MINGINS, R., *The Beacon Controversy and Challenges to British Quaker Tradition in the Early Nineteenth Century: Some Responses to the Evangelical Revival by Friends in Manchester and Kendal* (Quaker Studies, 6; Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2004), pp. xxi + 313. ISBN 0-7734-6383-6, £74.95.

British Friends have avoided the major splits that have divided American Quakers. But in 1835–36 the publication of Isaac Crewdson's *A Beacon to the Society of Friends*

engulfed London Yearly Meeting in its most bitterly fought controversy of the nineteenth century. The Manchester businessman and recorded minister Crewdson was one of many British Quakers in the 1820s and '30s to be strongly influenced by the Evangelical movement. In the *Beacon* he made a strong plea for the supremacy of Scripture, and launched an attack on contemporary understandings of the Inward Light, which in his view too closely approximated to the 'heresies' of Elias Hicks in the United States. In this well-researched and well-written book, Rosemary Mingins begins with a summary of the controversy, emphasising the division of British Friends into three major factions. Crewdson represented a new current of 'extreme Evangelicals', whose overriding stress not only on scriptural authority but on the Atonement led them to reject large parts of their Quaker heritage. At the opposite pole stood traditionalists, like Thomas Hancock from Liverpool, who hit back at Crewdson with *A Defence of the doctrines of Immediate Revelation and universal and saving light* (1835). And mediating between tradition and modernity were the most influential group, the 'moderate Evangelicals', such as Joseph Gurney. The most original aspect of the book is Mingins's in-depth account of the impact of these rival polemics on Quakers in Manchester and Kendal, two towns where support for 'Beaconism' was unusually large. In both places about ten per cent of the membership resigned in the later 1830s or early '40s. Manchester, the most dynamic of British cities in the early nineteenth century, also contained one of the country's largest Quaker communities. There, Crewdson and his followers broke away to form a congregation of Evangelical Friends, worshipping in a large and expensively built meeting house, but not long surviving their leader's death in 1844. In Kendal, a small market town where Quakers made up a large and influential section of the population, many of the Beaconites left to join other denominations. The principal theme of the book is the social background to these secessions. Mingins shows that in both places the seceders were drawn from the elite – both in an economic, and in a more strictly Quaker sense: they included bankers and industrialists, often living in large and elegant houses, even in one case in a castle. Many of them were recorded ministers or elders. The younger generation of the more affluent Quaker families also joined the secession in considerable numbers. For these families, Mingins argues, Evangelicalism was a way of joining the mainstream of contemporary upper middle-class life. More controversially, she highlights the theme of social control: a biblically-based religion was better suited to providing strict rules for the regulation of a turbulent industrialising society than one based on the less predictable leadings of the Inward Light.

While stressing social motivation, Mingins also provides a vivid portrait of the thought-world of early nineteenth-century Quakerism. One theme is the importance of trans-Atlantic religious traffic. Elias Hicks, the Long Island farmer, was the supreme bugbear of the Evangelicals in England as much as in America. On the other hand, an English tour by the American Evangelical Elisha Bates in the early 1830s provided inspiration for many of the later Beaconites. Intense spiritual searching, combined with rigid dogmatism, were common to those on each side of the debates. She quotes an interesting retrospect by one of the participants in the conflict, writing from the vantage-point of the more tolerant 1870s, who thought that both sides had been too uncompromising, and too little ready to allow room for difference. In

Kendal, ex-Friends played a formative role in the establishment of a Brethren meeting house in the town, offering one fascinating indication of the directions in which nineteenth-century Quakerism could lead. In this case they seem to have been more interested in millenarian speculation than in social control. While I am entirely in sympathy with Mingins's attempt to place belief in its social context, I am not entirely convinced that social control provides the key. Evangelicalism was many-sided. It could produce rebels as well as reactionaries, reformers as well as introspective individualists. To establish that the seceders were those most concerned with problems of social control, one would need a more extended social analysis of the 'traditional' and 'moderate Evangelical' Quakers. The assumption is that they were less economically successful than the Evangelicals, and that they were contained within a Quaker sub-culture. But since most of the book is about the Evangelicals, and especially those whom Mingins calls 'extreme Evangelicals', it is hard to be sure about this. Apart from Gurney, the only 'moderate Evangelical' to get extended treatment is Anna Braithwaite. There is an intriguing suggestion that as a woman minister she may have been put off by the Beaconites' preference for a male ministry. This is no more than a hint, but it is one of several issues raised in this stimulating book that would merit further research.

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