

Jim Pym, *The Pure Principle: Quakers and Other Faith Traditions* (York: William Sessions, 2000), pp. xii + 116. Paperback. ISBN 1-85072-249-8. £8.99.

The book is an evaluation of the work that has been carried out by Quakers with other faith traditions. It is a timely publication as in our postmodern condition religions and spiritualities are increasingly being made aware of each other's existence. If such increased contact is not to lead to tension but rather peace, we need to learn from past experience. Pym's book is helpful in this respect.

Although a slim volume it covers a lot of ground. The first chapter is introductory and sets the interfaith movement in its historical context; the author places the major impetus in the middle of the nineteenth century. Chapter Two steps back in time and discusses the early Quaker understanding of other faiths and also the way their own faith was expressed in a universal and inclusive language. It looks at the thoughts of George Fox, William Penn and James Naylor.

The book is particularly detailed when discussing the Quaker involvement in India and Chapter Three considers the work of mutual irradiation pioneered by the American Quaker Douglas Steere. This work led to two important interfaith symposia organised by Quakers. One was a gathering of Hindus and Christians in India, the other the 'Zen-Christian Colloquia' in Japan. Publications from the latter included papers by those who went on to become famous in the field of Buddhist/ Christian studies: Heinrich Dumoulin, William Johnston and Masao Abe.

Most of the work in India was carried out by individuals meeting with Hindu sadhus or pilgrims. Indian spiritual teachers and leaders in the social and political fields also accepted Friends and were willing to work with them, for example Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Pym details the steps Horace Alexander took in founding the Fellowship of Friends for Truth (FFT) which aimed to foster the reverence for all religions, silent worship and united brotherly action on non-violent lines.

There is a chapter on other approaches, in particular the Open Letter Movement (OLM) where one of their questions was 'How do we meet the insights into spiritual awareness now coming from the East?' This chapter also gives details on the Quaker Universalist Group (QUG), the Friends Interfaith Group and the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relationships (CIR).

In Chapters 5 and 8 Pym draws important distinctions between meditation and the meeting for worship and also how Buddhism relates to Quaker-

ism. The end of the book contains an appendix which has an excellent and useful selection of quotations from various faiths.

The book contains a wealth of historical material, most of it fascinating. However, such detail often makes it difficult to gain a clear picture as to how the various strands relate to each other. The sheer number of initiatives also highlights the tension between work carried out on an individual basis and that carried out by groups and organizations. The author is obviously irked by the committee recently set up by the Quakers to carry out interfaith work.

Throughout the book the importance of India is stressed: whether it be the universalism of RamaKrishna or the influence of Ghandi on peace work. Pym also believes that whereas in the 1920s and the 1930s the main spiritual force to be reckoned with from the East was that of Vedanta, as indeed can be witnessed in the diaries of Christopher Isherwood, the current influence is Buddhism.

What becomes clear from this book is that Quakers have often gone further and deeper in their interfaith adventure than most Christian denominations where dialogue rather than sharing and joint worship is the norm. It is also apparent that whereas in previous centuries the line marking the boundary between Quakerism and other faiths was drawn externally, today in some sense the boundaries are now internal, the dialogue between faiths is often carried out within the meeting for worship itself.

By setting past efforts in their historical context, this is an excellent book for situating and focusing Quakers' current interfaith and outreach work. Beyond this it also has much to recommend it to the academic researcher, in particular its wealth of historical detail and its insights into the core mystical themes uniting the world's religions.

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