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AN INCARNATIONAL SACRAMENTOLOGY

PAUL ANDERSON

A common misconception about Friends is that they have no sacramental theology or practice; another is that their sacramental stance is negative rather than positive. These impressions are wrong, although one can understand how people might come to hold these views, even among Friends. While Friends have indeed objected to some sacramental beliefs and practices, this has been for a positive set of reasons. First, Friends believe the grace, power, and presence of Christ is available to all in unmediated ways, to be received through faith and faith alone. Second, Friends have argued that the New Covenant is one that is devoid of external rites and formalities, and that these are neither pleasing to God nor helpful for humans. Third, Friends have testified that the true and outward evidence of God's sacramental reality is the changed and changing lives of those who abide in Christ and he in them. The central element common to these views is that they forward an *incarnational sacramentology*, which is rooted in shared experience, biblical conviction, and missional witness.¹

MISCONCEPTIONS AMONG FRIENDS

At the outset, several other misconceptions deserved to be addressed, at least briefly, and these involve misconceptions among Friends and others. First, among Friends it must be emphasized that a Quaker sacramentology is not a “distinctive” to be selected from a cafeteria spread of quaint denominational features if one has the appetite for it and room on one's platter. It is a *Testimony* to the central core of the New Covenant effected by the world-changing work of Christ on the cross. In that sense, the goal is not to get others to become Quakers by advocating a peculiar approach to sacramental faith and practice. It is to witness to the central core of the Good News: that in the fullness of time God has reconciled the world to Godself by means of the work of Christ on the cross and by means of the Holy Spirit at work in the world. The veil in the Jerusalem temple was torn from top to bottom when Jesus was on the cross, availing the Holy of Holies to all who would worship in spirit and in truth. The blood of Christ was shed

for all, not to be dispensed ritually by a few. This is what makes it a Testimony rather than a pick-and-choose “distinctive.”

A second misconception among Friends is the confusion of liberty of conscience with liberty of ignorance. On one hand, the Friends Testimony as to the non-necessity of sacramental rites should not be confused with the necessity of non-sacramental practice, although one can understand how the Testimony might be experienced that way. If too many Friends take up liberty on this matter, the Testimony will be lost, and God will have to raise up other groups to challenge the church and the world with these important convictions if the light of Friends is hidden under a bushel. Especially among Friends in the Ohio Valley, where cooperation with other Christian groups in the 19th century abolitionist and revivalist movements led to sharing fellowship with other Christians, an emphasis on sacramental liberty developed. However, sometimes a lack of understanding has been a factor, which is different from conscientious freedom. If one assumes that God requires a Christian formula or rite before bestowing a blessing, if one questions a believer’s (or even one’s own) authentic spiritual experience because it has not been externalized religiously, if one assumes humans need external forms because they cannot open themselves to the life of the Spirit unadorned and non-prescribed, these are indicators that one has not thought seriously enough about the Friends Testimony on the Sacraments. Liberty as a factor of these types of considerations reflects liberty of ignorance rather than liberty of conscience; they evidence the need for more sustained theological reflection, or better yet, an opening of one’s life to the immediacy of God’s presence in Spirit and in Truth, which ever happens by means of the Divine Initiative rather than human platforms and scaffolding.

A third internal misconception about Friends’ approaches to baptism and communion is that they don’t believe in or advocate baptism and communion. This is the furthest from the truth. Friends teach and believe that the authentic baptism of Jesus—in fire and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Lk. 3:16)—is essential for victorious Christian living. John baptized with water, but Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Mk. 1:8; Jn. 1:33; Ac. 1:5; 11:16), and this reality is encountered by a spiritual immersion in Christ, where the believer abides in him and he abides in the believer (Jn. 15:1-8). The baptism of Jesus is a pneumatic reality, not a hydraulic one, communicated by the inward empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not the external purification of water. The true sign of the believer’s baptism is thus not a certificate or memory of a water cleansing; it is the transformed

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life of the baptized believer, who becomes a “living letter” (2 Cor. 3:30) and testimony to the world. Likewise, the same is true with spiritual gifts. The truest evidence of Spirit-filledness, according to the Apostle Paul, is not the demonstrative gifts, such as tongues, healings, and exorcisms; it is *the fruit of the Spirit*: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Gal. 5:22-23). Thus, the truest evidence of baptism is the changed and changing life of the believer; by this will the world recognize the true followers of Jesus: that they have *love* for one another (Jn. 13:35).

