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Ruth M. Pitman

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Quaker Symbolism and Ritual:

Communication of Meaning in Quaker Practices

RUTH M. PITMAN

In a letter in *QRT* no. 45, Samuel Cooper points out that as soon as a humble person entertains the thought "I am humble," self arises and humility is gone. In this instance thought destroys a virtue. For some years I have been interested in what happens when ideas or attitudes are put into words, symbols, rituals, signs, or gestures. It is one thing to feel, let us say, exultation; it is another to write that fact on paper where one's feeling becomes an object for one to examine. It is something else again to announce one's feeling to the world where others can react to one or to one's emotion with praise, blame, curiosity, imitation, or any of a myriad of other responses, and where any reaction becomes a new object that in turn invites responses. Though Christ puts more emphasis upon the sins of the heart than the Law had done, he also recognizes the special significance of the outward act of breaking a law and of the act of teaching others to do likewise: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19 KJV). This paper is concerned with Friends' teaching through signs, symbols, rituals, conduct, and dogma.

Two fields of inquiry immediately present themselves: the technical one of definition and description and the specifically Quaker one of Quaker attitude and practice. I shall deal hastily and loosely with the technical side before turning to the problems peculiar to Friends, and then to a subjective interpretation of what might be called high-church Quaker ritual or, rather extravagantly, an apology for quietist Quakerism as the one true church.

FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Coarse distinctions between terms are obvious. Dogmas are verbal, symbols and gestures are generally non-verbal, rituals are usually a mixture of actions and words. For Friends "dogma" is a boo-word, but "testimony" is a hurrah-word; "law" is a boo-word, but "advices" is a hurrah-word. Clearly there must be differences, and it might be an interesting exercise to find out what the differences are. What captures my attention, however, are not so much the differences in these phenomena as the fact that all communicate ideas. Consequently, I shall use the terms symbol, ritual, and gesture loosely to cover a range of phenomena with common, if not identical, characteristics.

In his paper read at the College Park Quarterly Meeting Theology Workshop in 1975 (*QRT* no. 45) William T. Scott referred to the well-known fact that we dwell in language. We shape it to our purposes while at the same time we are shaped by it. The same is true for the verbal, non-verbal, and semi-verbal phenomena I am discussing here. We live our lives in symbol and ritual just as much as we dwell in language. We communicate often at several levels, through objects, signs, and gestures. We convey our feelings, our beliefs, and the dynamic of our community. We address our children and the world around us, and often we address ourselves: the revival meeting, for example, is primarily aimed at rekindling the flame in the already converted.

FOUR OBSERVATIONS ABOUT SYMBOLS

Where do symbols and rituals come from? Sometimes from the most commonplace circumstances, which acquire meaning in the course of repetition. Take, for example, the clear glass meetinghouse window. Its origin is almost surely utilitarian. But what would happen if some kind donor were to offer tinted glass to beautify a new meetinghouse in the East? You can be sure there would be a lot of squirming if not audible cries of indignation. When did clear glass become a symbol for us? Perhaps when some Friend first preached a sermon on the subject and told us how clear glass was a mark of simplicity and let the sunshine into our meetinghouse as our lives should let the light of God shine through us. Or perhaps it was when an

older Friend denounced the idolatry in stained glass windows. But I suspect that it happened even before we heard the sermons. I have often worshiped on chairs, but I prefer benches, though I have never heard a sermon on the subject, and my reasons would have to do with what benches mean in human relations in worship, i.e., with the ritualistic-symbolic function of benches.

This brings me to my second observation about symbols and rituals: it is a human tendency to read meaning into acts and objects whether there was meaning in them to begin with or not. There are Anabaptist groups that have split over whether a person being baptized should be immersed face down or face up. "How silly," we say from our superior, enlightened vantage point, but as soon as an act assumes meaning beyond itself an attack upon the act is an affront to the doctrine or attitude that the act represents. Moreover, the problem is not solved by giving each individual his choice of being baptized forward or backward, because if direction has a meaning that the whole group understands, the unity of the group's testimony to the world is destroyed when each individual can do as he pleases, and in place of the testimony there arises a new statement in gestures: neither what forward immersion nor what backward immersion signifies is important. We can feel superior only because we do not understand and do not care. Slim grounds for superiority!

