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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

T. L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb's War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-19-510833-7, 188 pp. cloth. \$45.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL P. GRAVES

Three religious sects emerged and survived from tumultuous seventeenth-century England: the Quakers, the Baptists, and the Muggletonians, whose last adherent apparently died in 1979 (Underwood 14). As is well known by readers of this publication, Quakers have received increasing and serious attention by a range of scholars in several disciplines. The Muggletonians have also been the subject of serious study, perhaps out of proportion to their relative insignificance in light of subsequent social and religious history. The least studied of the three sects is the Baptists, all the more surprising because of their formidable contemporary membership and significant worldwide influence. T. L. Underwood seeks to address the comparative paucity of scholarship on early Baptists in a well-conceived and carefully written book that addresses Baptist origins and early evolution by means of contrasting early Baptists and Quakers.

Underwood, a professor of history at the University of Minnesota, Morris, unfolds for the reader the seventeenth-century Baptist-Quaker conflict in chapters that view their debate through the lens of "primitivism": "Whatever their social origins, members of both groups strongly identified with the primitive church, the Baptists more strictly than Presbyterians and Independents, and the Quakers more intensely still." (11) This conceptual frame allows Underwood to compare and contrast early Baptist and Quaker theological and behavioral commitments in a dispassionate light that comes across as fair to both sides and that, perforce, stresses at least a partially contextual focus. His chapters deal with seventeenth-century Quaker and Baptist views of scripture, the person of Christ, soteriology and eschatology, baptism and the Lord's supper, the nature of the church, and the concept of "the light within." Throughout the book Underwood displays a wide acquaintance with significant secondary sources dealing with the religious struggles of

the period, but the real strength of the book is Underwood's knowledge and fair handling of primary sources, which he quotes with frequency in both text and detailed and informative end notes. The spine of this volume is its masterful weighing and interweaving of primary source material.

In the 1670s Quakers and Baptists actually went head to head in a series of public debates in London. Underwood routinely refers to the surviving texts of these debates to capture the sense of conceptual and practical contrasts between the two sects that only the immediacy of public oral debate can dramatically expose. In his concluding chapter Underwood draws the book thematically together with reference to "the great London debates of the 1670s," where "Baptists were communicating to the broader audience that they were not radical...but part of the Nonconformist mainstream, and were defending Christianity against the heresies of Quakerism." On the same occasions, Quakers "were denying that they were radical and were claiming to be not only Christian but adherents to the purest form of primitive Christianity." (123)

Some readers may be put off, as I was initially, by Underwood's consistent use of "inner light" rather than "inward light," in reference to the Light of Christ or the light within. To my knowledge, the term "inward light" was de rigueur among seventeenth-century Friends. But this is a comparatively small matter in a book that is so highly informative in many other ways.

Hidden in Plain Sight: Quaker Women's Writings, 1650-1700, edited by Mary Garman, Judith Applegate, Margaret Benefiel, and Dortha Meredith. Wallingford PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1996: ISBN 087574-923-2, xx & 540 pp. \$20.

REVIEWED BY HUGH BARBOUR

The brief foreword by Rosemary Radford Ruether, though it sets a keynote of early Quaker women's achievements, should not mislead the casual reader of this massive anthology. Few of these works have been reprinted since 1700. Most are available only at Haverford, Swarthmore, Harvard, and London Friends House libraries, though some have been discussed in the flood of recent writings on Quaker women, well summarized by Mary Garman's Introduction. This book is a complement to the 622 pages of *Early*

Quaker Writings, 1650-1700, which Arthur Roberts and I edited in 1973 (it largely ignored women's works, and often-reprinted works such as Fox's *Journal*, Barclay's *Apology*, and the works of Penn). It uses the same sectional division into Proclamation tracts, Journals and autobiographies, Theological works, and Epistles on church order. (There is no fifth section on social ethics, covered mainly in advices about hospitality, thrift and honesty, and teaching children to "keep the Yoak upon that Nature thats Proud, Stubborn, or Disobedient to Parents." [p. 486]) This book will be a rich resource for a generation of scholars.

Unlike other anthologies, the 33 short works transcribed here by Dortha Meredith (out of 651 Englishwomen's works published in that century) are presented in full. The complete texts imply that Margaret Fell stood up to protest when Fox first preached at Ulverston, but then sat down in silence, and that the 7,000 "hand-maidens of the Lord" who signed petitions in 1659 to abolish parish tithes were not undercounted (though a few names recur). A lovely "find" is Elizabeth Bathurst, whose summary of Quaker doctrine was clearer, shorter, and more winsome than Howgill's, Isaac Penington's, Nayler's, and Barclay's, which preceded her. She too profited, like many modern Friends, from her youth as a literate Presbyterian. For Margaret Fell, the editors used her complete works, rather than the oldest editions or the microfilmed manuscripts available at Earlham; her original letter to the prisoners at Appleby [p. 455] was addressed to James Nayler as well as Howgill.

