

9-2018

Review of Paul Buckley, *Primitive Christianity Revived: Translated into Modern English* (San Francisco, Inner Light Books, 2018) and *Primitive Quakerism Revived: Living as Friends in the Twenty-First Century* (San Francisco, Inner Light Books, 2018)

Paul N. Anderson
George Fox University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt>

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

Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul N. (2018) "Review of Paul Buckley, *Primitive Christianity Revived: Translated into Modern English* (San Francisco, Inner Light Books, 2018) and *Primitive Quakerism Revived: Living as Friends in the Twenty-First Century* (San Francisco, Inner Light Books, 2018)," *Quaker Religious Thought*. Vol. 131 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt/vol131/iss1/7>

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 Religious Thought by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

REVIEW OF PAUL BUCKLEY,
*PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY REVIVED:
TRANSLATED INTO MODERN
ENGLISH* (SAN FRANCISCO, INNER
LIGHT BOOKS, 2018)

AND

*PRIMITIVE QUAKERIS REVIVED:
LIVING AS FRIENDS IN THE TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY* (SAN FRANCISCO,
INNER LIGHT BOOKS, 2018)

PAUL ANDERSON

In translating William Penn's analysis of the early Quaker movement into Modern English and in expanding on its meaning for reviving the spirit of early Quakerism for the 21st century, Quaker theologian and historian Paul Buckley has performed a great service. These two books go hand-in-hand, and individuals and reading groups alike would benefit greatly from reading these books and considering their meaning for today. The text is readable, and Buckley's language is readily accessible. Thus, in rendering William Penn's *Primitive Christianity Revived* in a welcoming form, and in expanding upon its meaning as a source of spiritual renewal for contemporary Friends, Paul Buckley serves readers well in his latest books, published by Inner Light Books.¹

Following the example of Dean Freiday, whose *Barclay's Apology in Modern English* made the early Quaker classic highly accessible to present-day Friends,² Buckley's paraphrased version of Penn's *Primitive Christianity Revived* is helpful in several ways. First, Buckley introduces the work, reminding the reader of the setting in which Penn wrote and clarifying what he was trying to do.³ Second, some of the archaic and awkward diction is clarified, as well as sentences shortened, enhancing the readability of Penn's work.⁴ Unlike Freiday's

paraphrase, however, Buckley does not condense the piece overall, although some of the content is rearranged, with Scripture references listed at the end. Third, Buckley renders the chapters and subsections of Penn's work clearly so that the reader has a good sense of the flow and progression of the book. Overall, Buckley's translation is to be preferred for common uses of his work, although earlier versions should be cited for academic references to Penn's thought.

In his second volume, Buckley moves beyond the revival of primitive Christianity—Penn's original vision for the Friends movement, to the revival of primitive Quakerism—a reality needed among languishing sectors of the Friends movement today. Buckley begins his appeal autobiographically, citing his own experience among unprogrammed and pastoral Friends. In the introduction, he poses "Ten Signs We Need a Revival," including observations that God is not the center of our lives and meetings, the "encrusting" of outward Quaker characteristics, and delights in being admired over and against being willing to stand for the truth—challenging society (pp. 1-10). Buckley then offers "Eight Disclosures," including his belief that there *is* a God, his confession that he is both a Christian and a Quaker, and his convictions that God communicates directly with each person and that Friends have a calling in service to God (pp. 10-18).