Here is a second example of the human instinct to read meaning into the world. The star magnolia outside Arch Street meetinghouse in Philadelphia usually blooms at Yearly Meeting time, but in 1978 a cold winter and a slow spring kept the buds closed all week. Many Friends felt that the meetings went unusually well, and even a pessimist would have to admit that they could have been a lot worse. Then on the last day the sun came out, and the temperature rose into the eighties. In the last session, when the clerk announced that the magnolia had burst into bloom, there was a wave of excitement in the room, and even a pessimist could not help but feel that God must have accepted what happened there.

A third characteristic of symbols and rituals is that their meaning is not always apparent. When jeans, T-shirts, long

hair, and beards emerged in the 1960s as the favorite dress for many young men, there was much discussion, interpretation, and indignation. Why did young men dress this way? (One could also speak of the female counterpart, but she aroused less comment at the time.) Countless explanations were advanced: the costume represented rebellion against fathers, a rejection of parental values, a search for new values, the taking of drugs, a back-to-nature move, new simplicity, new tenderness, an assertion of masculinity, the worship of a new hero, an assertion of individuality, a new conformity, etc. Examples could undoubtedly be found for every explanation, but even if the list did not contain contradictions it would not explain why any one individual adopted this garb. How an individual dresses is significant, as any psychiatrist knows. And how one dresses affects how one feels about oneself and how others react to one. We live in ritual and symbol, shaping it while it shapes us. Dress communicates. But what it communicates is not always clear either to the wearer or the observer, and interpreting can be dangerous. This is especially true of the non-verbal phenomena, much less so of the verbal ones.

The meaning of a gesture or ritual not only can vary (within a range) from individual to individual, but it can shift in the course of time. When the world around us changes, our symbols are perceived differently. This is so obvious it hardly needs to be mentioned. Less obvious is the fact that our symbols can change their significance even for us insiders, because the word once spoken or the ritual once established becomes an object in itself and often conveys something more than, less than, or different from the impulse that created it.

A Quaker institution that has changed both because of external circumstances and because of the very existence of the institution is the plain language, the use of the singular pronoun to one person and the plural to more than one. Originally this usage was a symbolic act that testified to truth through grammar. There was also an element of confrontation in the practice. To address a person in the singular who expected to be addressed in the plural was to call him to humility, to remind him of his real size before the God of truth. As a practical matter the confrontation often opened the door for

stronger evangelizing. When *you* supplanted *thou* and *thee*, Friends' practice assumed a new function: it set them apart from the rest of the world. Do not underestimate the value of being different! A people that stands out from the masses has a wonderful opportunity to witness with its life, and Friends did so, building up such a capital of respect for their ethics that they can still spend from it today. A custom that sets a group apart has internal functions too. It calls the members to fidelity to the whole tradition and gives each individual something that answers one of his deepest needs, the need to belong.

As the use of the singular pronouns declined, and as Friends became more integrated into life around them, they were affected by the growing American preoccupation with equality, and the meaning of the plain language was reinterpreted. "Friends used the plain language," we were told in Quakerism class about 1950, "because they believed in equality." This is no more than a half-truth, though I heard it again just this year from a young woman who invoked it in support of an equality measure for which she was campaigning. This is one of the things we do with dogmas, traditions, symbols, and rituals; we invoke them to support the policies for which we are campaigning, sometimes reinterpreting, lifting from context, and removing from history, a process that can be both creative and dishonest. In Philadelphia Yearly Meeting today the plain language lingers on as a mark of affection or devotion, and many is the convinced Friend who longs to use it and hear it as a mark of acceptance and belonging, even though he would reject the theology and way of life of which it was once an integral part.

So far I have described four characteristics of the phenomena that for want of a better word I have lumped together as rituals and symbols: 1) Their raw material is often commonplace objects and events. 2) There is a human tendency to read meaning into the forms of life regardless of what was originally intended. 3) Symbols and rituals do communicate, though what they communicate is risky to define. 4) Their meaning tends to shift in time. We noted in passing that symbols have both internal and external effects and that they minister to

deep psychological needs of people. We shall return to these functions later.

FRIENDS AND SYMBOLS

Having said this, I want to turn to some of the peculiarly Quaker problems with symbols and rituals. The first is that Friends are very reluctant to admit that they have any, and even less inclined to talk about them. There is good reason for this. For one thing, set symbols and rituals with clear interpretations might inhibit change, or "growth," to use a current hurrah-word, and a dynamic of change comes close to being one of the contemporary Quaker idolatries. For another, the denial of symbolism avoids certain sorts of arguments. You cannot argue, for example, over whether flowers get placed at the front of the meeting room if the move does not signify anything, and often the meaning of such a move is inoffensively vague until someone makes a point of it, thus giving it conscious symbolic meaning. Of course, if the issue is a Bible rather than flowers, it is much harder to avoid the symbolic content: hell breaks loose, and in agonizing monthly meetings Friends pay the price of their lack of creed.