Judith Applegate edited the vivid narratives: Most of the authors had been jailed for months. Sarah Chevers and Katharine Evans spent three years in the Catholic Inquisition's prison at Malta. Many of these tracts were written in prison. Hence they warned all Friends against "flying [from] the cross." Though repeatedly near shipwreck in America, Joan Vokins, like many women, could only justify absence from her husband and children by fear of God's judgment if she rejected God's call. Until 1684, Quaker women risked publishing mostly to warn or condemn opponents, which is why self-deprecating Mary Penington did not publish her "Account" of her life. Barbara Blaugdone, however, felt no qualms.

Non-scholarly Quaker readers may be helped by two warnings: keep a King James Bible and concordance handy—the texts themselves are plumcakes of biblical quotations. Most, such as invective against Puritan pastors as false prophets and idle shepherds, or

Friends' weapons being spiritual, not carnal, had already become standard phrases for earlier Quaker writers. Thus, our challenge is to notice the sensitivity with which these women applied them. Second, notice the context of each tract. The editors have presented most of what can be known about their authors, and briefly footnote the persecution. But only one note links Susannah Blandford with William Rogers and shows her opposing George Keith, Thomas Budd, and Thomas Curtis. Each of these men formed "splinter" Meetings, which called themselves "Christian Quakers" (a title also used in 1674 by Penn and Whitehead) with meanings as diverse as similar uses of the phrase today. The "separatists" stressed the risen Christ's physical Ascension (most early Friends, as in Rebecca Travers' tract, identified Christ with the Spirit of Truth that enlightens every person's conscience). They also opposed Fox's and Fell's initiative in setting up separate Women's Meetings for business at the Monthly and Quarterly Meeting level (the separate Women's London Yearly Meeting only began in 1784). Margaret Benefiel shows the mutual support of these Meetings and these authors. Modern readers need the help of W.C. Braithwaite's *Second Period*, Christine Trevett's *Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century*, and Arnold Lloyd's *Quaker Social History, 1669-1738*, to understand these texts and decode the early Friends' biblical symbols.

T. R. Miles, *Speaking of God: Theism, Atheism and the Magnus Image*. York, England: William Sessions Ltd., 1998.

REVIEWED BY LARRY KUENNING

T. R. Miles contends that literalism is the great danger to serious religious thought. To combat it he uses an acknowledged caricature, a supernatural and non-material deity named Magnus with the worst traits of a literalistic God. He urges us to replace Magnus by recognizing that religious language deals with "profound truth" and not "standard truth." According to Miles, God not only has no literal "right hand" but cannot even be said to "exist" in any literal sense.

Surprisingly, though he repeatedly demands that literalists define their terms carefully, Miles nowhere defines his own key terms "literal," "supernatural" and "non-material," and his attempt to define "profound truth" and "standard truth" consists only of a few examples with no clear explanation. Thus readers cannot tell what real

beliefs he caricatures. Unfortunately this failure typifies the entire performance.

For instance, Miles argues that the idea of a nonmaterial, supernatural deity was unknown before the sixteenth century, but his history is slapdash and plagued with blunders, such as citing the antireligious Lucretius as his sole sample of ancient Roman religious thought. Again, his key argument (that if “the right hand of God” is not literal then God’s emotions, will, masculinity, and existence cannot be literal either) occupies a perfunctory two pages; it consists largely of repeating that there is no difference between one category and the next, and does not even take notice of contrary arguments such as Abraham Heschel’s case for a grieving God in *The Prophets*. Yet again, the proposed limits on “meaningful” statements about “real” beings are too narrow for real science, which describes such things as the interior of black holes where no “pay-off observation” is possible. Finally, in expounding, doctrine by doctrine, how his preferred category of “profound truth” or “mythos” can substitute for a logically self-contradictory “literalism,” Miles never explains the “profound” version of any doctrine coherently but only asserts that there is one.

The book’s central tactic consists of sundering a religion’s existence beliefs from its value judgments; ridiculing the former in isolation as trivial, “logically self-defeating,” and “degrading to God”; and urging us instead to adopt the value judgments in equal isolation. The possibility of considering a religious outlook as a whole is never addressed.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Donald F. Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Brethren, 1708-1995*. Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1995. ISBN 0-87178-003-8, 675 pp. \$39.95. A thorough study by a respected scholar of a pacifist Christian movement somewhat parallel to Friends. The book details Brethren efforts at biblical faithfulness in respect to peacemaking, gender equality, cultural leavening, and doctrinal interpretation.

CORRECTION

Two alert readers pointed out a goof in my review in *QRT* #90 of the new edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Joseph Ginder and Arthur Worrall both reminded me that the editor of that work, E. A. Livingstone, is a woman. I had used a masculine pronoun. My apologies to Ms. Livingstone. Sorry for the error! [aor]