

2006

Dandelion's "The Liturgies of Quakerism" - Book Review

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Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul (2006) "Dandelion's "The Liturgies of Quakerism" - Book Review," *Quaker Studies*: Vol. 10: Iss. 2, Article 15.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerstudies/vol10/iss2/15>

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DANDELION, Pink, *The Liturgies of Quakerism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 138. ISBN 0-7546-3128-1, Hardback, £50.00; ISBN 0-7546-3129-X, Paper, £16-99.

Commentaries on the formalistic foibles of Quaker programmed worship have been many, especially by unprogrammed Friends, but this book mounts a sustained and thought-provoking critique of formal developments within the unprogrammed tradition of Friends. In this book by Pink Dandelion, Quaker approaches to worship are analyzed in the light of several intersecting features, including eschatology, liturgy, sectarianism, experience, liberalism, and spiritual intimacy. In considering the root meaning of 'liturgy' as the work that humans do both in furthering human receptivity to the divine presence as well as in attempting to deal with divine absence, Pink Dandelion confronts his subject in ways sure to be helpful to programmed and unprogrammed traditions alike.

The first chapter ('The End of Time and the Beginning of Quakerism', pp. 8-20) develops the thesis that central to the beginnings of the Quaker movement was the experience of loving intimacy with God, signalling the second coming of Christ and a new era that displaced chronological (*chronos*) time with momentous (*kairos*) time. Early Friends thus saw themselves as heralds of the New Covenant in ways that put an end to forms and outward devices in elevating the priority of inward and authentic religious experience. From there Pink Dandelion develops a thoughtful analysis of 'The Liturgy of Silence' (pp. 21-33) and shows how apocalyptic visions of a people gathered in white raiment (Rev. 3, 4, 7, and 10), along with consciousness of the

half-hour of silence in Rev. 8:1, brought an end-time consciousness to the practice of silent waiting before the divine presence. Vocal ministry both arose out of the silence and functioned to call people back to attentive waiting in the silence.

With the movement of Friends into their second and third generations, however, Quakerism saw several changes in its approaches to worship and community. Robert Barclay, for instance, provided a biblical and apologetic basis for seeing Quakerism as the restoration of primitive Christian experience, which functioned to domesticate silence as a conventional practice, rather than seeing it as an end-time event ('In the World but Not of It', pp. 34-52). From there, the move into Quietism distorted silent worship even further. Rather than seeing the Quaker movement as called by God to change the world in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ, Friends developed a culture of Quietism, creating conventions designed to distinguish them from markers of worldliness. From there, the eventual Quaker divisions are perfectly understandable, and in his fourth chapter ('Different Confessions, Different Liturgies', pp. 53-73) Pink Dandelion shows how the Gurneyite and Orthodox attempts to recover the spiritual vitality lost by Friends in the Quietist era led to differing confessions and liturgies.

'Present-Day Practice' among Friends shows an impressive diversity among those claiming a common heritage, and to some degree identity (pp. 74-93). Palpable within Evangelical Friends International churches (and most Meetings which are associated to Friends United Meeting, totalling about seventy per cent of Friends in America and eighty per cent worldwide) is the desire to enter into an intimate experience of the Divine presence, aided by singing, Scripture, preaching and open worship. It is assumed the Holy Spirit can lead in the preparation of various elements in the meeting for worship, not just in the gathered meeting, and these Friends see direct encounter with the present Christ in corporate worship as being in continuity with the faith and experience of early Friends. Conservative Friends, while smaller in number, have sought to maintain purity in matters of faith and practice, including adherence to Christ and Scripture, while at the same time maintaining an unprogrammed approach to worship. Liberal (Friends General Conference and unaffiliated) Friends in Britain and North America have largely abandoned their Christian and biblical language regarding aspects of faith and practice, and silence in worship has evolved from the expectation of a transformative encounter with the Divine to a setting in which meditation and conventional insight may be respectively practiced and obtained.

As 'The Means to Experience' (pp. 94-112), unprogrammed worship has morphed into a 'culture of silence' in which experience is prioritized over theological understandings. In contrast to two types of Seekers in the first generation of Friends, one seeking to recover basic Christianity in restoring the first coming of Christ and the other seeking to actualise the second coming of Christ – both held together in the faith and experience of Fox – Liberal Friends pose a third type of Seekers, namely, 'those who prefer to seek than to find' (p. 94). This culture of silence is maintained by means of rules for speech and silence, serving to produce experiential outcomes which reinforce the values of the culture. Because vocalization is devalued and silence is valued, theological incongruity and inadequacy go unnoticed, and the place

of God in worship and in the life of the meeting becomes not only muted, but inconsequential.

