practice, and Judge of Controversy; Primitive Christianity Revived* and *The Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers*) is even more important for the fact they have long been covered by thick dust. The exception is *The Rise and Progress* which appeared in its entirety, in its due place as a preface to Fox's *Journal*, in the 1990 reprinting of Fox's *Works*. I do not quite agree with Buckley in his 'Introduction' on the degree to which these works might have been instrumental in shaping the course of the history of the Religious Society of Friends, given their highly academic nature and the average social stratum of the Quakers of the day. However, I believe Penn's activity as a 'public Friend' among his co-religionists must have been influential and I see them having bearing. Indeed, I would hesitate to call *The Sandy Foundation Shaken* an 'esoteric' writing, as Buckley does, but would acknowledge its due importance as descriptive of the time and having weight and relevance in its context, alongside the other works in the compilation. Further, besides their relevance as historical documents, I believe that these writings of Penn are still theologically relevant and compelling to modern Friends. (I should add that whilst the reasons for the choice of translating just these five works of Penn's for this compilation are to a large degree evident and well-grounded, I expect readers would have preferred to have them made more explicit.)

The result of the huge task Buckley has undertaken is the best and most successful rendering of early Quaker writings into contemporary English I have yet come across. In Buckley's treatment, long sentences, typical of Penn's time, have been successfully cut into shorter entities, without omitting substantial content – something that has not been the case in other works of a similar nature. What I perceive and consider as 'mistakes' in Buckley's text are rare and of quite a secondary nature (an example being Buckley's rendering Penn's 'It was the fault of some in ancient times...' to 'Out of weakness, some in ancient times...' in the very opening sentence of *The Sandy Foundation Shaken*). In this light it is regrettable that he fails to be successful with his translation in the cases of two oft-quoted citations from *The Rise and Progress*. By rendering the first part of Penn's famous epitaph to George Fox, 'Many sons have done virtuously in this day...' as 'Many have lived *upright* lives in this day...' [italics mine], the wider scope of the intention of Penn's expression is erroneously reduced so as to have only single meaning. Elsewhere, where Penn describes Fox's physical constitution as his having been 'a bulky person', 'a large man' is hardly an exact synonym for that. The only very substantial and factual mistake that I spotted in the whole compilation was in *The Christian Quaker*, in a place where Penn refers to the Muggletonians. It is probably a lack of knowledge of Muggletonian theology that led to some of Penn's writing being seen as 'needless' repetition typical of the style of writing of Penn and the time, when it is actually not the case in this particular context. Perhaps consulting someone with expertise in a difficult place like this would have been a good option.

There could also have been more consultation in regard to the footnotes, or at least more circumspect and critical proof-reading. Buckley's notes seem to stand in contradiction to the praiseworthy character of Buckley's core work, the main body of the text. I found both the theological and historical notes too often either erroneous or badly formulated. To give a few examples of the former ones: the term 'Homoousios' can hardly be equated with simply 'Trinitarian' despite the course that the history of the early Church took; not all Protestants deny that the consecrated bread and wine is the actual body and blood of Christ (the Lutherans for example maintain this view). The Familists were hardly a people 'that held that religion consisted chiefly in the exercise of love (an idea probably derived from the more 'official' appellation of the group, the Family of Love; luckily this mistake is corrected in another footnote). The historical remarks follow very much in the same vein as the theological ones, despite the one or two to be found in relation to *The Rise and Progress* which avoid the tendentious, 'Quakerly' and quite ahistorical representation evident in many places in Buckley's 'Introduction'.

Some other shortcomings and deficiencies also attend the footnoting. It is the Muggletonians, not the Familists, that would have required an explanatory footnote in relation to *The Christian Quaker*, being of more importance with respect to that work. This would have been more important and, I believe, of more interest, too, to the reader.

In many places an everyday reader would have surely benefited from footnoted information about the contemporary historical situation Penn refers to, or against which his reflections are to be understood. Indeed, overall, historical introductions to the context of each of the works (including some explanation over the question of Penn's and Whitehead's 'co-work' in *The Christian Quaker*, which is seemingly clear but has some ambiguity to it) would have done no harm. These critical remarks, though not major issues in their own right, are numerous in quantity, and this reader is left with a feeling that the work went to press in haste. Some inconsistencies in some minor and quite rare, yet striking, respects to do with the layout also contribute to this sense.

But in giving to the reader in their entirety the Bible references that Penn alludes to in his text mostly without making them explicit, Buckley has again done superb work. Whilst this requires very frequent reiterating of the same passages it greatly benefits a reader not familiar with the Bible, and at the same times shows Penn's manner of using the Scriptures in his writing. He quotes them even more freely than Fox or Barclay (also mingling different passages together as the other two do): the two first pieces, *The Sandy Foundation Shaken* and *The Innocency with Her Open Face*, are almost as full of the quotations from the Bible and biblical language as is the case with Fox.

In the light of the huge task Buckley has taken upon himself and completed, the rather unavoidable deficiencies and shortcomings are quite natural and understandable. Occasionally but very rarely he misses references to Scriptural passages Penn has clearly had in mind, also occasionally referring to only one of the two passages Penn is evidently alluding to. Some odd Bible references Penn

has given in the margin of the original are left unquoted in the footnotes, and in some rare places it seems dubious to me whether Penn is actually alluding to a particular biblical passage given by Buckley, or any at all, or whether it is just a preconception of Penn's worldview (though obviously not detached from a biblical one).

Looked at from the perspective of scholarly use, I personally found Buckley's giving information on the theologians and other contemporaries of Penn to whom he refers, and whose reputation has not lasted through to the present day, to be most useful; in some of these cases I craved more information, but the lack of it is to be understood given the nature of the work. The same is true where Penn refers to the writings of Church Fathers or those of the early, leading Continental Reformers – details of the exact places in their works Penn is making the reference to would have also been of much benefit, especially given the prospect of having the full bibliographical details (former printings etc.) on each work included in the texts.

In addition to the useful identification of the contemporary persons Penn makes mention of, some of the other informative footnotes by Buckley might well prove to be useful for scholars. Pointing out some rarely quoted Biblical passages (especially in relation to the early Quaker writings) as underpinning Penn's words is useful even for a scholar quite familiar with the Bible.

Indeed, as a whole, Buckley's work is a very good 'tool' for scholarly purposes and highly recommended to be used alongside the original Penn. I hope that in making these writings of Penn more easily available to the students of Quakerism and others, the enormous job Buckley has completed will prove to be fruitful also in raising interest in the study of Penn and early Quaker theology and history.

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