


2006

Gardina's "Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts" - Book Review

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Recommended Citation

Louis, Jeanne-Henriette (2006) "Gardina's "Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts" - Book Review," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol10/iss1/7>

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BOOK REVIEWS

PESTANA, Carla Gardina, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. xii + 197. ISBN 0-521-52504-7, Paper £15.99. Reprint from 1991 (hardback).

Pestana's 2004 book was exactly reprinted from the 1991 print. Only the cover summary was slightly changed. So this is not research revisited, but a response to the interest which made the first publication out of print.

The topic might look very specialised and irrelevant for our modern times at first, but one should go beyond this first impression.

Pestana compares the fate of Quakers and Baptists in colonial Massachusetts, chronologically starting with the Baptists church, whose members first came to Massachusetts in the first half of the seventeenth century, and going on with Friends from 1656 (the time of their first immigration) onwards. Both groups had to suffer from the Puritans' intolerance, but, following the paths opened by Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, they militated for religious diversity in a very forbidding context. They challenged the Puritans' patriarchal authority.

The author focuses on Salem Monthly Meeting and the Boston Baptist Church for her comparison. She points out that the main common point between the two groups, besides their 'boldness', was the refusal of infant baptism, although she underlines the fact that Friends were more radical than the Baptists by refusing exterior baptism altogether, and claiming a preference for inner baptism, as explained by Robert Barclay in his *Apology*. Baptists only postponed baptism until the adult age, and made it a sign of deliberate choice of the Baptist faith. She reminds the reader that antipedobaptism was a burning issue in colonial Massachusetts at this time. It was the Baptists and the Quakers' honour to create the issue instead of yielding to the Puritans in a docile way. This issue linked the two groups together in the seventeenth century, but it faded in the eighteenth century with the Puritans' reluctant toleration of antipedobaptism.

To have spotted an interesting role played by both Baptists and Quakers in colonial Massachusetts and made it into a topic and a title is the particular merit of Carla Gardina Pestana. It is a rich topic. Personally I bought the 1991 publication (but did not read it!) before I was asked to write a review of the 2004 one (now I have read it!). But I remember why I bought the 1991 one several years ago. Working on the history of Nantucket island, I had noticed that the first European settlers on this island (1659) were either Baptists or influenced by the Anabaptists.

Thomas Macy, from Salisbury, was a Baptist who was fined for sheltering Quakers caught in a storm. This story is dramatically narrated by John Greenleaf Whittier in his poem *The Exiles*. Tristram Coffin had shown Puritans that he disagreed with their law against lay preachers. Edward Starbuck had been accused by the Puritans of professing anabaptism. These founders of the Nantucket British community moved to Nantucket for the sake of religious liberty, to escape the stifling atmosphere created by the Puritans. Then Peter Folger, who became the key figure of Nantucket after 1664, had become a Baptist in 1660. He was sympathetic to the Friends' philosophy, and was the spiritual guide of Mary Starbuck, who founded the Quaker community in 1708. As the works of Roland Warren (*Mary Coffin Starbuck and the Early History of Nantucket* [1987]) and Robert Leach and Peter Gow (*Quaker Nantucket* [1997]) show, Baptist and Quaker history are entangled in the history of the island. And considering that Nantucket had a majority of Quakers in the eighteenth century, Nantucket history is an important piece in the puzzle of the United States' Quaker history and its relations with Europe.

So the success of the 1991 book is not surprising to me. A comparison between Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts is not just a footnote to the United States' colonial history, and deserved to be done in depth. The reprint is most welcome.

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