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REVIEW OF *THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO QUAKERISM*,
ED. BY STEPHEN ANGELL AND PINK
DANDELION (NEW YORK:
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS,
2018)

JULIE PEYTON

This is a fine book, and while it should be of interest to anyone with an interest in world religions, I particularly recommend it to those of you who identify as Quaker, no matter what branch (or twig) of the Quaker family tree you occupy. The book is well-written (for the most part, but more on that in a minute), and is nicely divided into manageable chunks, and filled with variety – history, literature, social justice, women’s issues, cultural diversity, conflicts, stories of faithful people, and more. I emphasize another aspect of that variety: this book has two editors and multiple authors, who bring their multiple voices and experiences from their regions of the globe. The book thus feels like a good sampling of our early-21st Century Religious Society of Friends. The *form of the book* itself tells you how Quakers value the individual’s experience of this Way of being in the world.

I don’t voluntarily read history books, and so I approached Part 1: History of Quaker Faith & Practice with stoic resignation; yet I was quickly charmed by the content and the style of the writing. The book begins with three chapters of Quaker history, each covering approximately one century, and I found them riveting. These chapters are easy to read, that is, not overly-academic in style and not dwelling on dates, deaths, and wars, but rather picking out interesting stories to illustrate the events and environment of the times, and not glossing over the problems and conflicts but rather giving them a humanity that feels very present-day.

I was almost disappointed to leave the history chapters, but Part 2: Expressions of the Quaker Faith beckoned, with its first chapter simply titled, “Literature.” Here the author of this chapter sneakily included more history, and it blended beautifully with the first three chapters.

In fact, that is a common thread in this part: the authors showing how each of the chosen expressions (literature, social and environmental justice, peacemaking, education, and simplicity/material-goods) has evolved over Quaker history. I found some of the writing here to be uneven (for example, there was one opening sentence I had to re-read several times before I understood it), but it was obvious that these writers know their material, and most of the time they communicate it with both passion and inspiration. Personally, I wish there had been a chapter given to the contribution of Quakers to the sciences. For example, John Dalton, the “father of modern chemistry” and developer of the first modern atomic theory, was a Quaker.

Part 3 is Regional Studies, included chapters for five areas of the world: North America, Latin America, Europe & Middle East, Africa, and Asia Pacific. It feels very right to read a chapter about African Friends written by pastors and teachers from Rwanda and Kenya; likewise, Latin American Friends are not merely *written about* but have their own voices. Sometimes that comes *through* one of the authors giving extended quotations (Chapter 18, on women’s reconciling work, bringing back together diverse Friends in Africa and in North America, is a great example).

The final part of the book looks at what has been emerging in our day, and what the near future might hold. It is both depressing and hopeful, depending on where you look and what your own theology or spirituality holds to be True and important. The “culture wars,” which include gross economic disparities and environmental damages, and tribal conflicts have intruded into our beloved faith communities, resulting in a new set of separations; at the same time small-scale projects are re-weaving some scattered threads. I have experienced both the rending in my yearly meeting, and the weaving of “convergent Friends” and the Quaker women’s conferences; I have felt my heart break and my hope renewed, and this book reminded me of both these realities.

Thus this last section was the most difficult for me, a practicing Quaker, to read. It can be a confusing conglomeration of acronyms used by the authors and sometimes-baffling behavior exhibited by those about whom the authors write. More importantly, this section also presents both the excellent work of Friends around the world who have a clear-eyed vision of what the Religious Society of Friends can do and be, and the possibility of a Quakerism still filled with the Life and Power that moved the early Friends in the first chapter of Part 1.