

2009

Dandelion's "An Introduction to Quakerism" - Book Review

Martyn Bennett

Nottingham Trent University, England

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bennett, Martyn (2009) "Dandelion's "An Introduction to Quakerism" - Book Review," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 13: Iss. 2, Article 11.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol13/iss2/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quaker Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

DANDELION, P., *An Introduction to Quakerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 142. ISBN 0-521-60088-X, Hardback, £45; Paperback, £14.99 and *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xvi + 277. ISBN 978-0-19-920679-7, Paperback, £7.99.

Prolific author and editor Pink Dandelion published two introductions to Quakers and Quakerism in short order: one in Oxford University Press's ... *Very Short Introduction* series, the other with Cambridge University Press. Such a pairing of commissions might seem like a heaven-sent gift: presenting the opportunity to use the same research base and the same material. However, the challenge here is to avoid making one, in this case the ... *Very Short*... one look like a précis of the longer work. Readers who start with one might feel cheated if they found too much of a cross-over, and as for reviewers...

Naturally, in terms of subject matter, at the outset it is clear that similar things would be discussed—history, forms of worship, the great separation, and so on—and of course they all feature in both works. However, although the word ‘introduction’ is used in both titles, the similarity largely ends there. The very short book is laid out in a straightforward manner with the brief chapters starting with ‘Who are the Quakers?’ before then turning to an historical approach, and following up with explorations of worship, beliefs, and so on. The longer work is divided into two main sections, the larger of them examining in far more depth the history, nature, and development of Quaker theology and the second looking at Quakerism in the modern world.

In both books the histories begin with the young George Fox and the travels which became as much an inward spiritual journey as a religious progress through revolutionary Britain. Dandelion is careful to point out that Fox was not alone, either in his early journeys but also in progressing along a spiritual path. Other prominent figures especially, like the Fells from the northwest, but also midlanders like Fox himself and Elizabeth Hooton who made the dangerous journey into the intolerant and oppressive puritan heartlands of north America, feature to greater or lesser degrees. Nevertheless, Fox and his experience remained crucial, for his personal revelation formed the core of Quaker belief and practice. Dandelion points out that this was no especial or restricted revelation on a road to Damascus. Instead the 'Road from Bradford' brought a revelation that was actually available to all. Of course the Protestant Church of post-Reformation England was believed by its founders to require an educated ministry with degrees that only could be awarded in England at Oxford and Cambridge, but to Fox this was missing God's point: there had to be a further step away from the strictures and structures of the Roman Church. Quakers were not alone in holding this belief in a need to move beyond the sixteenth-century Reformation—mid-century Britain and Ireland was replete with seekers (small 's') but most of the children of the revolution, from the incredibly formalised Presbyterians through to the Muggletonians, still 'sought after teachers' as Gerard Winstanley would have it. Even the most radical groups had leaders. Fox and the Quakers were different as the only authority—earthly and spiritually—was God. Communion was personal and with Him and not mediated by anyone else. Universal communion, enabled through this personal relationship, also promised Universal Salvation. Crucially, as Dandelion would have it this equality led to breaking from the trap of double predestination.

Usefully for such a book, *An Introduction...* contains a good deal of analysis and scholarly intervention. An especially useful part is a study of the period from the later seventeenth century to the early nineteenth, which has great value in itself. Dandelion argues that the period requires more attention, but suggests that the Great Separation, among other things, has left the period under-researched and in need of work. It is currently and historically unpopular, he says, with both scholars and other Quakers alike. The later parts of the book lead the reader through the nineteenth century into the work of Quakers in the modern world, with all-too-brief explorations of current activity across the globe.

These books can be used together for anyone with a focussed interest: one text can lead to another, with a straight reading of the very short one leading to an exploration of the second. However, the readings can be less linear with themes being explored from one to the other. For academics looking at Quakerism with students, either approach could work, especially where time is limited. Dandelion did not fall into any of the traps such a serendipitous dual commission could have led him into and has produced two works which stand alone, yet can be used together.

Martyn Bennett
Nottingham Trent University
England