But the important reason why Friends resist symbols is that they know symbols are not the real thing. To settle for the symbol instead of the substance is delusion, is infidelity to truth. The traditional Quaker skepticism about symbols is akin to the Quaker skepticism about music: the religious fervor engendered by man-made art is not to be substituted for the work of God. Friends who now endorse the arts and glorify the senses would do well to consider the religious world-view their lifestyle implies, and what it must imply about their form of silent worship, about which they are often very dogmatic. The Quaker resistance to symbols can then be seen either as a Quaker gloss on the Second Commandment or as the Quaker realization of what Johann Scheffler, a Roman Catholic contemporary of Fox who wrote under the name of Angelus Silesius, expressed something like this: "Should Christ be born a thousand times anew, / Despair, O man, unless he's born in you!"

Early Friends did use symbols, however. Their writings and lives were filled with symbols. And not the meek sort that

grow naturally out of everyday objects and events like plain glass windows and silence as a form of worship. When early Friends "went naked for a sign" it was neither because of the inviting British climate nor because of some advanced new doctrine advocating the natural man. Interesting as early Quaker symbolism may be, I must leave it to the scholars, at least for now. My heritage is the forms of a later period, the period when Quakerism was no longer a movement, but had become a church. This is the period of the books of discipline or the quietist period, during which time Quaker forms both educated the children in the faith and continued to proclaim the faith to the world. Let us look at some of the characteristics of Quaker forms.

CHARACTERISTICS OF QUAKER RITUAL

One type of ritual popular with Friends is a type someone has dubbed "instant ritual," an apparently spontaneous act that makes a point with few or no words, often an enactment of a passage in the discipline. When William Bacon Evans was invited to Christmas dinner at his niece's, he brought along his sandwich. No one in the family could possibly have missed the meaning of the gesture as a protest against indulgent eating, especially feasting as a secular celebration of a spiritual event.

Another type of Quaker ritual consists of maneuvers that ease the conscience and state the point while avoiding the consequences of a direct clash with authorities. Mrs. Greer, a Friend who left the Society in the last century and wrote two anti-Quaker books, tells how Bristol Friends dealt with the problem of having to pay tithes, which supported the "hireling priesthood." The tithe collector let Friends know when he was coming, and each Friend had some silverware sitting in plain sight when he arrived. The Friend refused to pay, and the tithe collector confiscated the silver, but the Friend was always able to purchase back his things from the local silversmith for a sum that exactly matched the amount of the tithe assessment. The silver was always professionally polished and the silversmith found the Friends good customers. Friends reported to the meeting the value of the item distrained for tithes and the query was answered "that Friends were faithful in bearing their

Christian testimony against paying tithes, priests' demands, and church rates."² Before we join in Mrs. Greer's outrage, we might consider how similar the practice is to the twentieth-century procedure of withholding the portion of one's income tax that will go to the military and permitting the federal government to confiscate the sum from one's bank account. We might also consider the effectiveness of the witness as measured by the fact that Friends were eventually relieved of having to pay tithes, and relief from "war tax" now, for the first time, does seem to be a possibility. Finally, we might consider two unpleasant alternatives to such maneuvers: changing the discipline so that the matter did not arise, or answering the query with expressions of guilt, about which no one planned to do anything except to feel pious because he had been honest.

In the practices and testimonies handed down to us from the two previous centuries — and I am coming now to the third characteristic of Quaker ritual — there are many rituals that could be called anti-symbol symbols. These are practices whose symbolic content is a protest against the all-too-often empty rituals of the established church or of society, though these anti-symbol symbols also carry the positive message in which they originated. One can include here the Quaker practices with regard to sacraments, the church calendar, mourning, the paid ministry, war, and probably others. Against a background of Christians who trusted water, wine, and bread, and supported ministers whose only qualification for office was their Oxford or Cambridge degree, Friends testified by word and act to the importance of the genuine experience of God's forgiveness and his sustaining presence at all times and in all places. Against a background of self-indulgence, penance, and more self-indulgence, Friends testified to God's power to overcome sin every day of the year and thus to man's ability to "live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of wars." Against the background of a society that faced death and mourned the loss of its loved ones, Friends testified to their faith in the resurrection of the dead. The faith in these areas settled into "the peculiarities," but "the peculiarities" served to remind Friends of the faith. Now that "the peculiarities" have largely disappeared and Friends are free to attend other

churches and to enjoy sacraments and paid ministry; now that they have their own abysmal Christmas pageants, Christmas trees, and First-day school Easter egg hunts, and can rest easy in alternative service; now that Friends' simple burials and lack of mourning blend into society's avoidance of the reality of death, one may well ask what has become of the faith of which the Quaker symbols were the visible evidence.