Likewise, communion happens effectively where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus—he has promised to be there in their midst, and his promise is true (Matt. 18:20). Given that Christ is present in the gathered meeting for worship—really and metaphysically—his sacrifice is celebrated by receiving its impact in faith and by becoming living sacrifices in the world by faithfulness (Ro. 12:1-3). Therefore, gathering in holy expectation in the presence of the risen Lord, believers experience *koinonia* fellowship as authentic and sacramental communion (Ac. 2:42-47; 4:31-35). This lasts not just for a few seconds that it takes to swallow a bit of wine and wafer; it endures for the entire meeting for worship as believers commune directly with the Spirit of the risen Lord. Where this spiritual reality is happening authentically in transforming fullness, to introduce a ritual symbolization of the reality betrays a missing of the spiritual reality of Christ, which *is* the real thing. These are some of the misconceptions one tends to run into among Friends about their own sacramental faith and practice.

MISCONCEPTIONS AMONG OTHER BELEIVERS

Externally, biblical and theological misconceptions among others believers' views of the Sacraments also abound. First, it is commonly taught among some Christian groups that Jesus ordained rituals for his followers to participate in if they want to share in the new life he offers. These Christians see Christianity as superseding Judaism as one religion triumphing over another, but such a notion fails to appreciate the radical Jewishness of Jesus.² Likewise wrong is the impression that John the Baptist came emphasizing cultic rites rather than challenging them. Rather, both John and Jesus came to confront

Jewish cultic religion rather than establish alternative forms of it. One thing recent Jesus scholarship has rightly concluded is that in his challenging of Jewish temple trade, Sabbath laws, legal prescriptions, and cultic regulations, Jesus sought to overturn the conventional religious notion that such ritual purity laws and legalistic prescriptions were required by God in order for God's love and grace to be received. If Jesus opposed Jewish cultic practices in the name of God's loving desire for humanity, did he *really* set up a new set of Christian cultic prescriptions, or were these factors of religious developments commemorating his ministry?

The Gospel of John even suggests such a distinction. John 1 leaves out the narrating of Jesus' baptism, and John 4:2 clarifies that Jesus himself did not baptize; only his disciples did. John also omits the institution of a ritual at the last supper (Jn. 13) and presents the event as happening the day before the Passover, rather than being a Passover meal. So, if the Beloved Disciple was the author of the Fourth Gospel, leaning against the breast of Jesus during the last supper, how could he possibly have missed the institution of the Eucharist if that was the main intention of Jesus at that event?

A more likely scenario is that Jesus was seeking to add Christological significance to the Passover meal (Ex. 12) if things happened as presented in the Synoptics. As the cup of redemption was raised and as the bread of thanksgiving was eaten, the sort of thing Jesus is likely to have done is to have emphasized that as often as his followers should eat the Passover as a meal of remembrance, they should recall not the blood of that original sacrificial lamb (whose blood was daubed on the doorframes of homes to make the spirit of death pass over that home and not kill the firstborn in every home), nor the animal most recently sacrificed, but they should think of *Jesus' sacrifice* offered for the life of humanity. That is what the Passover cup of redemption and the sacrificial lamb finally point to, from a Christian perspective. Likewise, as the matzo bread is eaten commemorating fleeing the Egyptians into the wilderness, rather than envision the Exodus, Jesus' followers are invited to remember his body broken for their deliverance from spiritual bondage to sin. In that sense, Jesus was probably not inaugurating a new, briefer, symbolic meal; he was sharing a full meal of remembrance with his disciples, connecting the meaning of his sacrifice to the Passover meal as a means of pointing to his impending work on the cross. For believers in Jesus who celebrate the memorable Passover meal, thinking of his final sacrifice is the invitation here

extended. For believers in Jesus who do not celebrate the Jewish Passover meal, embracing his sacrifice at every meal, as often as we eat or drink, becomes an occasion for assimilating nourishment for our souls as food and drink are to our bodies.