Buckley then moves on to sketch what a Quaker revival might look like, including utopian revival and radical revival (Chapter 1, pp. 19-26). This is followed by a historical overview of early Quaker movement, where he outlines the contributions of George Fox, Robert Barclay, William Penn, and others (Chapter 2, pp. 27-51). Three of Penn's essential convictions are here outlined: the Inward Light, worship in Spirit and in Truth, and marks of a true Christian (pp. 38-41). The latter builds on Penn's last chapter, as he addressed testimonies of Friends in the late 17th century. From there, Buckley poses half a dozen central concepts of early Friends, held to be relevant in later generations, as well: the God or spirit of the world, the Lamb's War, buying and selling, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, salvation, and perfection (pp. 41-52). He then sketches a number of changes in Quaker Faith and Practice over the centuries (Chapter 3, pp. 53-104) and outlines how "Primitive Quakerism Revived" would look in today's world (Chapter 4, pp. 105-132). Buckley closes his book with a chapter on "Being Leaven" in the world (Chapter 5, 133-135) and twelve Queries for consideration (pp. 136-137). These include such simple questions as:

- Am I a Quaker? What does that mean to me? What marks my spiritual community as Quaker?
- Where is God in my life? How do I worship God? How is God manifest in the heart of my community?
- What spiritual disciplines enliven my spirit and guide my days? How does my community facilitate spiritual growth?
- Is my life rooted in integrity? How does my community help me to be truthful in all ways?
- When have I been led to seek the will of God? Does my community engage in spiritual discernment?
- Do I live in harmony with all creation? Does my community exercise responsible stewardship?

Additional queries address aspects of accountability within the meeting, love and spiritual communion within community, avoiding temporal distractions, a commitment to peace and nonviolence, expressing loving disagreement when appropriate, and choosing to do things that are hard. The book is seasoned with 66 classic quotations by leading Friends (p. xi), including ten by George Fox, nine by William Penn, and five by Margaret Fell. Many of these quotations are offset in large italic font, which displays them with prominence. Like *Primitive Christianity Revived*, *Primitive Quakerism Revived* is printed in large, generous type, and Inner Light Books is to be commended on the grace and accessibility of these publications. They are highly readable, lending themselves to good use and meaningful service to readers—individually and in community.

Overall, there are few downsides with these books; I commend them to being used in service to a renewed appreciation of the early Friends movement and its charism among the churches and in the world. They will be of value to liberal and evangelical Friends—unprogrammed and pastoral Friends—alike. I do have a question about the character of spiritual revival; it might be less programmatic and more of a mystery than Buckley suggests. In my experience, when people have a sense that God’s Spirit is moving powerfully—in healing, convicting, transforming ways—they cannot but be drawn into the Day of Visitation, where the Holy Spirit is poured out without measure. Spiritual renewal also tends to expand beyond the confines of a particular group or movement, so in that sense, the only way that primitive Quakerism can be revived is to seek and embrace again the

realities encountered by early Christians, as tongues of fire and rushing winds settled upon God's people gathered—transcending bounds of race, culture, gender, status, and even denominational loyalties.

Buckley would agree, I imagine, and the great value of learning from what God has done in the past is that it opens our hearts and minds to what God might yet be doing, within us and among us, in the present and the future. The great hope that Buckley puts forward in these books centers on the conviction that God might not yet be finished with the Religious Society of Friends. Whether such becomes a reality, of course, hinges upon the degree to which we are receptive and responsive to the divine initiative. As William Penn says in closing his book,⁵ “By God's grace, we have been called to be a people, giving praise through God's beloved Son, our ever-blessed and only Redeemer, Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.”

ENDNOTES

1. These books accompany several others contributed by Paul Buckley, including: *Dear Friend: The Letters and Essays of Elias Hicks* (Inner Light Books, 2011); *The Journal of Elias Hicks* (Inner Light Books, 2009); *The Essential Elias Hicks* (Inner Light Books, 2013); and *The Quaker Bible Reader*, co-edited with Stephen Angell (Richmond, IN: Earlham Press, 2006).
2. Robert Barclay, *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, edited by Dean Freiday (Elberon, NJ: Hemlock Press, 1967).
- 3 Pp. xi-xvii.
4. This is Buckley's revision of his original translation (Richmond, IN: Earlham School of Religion, 2003).
5. William Penn, *Primitive Christianity Revived*, p. 69.