SILENCE AS A RITUAL

But Quakerism's great central ritual in my part of the world is undoubtedly its form of "silent worship." The fact that this form has gone beyond being an unconscious practice and has hardened into ritual can be seen in numerous little ways. Some of the most theologically and ethically "progressive" Friends cling to their "worship based on silence" as proof that they are the direct and only spiritual descendants of Fox et al., and see in this ritual the justification for new evolutionary horizons. Or, as further evidence, consider the relationship between the opening silence and the conduct of the business in meetings where *discussion* is the method and *consensus* is the goal. In such meetings the silence is the same kind of ritual as the little prayer for guidance offered by a clergyman in political bodies or religious groups that then proceed to their debates and votes. Or finally, imagine what would happen today if a Friend were to arrive for meeting at the appointed hour, already preaching loudly as he walked in the door, as is reported of William Penn on one occasion. Imagine the expressions of outrage because he had not "settled down" and "spoken out of the silence."

Yet silence is in truth central. How else can one proclaim, or come before, the Creator of all that we now know or ever shall, the Father who sent his only begotten son to deliver us from our egypt, him who is nearer than breath! In ecstasy we cry, "Away with creeds, laws, symbols, and rituals, lest they bind the Spirit or replace direct experience!" And into our well-swept silence returns the spirit we have expelled, bringing seven more wicked than himself, because man must find meaning in life.

QUAKER FORMS: VOICE AND POSTURE

Mindful of the danger of reading meaning into forms, aware that signs are deceptive and that structure is not spirit, and knowing that I am indebted to the large Christian denominations, I want to describe part of what I feel our tradition has to offer us and those around us. Let me begin with two symbolic gestures that were never put into a discipline but survived until the early part of the twentieth century and disappeared from Philadelphia within my memory: intoning and a different posture for prayer.

If Elizabeth Isichei is correct, intoning is a nineteenth-century development.³ The practical side of intoning is the same as that of plain-chant: audibility in a large room, where especially the elderly find hearing difficult. The symbolic side of the practice is an effacement of self in an effort to let the words be God's; this is the opposite of "I have been thinking," from which spirit too much of our ministry springs and to which the classic reply is: "Friend, thou shouldst not have been thinking." Intoning may have other dimensions as well as the practical and the symbolic. It is possible, for example, that it is a kind of Quaker equivalent of wine and incense or peyote cactus, i.e., something that tends to induce another kind of consciousness. We do indeed have need for caution with regard to levels of consciousness (and with regard to false piety too!) as rationalist Friends would be quick to tell us, yet curiously enough, in 1977 I heard an active, youngish Friend in rationalist Philadelphia Yearly Meeting plead his experience in other realms of consciousness as a justification for his claim to spiritual insight. Intoning may also minister to the same human need filled by rock music. If religion cannot use, interpret, and give a place to this human capacity, the secular world will.

The practice of kneeling when offering vocal prayer, while the rest of those present rise, may well be older than Quaker intoning. Some sort of special posture for group prayer was undoubtedly part of Friends' heritage from the established church and the culture of the seventeenth century. Now we know very well that God looks not upon the posture but upon the heart, but we also know, if we are at all honest, that while posture does not affect God, it certainly does affect us. Rising

when someone kneels to offer vocal prayer on behalf of the whole meeting draws the individual into participation in the presence of God and man.

The same type of observation and reasoning I have been applying to the practices of intoning and of kneeling and standing for prayer can be applied to the practice of standing to give a message other than a prayer in the meeting for worship or business. At the practical level, it contributes to audibility and discourages unnecessary remarks. Symbolically it can represent the principle that what we seek is God's will, not man's opinion. Of course, posture is no proof that "Thus saith the Lord," or even that "Here I stand, I can do no other." One can also stand in the attitude of "Now I want my say." Gestures are hard to interpret.