The baptism of John is likewise misunderstood by most Christians, if they take it to be a water-ritual requirement, or a prescribed testimony to repentance. The fact is that Jewish purification customs during the days of John were quite extensive and elaborate; in that sense, his informal practice was a striking *protest to ritualism*, rather than a formalistic requirement of it. Purification laws involved performing particular ritual cleansings before performing sacrifices in the temple, or other acts of worship. Outside the Jerusalem temple area there were ritual bathing pools, which worshipers would enter on one side and come up purified on the other. The Qumran community had a large *mikvah* (cleansing pool) that had one staircase descending, with three ascending. Impurity was transferred by touch, so those coming up “pure” out of the water could thereby keep from contamination by those descending into the water. John protested the fact that those who were ritually “pure” were also taking advantage of the poor and aligned with Rome in compromising ways. He called for ethical repentance, sounding the judgment of God upon those who were outwardly religious but inwardly and morally corrupt. As a sign of true purification, John called for moral repentance and God-pleasing justice, dunking people in the free-flowing Jordan River as a sign: even washing in a muddy river is more effective in purifying the repentant individual than the “ritually correct” presentations of the unrepentant complicit. The baptism of John was therefore *a protest against empty ritualism* rather than a requirement of enthusiastic ritualism, and the *sign of purification* was not the public dunking in water, but the just and righteous life of the repentant believer.

So, why did Jesus submit to John’s baptism; was it to have his sins forgiven? No, nor was it to establish one of several cultic rites; rather, it reflected a joining with John in the protest *against* ritual purity laws and their cultic practices, which neither reflected God’s requirements nor indicated a true measure of personal repentance. Jesus and John both pointed to the righteous life as the telling sign of God’s redemption, and every time the baptisms of John and Jesus are mentioned in the New Testament, the baptism of water prefigures the priority of spiritual baptism, which is what Jesus came to bring. Therefore, an immersion in the Spirit was the character of Jesus’

baptism, not an ordinance of a water rite, and pointing to *that* reality is why John came baptizing (Jn. 1:29-34).

A second misconception of many Christians is that the early church was of one accord about its sacramental practices. This was by no means the case, as religious practices were in constant flux and highly diverse within first-century Christianity. Whereas John omits any mention of drinking the cup or eating the bread in remembrance of the Lord, Luke demonstrates a clear ritualization of the event when compared with Mark. In Mark Jesus emphasizes the *blood* of his covenant as he instructs them to drink; Luke emphasizes the “cup” of his covenant—a marker of ritual development. Of course, Luke also appears to be drawing on Paul’s calling to remembrance the events that transpired on the night the Lord was betrayed, but notice the evolution within Paul’s own practice.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul contrasts the love feasts of Christians to the pagan festivals and the eating of meat offered to idols. In doing so, he cites the spiritual food that Israel was fed over its history and contrasts Christian table fellowship with pagan counterparts. In the next chapter, however, Paul addresses problems pertaining to their partaking of food together: people apparently had cut in line, gotten drunk, and fed themselves while others went hungry. In response to these abuses, Paul calls in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 for them to eat at home from then on, and having done so to celebrate an abbreviated, symbolic meal together involving only bread and wine. Was there a Christian ritual and symbolic meal *before* that time, at least two decades after the ascension of the Lord? Possibly, but not probably. Perhaps the Gospel of John had no institutionalization of a symbolic meal because not all sectors of early Christianity—even apostolic ones—had evolved a symbolic meal. They may simply have celebrated full fellowship meals, as Jesus had done with his followers and with others.

Table fellowship in Judaism during the time of Jesus was an important matter; Jews were not allowed to enter the home of a Gentile person, nor were they allowed to eat with them. To eat with another in the presence of God is to be reconciled, and this would be impossible if the Gentile had not been circumcised or become Jewish religiously. This is one of the reasons Jesus’ dining with sinners was such a striking statement (Matt. 9:10; Lk. 15:2). Conversely, when Peter refused to eat with new Christians (of *Gentile* origin) at Antioch for fear of Jewish party of James, having shared table fellowship with

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them before, this was a big deal for Paul. In Galatians 2, Paul declares with some passion that he confronted Peter to his face and told him he was in the wrong. At stake here was no mere cultic rite; it was a matter of sharing loving fellowship together in the redemptive presence of God.

