

Hamm, T. D., *The Quakers in America*, Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pp. viii + 293, ISBN 0 231 12362 0, Cloth, \$40.00.

Thomas Hamm's latest work furthers his valuable contributions as a leading Quaker historian. His *Transformation of American Quakerism* (1988) treats the steps by which Orthodox Friends in America became evangelical and pastor-led. *God's Government Begun* (1995) details a little-known progressive/utopian movement among nineteenth-century American Friends. Hamm is still at work on a study of Hicksite Friends in the nineteenth century, a work which will no doubt complement Thomas Kennedy's recent work on the liberal renewal among British Friends, *British Quakerism, 1860-1920* (2001). A substantial sample of his findings on Hicksites can be found in *Quaker Studies* 6(2002), pp. 175-94.

Hamm makes an admirable transition with this volume from the nineteenth century to contemporary research. This study was solicited by Columbia University Press for its Contemporary American Religion Series, so its approach is no doubt dictated partly by the series editors. Although the book is mainly contemporary in focus, it includes distilled and balanced historical background chapters that provide perspective on the exotic divergences of today's Friends. A brief description of the book's chapters follows.

Chapter One, 'Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business', provides a good way into the subject matter by describing the sessions of four different Yearly Meetings – all in Ohio – embodying the wide diversity of American Quakerism. Careful, sympathetic characterisations of the four emphasise the commonalities of business procedures and testimonies, despite vast differences in theology, social outlook, and worship style.

Chapter Two, 'The Origins of American Quakerism, 1640-1800', is a good, brief portrayal of early Quakerism and its subsequent developments. As early Quakerism is my own area of specialisation, I, of course, found some points for disagreement. For example, from my own research I have not found that that early Friends expected an imminent physical return of Christ (see pp. 16-17). The experiential, present-unfolding sense of Christ returned to teach his people himself by the Light within them is one key to the social radicalism of early Friends. Similarly, I do not believe that Fox claimed to be 'Christ returned to earth' (p. 19), despite some of his exalted self-descriptions. Finally, Hamm follows Larry Ingle in portraying Fox as making a 'sharp right turn' and abandoning eschatology in 1660 (pp. 25-26). This is a misapprehension of early Quaker theology, which certainly had to make some adjustments with the Restoration, but not as immediately or as conservatively as Ingle suggests. Nevertheless, Hamm's subsequent characterisations of Penn's Holy Experiment, Quietism, the tightening of Quaker discipline, and the American Revolution move the book's

focus to the American scene gracefully and with clarity.

Chapter Three, 'Their Separate Ways: American Friends Since 1800', makes the most of Hamm's specialism in nineteenth century Quakerism. The portrayal of the separations and the diverging trajectories of Friends is masterful. The chapter helpfully traces the evangelical impetus of Gurney and subsequent revivalism, leading to the formation of the Five Years Meeting and Rufus Jones' early efforts to liberalise Orthodox Quakerism. It continues these trajectories through the post-war twentieth century, adding helpful summary paragraphs with statistical overviews of the various branches.

Chapter Four, 'Quaker Faiths and Practices', begins with the apt comment, 'Generalisation about American Quakers today is almost impossible.' This excellent chapter sketches the wide range of beliefs and practices among American Friends, all generating around five commonly shared convictions: 'worship based on the leading of the Spirit; the ministry of all believers; decision making through the traditional Quaker business process; simplicity as a basic philosophy of life; and a commitment to education as a manifestation of Quaker faith' (p. 64). Hamm introduces a vast array of specimen statements and pithy comments from the wide spectrum of contemporary Friends, amply illustrating the diversity of American Quakerism. However, while the breadth of research and the masterful organisation of data are impressive, I wished for more interpretation of these divergences, according to wider cultural influences upon Friends. What influences from the wider evangelical movement or liberal humanist currents are pulling on Friends today?

Chapter Five, 'Contemporary Quaker Debates', summarises some of the nagging disagreements and unclarity among Friends today. The main issues treated are the Christian nature of Quakerism, leadership, authority, sexuality, Quaker identity, unity/diversity, growth/decline. While no major splits have come from these differences, they continue to widen. Some of these issues are unique to Friends, others are causing concern in religious groups across the spectrum.

Chapter Six, 'Quakers and the World', examines the very different ways Evangelical and Liberal Friends carry on the traditional Quaker concern for the world. This treatment is carried on under the categories of peace, race relations, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Friends Committee for National Legislation. There is excellent detail and balance in this chapter, an original contribution. Chapter Seven, "'A quarterly meeting in herself': Quaker Women, Marriage, and the Family', concludes the study well, except that it does not treat the very rapidly evolving issues of gay/lesbian marriages and families – an area where Liberal Friends have been leading experimenters.

The book includes an afterword, biographical sketches of 15 of the best known American Friends (ranging from John Woolman to Bonnie Raitt and Scott Simon), a brief chronology, a glossary, 40 pages of detailed endnotes, resources for further study, and a good index. As both an American Friend and a mature historian, Hamm has drawn upon a wide variety of sources to produce the best available portrait of Friends in North America. His study can also help Friends in other parts of the world better understand the mind-bending varia-

tions in American Quakerism. It's a long, unblinking, nonjudgmental look in the mirror – although I caught myself flinching at times.

Douglas Gwyn
First Friends Meeting, Richmond, Indiana, USA