In his final chapter ('Reading Liberal Silence: New Intimacies and the End of Time', pp. 113-26), Pink Dandelion ties his previous assertions together into an impressive synthesis. Within his analysis, Pink Dandelion astutely notes that the moving away from a dynamic understanding of God among Liberal Friends coincides with the move toward formalism in silence, and he draws several inferences from this nexus. The move away from end-time and mean-time theology among Liberal Friends leads to a focus on the social rather than the Divine; a commitment to the 'absolute perhaps' as a new form of agnostic dogmatism; certainty about uncertainty; and the agency of the meeting rather than the agency of the Divine. As a result, unprogrammed worship furthers aversional and restorational priorities rather than transformational (seventeenth century) or purificational (nineteenth century) ones. Silence thus 'buys the time and magic of rest in a busy world' and intimacy is seen as an organisational principle rather than a factor of transformative encounter with the Divine. In short, the table at the centre of the Meeting for Worship 'bedecked with flowers [as] a quasi-altar' becomes merely a 'celebration of an aesthetic'. With a dynamic sense of God out of the picture, silent worship thus becomes a liturgical form, similar to other religious form to which Friends have long objected, except that it remains without a theological basis. Whether this liturgical form will be life-producing in the long run, only time will tell.

This is an engaging and intriguing piece. Certainly Pink Dandelion is correct in pointing out many of the basic continuities between the unprogrammed worship of early and contemporary Friends, and his analysis that the moving away from a dynamic sense of God among Liberal Friends is a correlative factor of liturgical formalism in silent worship is provocative – and probably correct. One might even see the relationship going in both directions. Formalism is required by a diminishing sense of the Divine, in order for things to run smoothly, and creeping liturgicalism ever shifts the focus away from the divine to the human factor in worship, thus making worship a creaturely venture. One could make the same argument regarding Fundamentalism-and-Modernism debates among Friends; the hardening of a position leads to dogmatism and a diminishment of spiritual vitality. In my view, this question is the most penetrating and significant point of this book.

Less certain, in my thinking, is the degree to which understandings of eschatology (end-time, meantime, and no time) have been the central factors in differences between the religious experience and faith of Fox, Barclay, and Friends interpreters ever since. Indeed, setting up and furthering the Kingdom of God was central to the conviction and experience of Fox, Howgill, and other first-generation Quakers, but some of this also continued in later generations. Barclay's systematisation of the beliefs of Fox and others indeed resulted in something of a domestication of pristine convictions, but some of this is simply a factor of the relation between the map and the territory. Theological description and analysis of how to know God and the one whom he sent (Jn. 17:3) provided for Barclay an apology for the 'true Christian divinity', and transformational encounters with the Divine are certainly central to his project. Correct is Pink Dandelion's analysis, however, of the cooling of those

spiritual fires within Quietism and the attempts to restore spiritual vitality to Friends in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Eschatology is one key to the equation; another might be simply the factor of direct encounter with and responsiveness to the divine. Then again, that itself is an eschatological event!

Recovering a sense of Divine calling among Friends indeed seems central to the spiritual vitality of the movement. However one sees the issue of time – whether as moving forward toward the Second Coming of Christ or whether we see ourselves as partners with Christ in the unfolding of the divine will on earth as perfectly as it is in heaven – an intriguing question is whether Quakerism devoid of this spiritual centre can long endure as Quakerism. If indeed the basis of the movement is a dynamic Christocentricity and living in the unmediated and spiritual reality of the risen Lord's power and presence, each of the Quaker testimonies and doctrines has this reality as its origin and goal. Therefore, without a dynamic sense of God's work and working at the center of Faith and Practice, not only a Quaker understanding of worship, but also of ministry, sacraments, decision-making, convincement, peace work, social action, simplicity, and integrity lose their energising core. In that sense, the scope of Pink Dandelion's book extends beyond implications for silent worship to all aspects of spiritual vitality for the Religious Society of Friends.

Overall, this book is a fascinating treatment of an issue central to the spiritual vitality of the Quaker movement. While targeted primarily at the liberal and unprogrammed traditions of Friends, this book will have significant implications for all members of the wider family of Friends, and the broader Christian movement. Beyond the predictable *impasses* between programmed vs. unprogrammed, pastoral vs. nonpastoral, and biblical vs. nonbiblical debates is a fresh and compelling analysis of the evolution of silence into a liturgical form. While creating time and space within which to attend and respond to the divine requires quiet waiting in the presence of God, this cannot be seen authentically as a transaction or as a thing to do in order to 'get' something from beyond. Indeed, the 'work of the people' must be from first to last a faithful response to the Divine initiative, and this conviction is central to the heart of Quaker faith and practice, as well as to the heart of the Gospel, proper. This book helps us get closer to that standard by casting into sharp relief its various and lesser alternatives.

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