The fellowship meals of Acts 2 and 4 involved *real* meals, and it was in the partaking of full table fellowship that early believers celebrated Jesus' practice of holding an open table for his followers, and also for sinners and others neglected by society. In keeping with the communion offering of the Old Testament, where enmity between neighbors was absolved and social reconciliation was restored around a common table (Ps. 23:5), Jesus dined with sinners as a statement of God's inclusive love. He did this even *before* they repented as an act of demonstrated grace. It was primarily in this vein that followers of Jesus continued to share table fellowship after his departure, and eating together was the main practice of table fellowship for early believers. Out of that practice some ritualizations occurred, but they were less than programmatic or uniform.³

Likewise, there was even dissention about whose baptism was efficacious, perhaps as a result of Paul's encounter with the followers of Apollos, who knew the baptism of John but did not know there was a Holy Spirit (Acts. 19:1-7). Only when Paul laid his hands on them were they filled with the Holy Spirit, after they were baptized a second time; so, when were they *really* baptized? According to Luke, the "real thing" appears to have happened with the laying on of hands. So is *that* the magic answer? Must the true sacrament involve the laying on of hands, or must it be dispensed by the right leader?

Because of this and other factors the Corinthian church was divided by a partisan spirit, with some claiming to be "of Paul," "of Apollos," "of Cephas," or "of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12-17). In countering the cult of baptismal personalities, Paul declares that he wishes he had baptized no one if it would lead to dissention. By this Paul was by no means saying he wished he had not evangelized; he was distinguishing authentic evangelism from cultic forms, and even the linking of spiritual efficaciousness with the impact of an individual's giftedness over the primacy of the workings of the Holy Spirit. These are just a few of the ways that the evolution of religious forms created dissention in the early church, and Paul sought to transcend these by appealing to the spiritual essence of Christian experience, emphasizing "one faith, one Lord, and one baptism," independent of particular manifestations or

forms (Eph. 4:5). He appealed, then, to the spiritual essence and reality of baptism, and Friends do so as well.

A third misconception is that sacramental associations in the first-century church were emphases of privilege rather than the cost of discipleship. When Jesus asked James and John if they were *willing to drink his cup and to share in his baptism* in Mark 10:38, he was not inviting them to ritualism, but to martyrdom. Likewise, when Jesus in John 6:53 is remembered as saying “unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in yourselves,” he was not declaring the indispensability of the eucharist for salvation. He was declaring the indispensability of ingesting the “bread” which Jesus offers—his flesh given on the Cross for the life of the world (Jn. 6:51)—if they expect to be raised with him on the last day (Jn. 6:54). The issue here is the willingness to suffer and die for Christ if required by the truth.⁴ In that sense, the message is entirely parallel to the warning of Jesus after Peter’s confession in Mark 8:34-35: Jesus’ followers must be willing to take up the Cross, and those who wish to save their lives will lose them; the only way to find one’s life is to release it in faithfulness to the Lord. Therefore, sharing the cup of the Lord involved an association with his dying on the Cross and believers’ willingness to do the same in the earliest Christian sacramental practice.

The Christian view of water baptism was likewise martyrological in its earliest associations. To share with Christ in his baptism was to be willing to affirm solidarity with him in his suffering and death, rather than the procuring of privilege. In Romans 6:4 Paul declares, “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Death to self is thus effected by embracing the Cross, and the evidence of baptism is the newness of life in which the regenerated believer abides. Within the Matthean tradition the role of baptism apparently had changed from an association with martyrdom to group inclusion. Therefore, Matthew uncharacteristically drops an important Markan detail: the reference to being baptized with Jesus’ baptism in the response of Jesus to the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 20:22). In Matthew alone among the Synoptics, Jesus asks if they are willing to drink of his cup but says nothing of sharing with him in his baptism. Apparently, baptism had ceased to be associated with martyrological faithfulness in Matthean Christianity and had become linked to joining the community of faith as a disciple. That is also why Matthew’s Jesus commissions his

disciples to go out into all the world making disciples, describing that communal induction as “baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). An association with martyrdom had evolved into a marker of group affiliation, but such was a later meaning of “baptism,” not the earliest one.

