

1-1-2007

## A Response to Friendly Sacramentology Ecumencial Perspective

Ann K. Riggs

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Riggs, Ann K. (2007) "A Response to Friendly Sacramentology Ecumencial Perspective," *Quaker Religious Thought*: Vol. 109, Article 7.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/qrt/vol109/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quaker Religious Thought by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.

## A RESPONSE TO FRIENDLY SACRAMENTOLOGY IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

ANN K. RIGGS

As others have done, I begin with my thanks to the organizers and participants of this discussion of Quaker sacramental theology, originally carried out in person at the November 2007 meeting of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group. I echo David Johns' hope that this should be a beginning for more extended discussion rather than its ending. In some local settings questions of sacramental practice are of immediate pastoral concern; our theological discussion could serve pressing needs in unfolding daily matters. Our discussion on this specific set of questions raises methodological issues pertinent to broader theological discussion and the self-understanding of Friends. At various points in these papers, relationships with other Christian communities and their sacramental practice are referenced. Details of those wider discussions were intentionally not brought fully into this internal discussion. Bringing these two streams into immediate dialogue, however, could be highly productive. In each of these three arenas of focus, I would suggest, locating our discussion in a wider horizon could serve fuller and richer inquiry.

In our discussion at the meeting, I raised the possibility that a key to understanding the non-use of the outward elements of bread and wine in the Eucharist by early Friends lies at the intersection of their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11, with its account of very early Eucharistic practice (c. 55 AD) and its injunction to engage in this memorial act, "proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26), and the conviction of early Friends that the Lord had indeed already come to teach his people himself. In *The Liturgies of Quakerism*, Pink Dandelion presses this point more effectively than I, drawing attention in particular to George Fox's leaflet of 1685, *A Distinction Between the Two Suppers* (Ashgate 2005, pp. 26-28). Further engagement with this pamphlet could be highly productive. Framing discussion of Quaker sacramental thought in eschatological terms, even at the local level, could refocus discussion on broader

questions of the eschatological “already” and the “not yet” of final fulfillment in productive ways.

As Seid rightly notes, Anglicanism is a mixture of Reformed and Catholic sensibilities and perspectives. History has documented the fact that this mix has a certain internal instability, creating tensions between low-church, Evangelical and high-church, Catholic-like expressions—even giving birth to such important church families as Methodism. In a broader perspective, our Quaker tradition is a historical product of this instability as well. Theologically we bear marks of this larger context out of which we emerged. Striking here is the fact that we have a strong doctrine of the Real Presence and an expectation of objectively recognizable baptismal transformation, characteristic of Catholic theology, which in several of the papers here is argued for from a basis characteristic of Reformed theology: *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), *Sola Gratia* (grace alone), *Sola Fide* (faith alone), *Soli Deo Gloria* (the glory of God alone).

Others of us, with stronger affinities to Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican thought would argue for a stronger sense of the living authority and power of Tradition and would explicate Quaker sacramental practice, using pre-Reformation conceptualization, as receiving the same spiritual matter (*res*) as other churches claim to enjoy, e.g. the Real Presence of Christ, but made available through a different symbolic means: the Gathered silence. How might we be able more effectively to bring our own Protestant and pre-Reformation sides into fruitful theological dialogue? Would greater awareness of these differences of perspective among us make it possible for us to tackle other theological questions together more productively and creatively?

Our discussions in the papers here do not engage in as full and direct discussions of the same questions in either the current or the historical discipline books of the yearly meetings. It could be useful, for instance, to bring the concern expressed by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in the section on sacraments in its 1997 *Faith and Practice* that “doctrinaire repudiation of form and ritual may become an end in itself” (p. 33) with Anderson’s paper, which is no doubt shaped in part by his Northwest Yearly Meeting affiliation.

Engagement with ecumenical texts in the preparation of which Friends were involved with a very wide community of other Christian

64 • ANN K. RIGGS

believers could be productive and offer new lenses through which to see and understand our own practice. World Council of Churches Faith and Order paper no. 111, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) is a primary resource for this purpose. That text's description of Holy Communion by means of five key dimensions gives powerful insight into our own communion practice and its underlying consonance with the practice of other Christians:

*Thanksgiving to the Father*—"the benediction (*berakah*) by which the Church expresses its thankfulness for all God's benefits" Eucharist 3;

*Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ*—"Christ himself with all that he has accomplished for us and for all creation (in his incarnation, servant-hood, ministry, teaching, suffering, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit) is present in this *anamnesis*, granting us communion with himself" E 6;

*Invocation of the Spirit*—"The whole action of the eucharist has an "epikletic" character because it depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit. In the words [and faith-filled silences? – AR] of the liturgy, this aspect of the eucharist finds varied expression. The Church, as the community of the new covenant, confidently invokes the Spirit, in order that it may be sanctified and renewed, led into all justice, truth and unity, and empowered to fulfil its mission in the world" E 16-17;

*Communion of the Faithful*—"communion with Christ who nourishes the life of the Church is at the same time communion within the body of Christ which is the Church. The sharing ... in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places" E 19;

*The Meal of the Kingdom*—"opens up the vision of the divine rule which has been promised as the final renewal of creation, and is a foretaste of it. Signs of this renewal are present in the world wherever the grace of God is manifest and human beings work for justice, love and peace. The eucharist is the feast at which the Church gives thanks to God for these signs and joyfully celebrates and anticipates the coming of the Kingdom in Christ (1 Cor. 11:26; Matt. 26:29)." E 22

Finally, engagement by a broader community of Friends with formal ecumenical responses to key ecumenical texts that include statement

on or references to sacramental theology would be a welcome activity, and it could also produce fruitful new insights. Some of the key texts that come to mind are listed below. As we consider prayerfully how to bear witness to the truth we have received as Friends, it helps us to be mindful that other believers are seeking to do the same. There may even be a larger, not-yet-imagined contribution that Friends might make to these important discussions on Christian unity, that Jesus' followers might be one, and that the world might be more fully receptive to his saving and healing work in the world (Jn. 17:23).

#### FURTHER READING:

*To Lima with Love: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: A Quaker Response*, London Yearly Meeting, 1986  
([http://www.fgcquaker.org/circ/to\\_lima\\_with\\_love.htm](http://www.fgcquaker.org/circ/to_lima_with_love.htm)).

*Response to The Nature and Purpose of the Church, Faith and Order Paper #181 (1998) of the World Council of Churches*, Christian and Interfaith Relations Committee, Friends General Conference, 2001  
(<http://www.fgcquaker.org/circ/faithandorder-response.html>).

*The Church: Called, Gathered, and Faithful*, prepared by Friends United Meeting Theological Commission, 2002  
(<http://www.quaker.org/quest/issue-9-FUM-02.htm>).