Again, the primitive and essential meaning of sharing the cup and baptism of the Lord had to do with faithfulness to Christ, his truth, and his community, even in the face of hardship and suffering, if one expected to participate in his promise of eternal life. Friends challenged misconceptions on these matters and went to the radical core of the meaning in every case. What is the essential character of purification? It is the Spirit’s acting upon the individual’s life, cleansing one from sin and empowering one to live in the newness of life. What is the heart of *koinonia* fellowship? Breaking bread together around a full-meal celebration and holding an open table with fellow believers, but also sharing with any in need of food or fellowship in the love of Christ. How does the believer “eat the flesh and drink the blood” of Jesus? By living faithfully in obedience to him, neither denying him before human threats nor abandoning his way for personal gain or expedience. And, how is the work of saving-revealing work of Christ remembered most powerfully? By creating space in one’s life to feed inwardly upon the true Bread from Heaven and to imbibe the Living Waters of the Spirit. Individually, this happens within a regular discipline of prayer and devotion; corporately, it happens in the gathered meeting for worship, opening our lives to the Spirit of the Present Christ for an extended period of time, not just a few seconds. These spiritual and experiential realities indeed are regarded as “baptism and communion after the manner of Friends.”

THE UNMEDIATED AND DIRECTLY ACCESSIBLE WORK OF CHRIST

The first element in the Friends Testimony as to the true character of Christian Sacramentality is the conviction that the work of Christ is mediated spiritually and directly—not mediated by human or ritual intermediaries—fully effective in and of itself. Therefore, anything added to Christ and his work detracts from it accordingly. The saving, revealing, empowering work of Christ plus any form of human mediation or conveyance is thereby diminished. If Christ’s is the perfect sacrifice, no animal sacrifice is needed. If Christ’s is the new Temple,

ones made with human hands are obsolete. If Christ's is the perfect priesthood, all human priesthoods are done away with. On several of these matters some Christians reinstall some of the same religious systems that Jesus supplanted, and Fox was fond of saying that the Reformers had built back up what their fathers had torn down. There certainly is a place for empowered and effective Christian ministry, but Gospel ministry is different from an intermediary priesthood. The Christian minister points people to Christ, who alone is enough. Giftedness and training help, but they do not mediate the sacramental reality of Christ's saving-revealing work; he alone is the source of that work and through the Holy Spirit the singular mediator of it.

In that sense, no particular religious system or organization holds a monopoly on the dispensing of grace. To claim so, or even to imagine so, displaces the unique work of Christ to that extent. When Jesus was on the cross, the sun was blotted out, the earth shook, the graves were opened, and the veil in the Jerusalem Temple was torn from top to bottom. Where only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people, and that was allowed only once a year, now the partition between the Holy Presence of the Almighty was riven completely as an invitation of all humanity into the Holy of Holies. Well-meaning Christians may be inclined to stitch the veil back up again, reinstate a human priesthood, and reinsert a cultic bridge between God and humanity, but the New Covenant has done away with such trappings. Christ is the only bridge between God and humanity, and to add anything to Christ's mediation is to diminish his work accordingly.

Then again, Friends recognize and appreciate the authentic ministries of priests and Gospel ministers from all traditions, and in ecumenical fellowship we work and pray for one another's success.⁵ We also appreciate the aesthetic beauty of church music, liturgical services, colored glass, magnificent architecture, and well-delivered sermons. We are physical and sensory beings as well as spiritual beings, and the full range of expression matches the full impact of impression within meaningful services of worship, and the authentic worshiper should be able to be at home within a full panoply of worship forms, as well as their dearth in the austerity of silence and quiet waiting before the Lord. The point here is that forms and officials do not mediate spiritual realities; Christ alone, through the power of the Holy Spirit, carries that forth. The main thing, though, is the main thing: opening our lives responsively to the Divine Initiative, which

may come through the outward means, but will always be beyond them. That is the New and Inward Covenant, which is received by faith and expressed in faithfulness.

THE NEW AND INWARD COVENANT

Because Christ has brought the new and living way to humanity by means of an Eternal Covenant, punctuating history and making all things new, there is hope for humanity and hope for the world. The sting of Adam's fall is itself dealt a death blow, restoring humanity to right relationship with the earth, with one another, within oneself, and with God. As George Fox described it, he came through the flaming sword (back into the Garden of Eden) to the place where Adam was before he fell, and all creation had another smell. This New Covenant is given by grace (undeserved love), not merit, and it is received by faith. The fact that it is not conditioned by human deservedness goes against all worldly conventions, which is why a revelation from beyond is required in order for it to be imagined. Further, participation in this New Covenant is celebrated personally and sealed inwardly. We witness to this Covenant outwardly with our lives, but our engagement with it is transacted inwardly in trust and authenticity. Those who believe God fully receive God fully, and this is the restored human-divine relationship Christ came to effect.

How that happens, of course, the best of Christian theologizing can only approximate. Sacramental theology and soteriology (the study of salvation) attempt to understand the mystery, but ultimately, it will remain a mystery. However it happens, God was “in Christ, reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:18), and we are invited to participate in that reality by faith. The word “mystery” is a fitting one, though, as “sacrament” does not occur in the New Testament. *Sacramentum* is the Latin word attempting a translation of the Greek word, *mystērion*, which occurs just over two dozen times in the New Testament. Interestingly, though, of all the times *mystērion* occurs in the Bible, it *never* is used in reference to a cultic practice, whether baptismal, eucharistic, or liturgical. The most common association is with the mystery that God should be at work among Jews and Gentiles alike, working a saving-revealing plan to reconcile humanity to God and to one another as a means of completing the order of creation and the meaning of history. Most of the occurrences of the term are found in Paul's letters, and they refer primarily to the Christ

Events: the death and resurrection of Christ and the gifts bestowed to humanity as a result. That being the case, sacramental theology roots entirely in soteriology, and soteriology roots entirely in the saving-revealing work of Christ.

This is what the New and Inward Covenant establishes between believers and God. In times past, the blood of bulls and goats may have helped humans grasp the concept that the debt for their sins had been paid by another, but according to the writer of Hebrews, such can never take away sin; they were simply given to humans for a time by God, for *their* benefit, not God's (Heb. 10:4). Likewise, the conditional covenant of keeping the Law in order to receive the blessings of God became a means of appreciating human responsibility with respect to God's ways and right standards for human behavior. However, because our most can never be enough, the only hope for humanity is the unmerited favor of God, and this is what the work of Christ brings to humanity. In the New and Inward Covenant, sacrifices, washings, circumcisions, and all creaturely rites are put away in exchange for the new and living way. This is what the work of Christ brings to the world, and to respond to the New Covenant is to put away the old.

OUTWARD AND VISIBLE SIGNS OF GRACE

As physical beings, though, Christians may sometimes wonder what the outward and visible signs of inward and effective grace should be. Indeed, one of the most ironic facts of ecumenical life is that the very sacramental practices that are designed to bring about Christian unity become at the same time means of accentuating our Christian divisions. At ecumenical gatherings to this day, Christian leaders from some traditions are forbidden to take communion in other traditional services, although the respecting of one another's baptisms is less of a problem than it was a generation or two ago. Still, the tragic reality of historic divisions among the churches is accentuated by the sacramental markings of their fragmentation. Jesus prayed that his followers may be one that the world might believe that he was sent from the Father (Jn. 17:21-23), and outward and visible signs of grace are needed indeed. On this point Friends might yet make at least two contributions to the larger ecumenical situation.

First, Friends might call attention to the incarnational reality that when God revealed Godself to the world, he sent not a cultic form or a

rite, but a *person*—his Son, Jesus Christ. In the flesh-becoming-Word, the love and glory of God is revealed to humanity with eschatological power and clarity. In what I believe to be the finest essay on a Quaker view of sacramental living in recent years, Alan Kolp argues that as an outward and physical sign of an invisible and spiritual reality the transformed life of the believer is the most effective of sacramental “signs.” If what is conveyed is the presence, love, goodness, and power of God, the human life has greater capacity to convey such realities than inanimate objects or rites.⁶ Put otherwise, the truest sign of God’s sacramental work and presence in the world is the changed and changing lives of those who abide in Christ and in whom he abides. Thus, the truest evidence of saving faith and empowered faithfulness is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 6:22-23). Participation in rites can be feigned, and spiritual gifts can be imitated, but the fruit of the Spirit cannot be counterfeited. By this shall all know the disciples of Jesus, according to the Lord: that they have love for one another (Jn. 13:35). By emphasizing the incarnational reality of Christ-like character and ways of being as the authentic and visible measure of Christian commitment, Friends point to the *real thing*, which is the only thing that matters.

A second way Friends may yet contribute to the larger ecumenical movement is to emphasize the incarnational sacramental reality of the gathered meeting for worship. Jesus promised that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there, present in their midst (Matt. 18:20), and Friends hold that promise to be true across sectarian boundaries and divisions. Where some groups may push for visible Christian unity on their terms, calling for exclusive participation in their baptismal and eucharistic rites for *koinonia* fellowship to be its fullest, Friends testify to the fullness of spiritual fellowship that happens inclusively within the gathered meeting of those who wait upon the Lord. An emphasis upon spiritual baptism, which happens by faith alone, is the only way to spiritual transformation and holiness. An emphasis upon authenticity of worship and corporate attending the presence of the risen Lord can be experienced as a sacramental reality (Jn. 4:21-24), as communion is experienced by those who feed on the Bread from Heaven in holy expectation (Jn. 6:32-58).

On this point, the Friends Testimony on the Sacraments is not simply aimed at dead formalism; it also extends to lively formalism. Pointing to the incarnational realities of what it means to be baptized with fire and the Holy Spirit (the baptism of Jesus rather than the

baptism of John) and raising up the true character of *koinonia* fellowship (authentic communion in the presence of the Lord) become ways of pointing to shared Christian realities among all believers. Friends also encourage testifying publicly to one's faith and commitment to discipleship. While a water rite may be one way to do that—especially if it involves sacrifice rather than privilege, as Friends in Taiwan have testified—a clearer way to do so is with one's testimony in word and deed. And, where an open table is celebrated in Christian love, Friends respond warmly to the welcome and even seek to amplify the partnership in furthering together the work of the Kingdom, which is where true community is discovered. In these ways, an incarnational sacramentology becomes a direct way to actualize the outward and visible unity of the Church that the world might believe.

CONCLUSION

While the Friends Testimony on the Sacraments challenged the dead formalism of some settings, it also challenges the lively formalism of others.⁷ In testifying to the spiritual reality of God's presence and the true and inward character of the human-divine relationship, Friends uphold the immediacy of Christ and the incarnational character of sacramental reality. Neither informality nor silence, however are alternative "forms" to be advocated over and against other ones. Rather, the Testimony is that the New Covenant has put away the place and value of all religious forms, as the only way to apprehend the divine initiative and presence is to open oneself to their spiritual reality. While humans are indeed physical beings, we are also spiritual beings. To assume that people do *not* have the capacity to open themselves directly to the divine presence not only betrays a lack of confidence in people's capacity to embrace the life of the Spirit, it also reflects a lack of confidence in God's ability to reach people spiritually and directly. On these matters, Friends uphold the Testimony that just as God spoke most fully in history through the incarnation of the Word, Jesus Christ, God also speaks today through the Spirit of Christ at work in and through the changed and changing lives of believers.

How might this Testimony now play in an era when Christians really are seeking to work together in visible and invisible unity for the Glory of Christ and his Church? In response to the question, "Are you baptized?" the answer of the Convinced Friend⁸ deserves to be, "Yes; with the Baptism of Jesus—in fire and the Holy Spirit. Are you?" And

likewise, in response to the question, “Do you take communion?” the answer of the faithful Friend deserves to be the same as that of Stephen Grellett: “I think I can reverently say that I have much doubt whether since the Lord by His grace brought me into the faith of His dear Son, I have ever broken bread or drunk wine, even in the ordinary course of life, without devout remembrance of, and some devout feeling regarding the broken body and the blood-shedding of my dear Lord and Saviour.”

I am mindful of an instance when a Quaker couple attended a meeting for worship in which the eucharist was celebrated. They sat in the back and waited in silence, feeding inwardly on the Bread of Life for an entire hour before leaving. After the service, the minister apologized that they had not had the opportunity to participate in communion, seeing they had not come forward to receive the elements. To this one of them responded, “Oh, we did experience communion, and it was most meaningful indeed!” Again, the Testimony to the essential and spiritual reality of the mysteries of God in Christ Jesus is an important contribution to Christian faith and practice, as well as to the character of the Gospel for the rest of the world. Testifying, though, to an *Incarnational Sacramentology*, will ultimately be effective as it not only becomes something we articulate, but as it is something we *become*! That will be the true measure of the Testimony, *and* its veracity.

NOTES

- 1 For one of the most sustained apologetics for a Friendly view of the Sacraments, see Joseph John Gurney’s chapter and addendum on baptism and communion, “On the Disuse of All Typical Rites in the Worship of God,” in *A Peculiar People: The Rediscovery of Primitive Christianity* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press; a reprinting of *Observations*, 1824 edn. 1979), 99-175. See also the essays in *Evangelical Friend* 26:2 (1992): Paul Anderson, “On Christmas...And the Character of Sacramentality,” 4, 18-19; Chuck Orwiler, “The Sacrament of Discipleship,” 6-7; and John Punshon, “The Shadow and the Substance,” 2-3. The issue was taken up in an important issue of *QRT* edited by Christine Dowling: *Friends and the Sacraments; Some Critical Perspectives, Quaker Religious Thought* 14:4 (1973): T. Vail Palmer, Jr., “Preface to a Sacramental Wrap-up,” 1-4; Charles S. Ball, “Friends and Baptism,” 5-7 and “Friends and Communion,” 8-12; Anna C. Brinton, “Friends and Sacraments,” 13-15; Maurice A. Creasey, “Sacraments – A Quaker Approach,” 16-20; R. W. Tucker, “The Centrality of the Sacraments,” 21-35; and Candida Palmer, “Friends and Sacraments: An Introductory Essay,” 36-39. See also Elton Trueblood’s essay, “A Sacramental World,” in his important book, *The People Called Quakers* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1966/1980), 128-147.
- 2 See especially John Riches, “Jesus and the Law of Purity,” *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980), 112-144.

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- 3 See the work of James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (3rd edn.; London: SCM Press, 2006), which challenges notions of the “pan liturgism” of the early church, including a critical analysis of sacramental developments. See also Henry J. Cadbury, “The Informality of Early Christianity,” *The Crozier Quarterly* 21:3 (1944): 246-250.
- 4 For an extensive treatment of what is meant by eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus in John 6 and its martyrological associations, see Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel; Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997).
- 5 In his thoughtful essay, “Quakers and the Sacraments,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 5:1, #9 (1963): 2-25, Maurice A. Casey emphasizes the importance of being true to the Friends Testimony on the Sacraments, while also welcoming the authentic sacramental practice of other Christians, who do share in the essential sacramental spiritual reality meaningfully.
- 6 See Alan Kolp, “Friends, Sacraments, and Sacramental Living,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 20:3, #57 (1984): 36-51.
- 7 Consider, for instance, the problem of early Christians, who faced Judaizing believers wanting to insure that all Jesus followers were circumcised. After all, this fulfilled the commandment of God to Abraham and his children in Genesis 17, that the sign of the covenant would be one of circumcision for males. Again, the problem as Gentiles joined the church was not dead formalism but *lively* formalism. In Acts 15 the “sense of the meeting” was to move toward the center of the concerns (abstaining from sexual liberties, eating meat offered to idols, and drinking the blood of strangled animals) rather than a particular prescription signifying the abstentions. In that sense, getting at the *essence* of baptism and communion may pose a way for greater Christian unity today.
- 8 That is, one who is “convinced of the Truth” of the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit (see John 16:8-11) and filled with the Spirit accordingly.