In meetings where the accepted pattern is to remain seated when speaking, a different dynamic tends to develop. Informality as an expression of the human tends to supplant formality as an expression of the divine. Bound by the non-voting form of Quaker business meetings, these groups seek consensus but stop short of calling it God's will. In making decisions they seek a free expression of personal opinion as a sign that every individual is valued, and they are amazed to discover that individuals often have very different desires. Quakerism, these Friends conclude regretfully, can appeal only to people from a limited part of society.

SACRAMENTS

We know well that any religion worth troubling about must have something to say that reaches people of all classes. This thought brings me to the sacraments. These are the institutions that speak of the universal experiences of birth and death and of the physical and spiritual perpetuation of the community. The sacraments give meaning to the deepest human emotions and always in such a way that the individual is brought into the context of God's people living under his law. Sacraments are never purely individual. Even penance, traditionally probably the most private of the sacraments, deals with the individual's relationship to the law that shapes the religious community and reflects truth.

Protestants, it seems to me, have lost a great deal in recognizing only two rites as sacraments, though their position is itself an expression of their emphasis upon the authority of the Bible. The Quaker position that recognizes everything and nothing as sacramental is ambiguous. The cliché versions of the position are found in the statements: "Quakers don't have any sacraments" and "Quakers think all of life is sacramental." One suspects that where everything is sacred, nothing is. In any event, the serious question arises: how do we recognize the so-called sacramental quality of life and how do we communicate it to others?

Before discussing the question of communication further, we might see what provisions Friends have for sacramental occasions. It has been my repeated experience that, when hearing about the meaning others found in their rites, I have said to myself, "We have that too." Take baptism, for example: the Anglican Church of Canada is now making baptism (rather than baptism and confirmation) the sole requirement for admission to communion. In making this change they have stressed the significance of baptism as a rite of belonging to the Christian community. Belonging on the strength of one's parents' commitment is, of course, what Friends have in birthright membership. Belonging as a full member can be extremely important to a child. It frees him from the need to conform to the pressures of outside society and enables him to support Christian testimonies in the face of a hostile world. Where children are expected to be in meetings for worship and business, the sense of belonging is reinforced. In my own experience the attitude of older Friends, who greeted us children as they greeted our parents, also helped.

In the Baptist denominations, where baptism is adult baptism, commitment is one of the important meanings of the sacraments. Earnest Friends who see the sad results of a strong sense of belonging coupled with no sense of commitment, Friends who wring their hands about absentee members who may make a nominal financial contribution to prevent disownment but are not practicing members, often favor the abolition of birthright membership in the hope that a personal commitment from an adult will yield better fruit than a sense of

belonging that makes an individual feel good but lacks witness or perhaps, even worse, actually undermines Friends' corporate witness. Friends have traditionally covered the need for commitment to back up belonging, by placing a strong emphasis on discipline. Faithfulness in attendance and in the observance of "the peculiarities" was a symbol of Friends' commitment, a reminder to self and a sign to the world.

Quaker penance could take a variety of forms. Apart from fully private confession, and confession with the help of another person, probably an overseer or possibly an elder, Friends had public confession in the form of written acknowledgments. This institution "for the clearing of Friends and Truth," as some of the letters said, had all the potential for individual and communal joy and healing, plus a large measure of public witness, individual and corporate.

The elaborateness of the marriage procedure, the space devoted to it in the discipline, the fact that the whole meeting is involved, and the accomplishment of the marriage in a worship setting after God's will has been sought, are all characteristics that point clearly to a sacrament. If Quaker marriage is to continue to maintain its sacramental character, the acts and rituals that govern society's continuation and stability must not be permitted to degenerate into individualism. Individualistic vows and self-designed sexual ethics destroy the sacrament of marriage by removing meaning from the patterns of married life and cutting the ties with the past.⁴

The custom of recording ministers and elders makes room for the sacrament of ordination. As the word "recording" indicates, Friends recognize a gift and a calling, they do not bestow them. Unlike the appointment of committees and the approval of marriages, the recognition of ministers is not solely a monthly meeting matter. Its rightness is to be tested by the quarterly meeting also. This precaution indicates the gravity of the matter, though there is no special ceremony or ordination; the particular Quaker requirement is that great care be taken to discern God's will for the individual correctly, rather than to celebrate or congratulate the new minister, though there is a place for prayers and rejoicing also. The recording of the names

of those to whom God has given the gift of ministry for his people is an occasion for remembering with joy the movement of the Holy Spirit among Friends. A new committee list does not elicit such a response.

One of the provisions of the older disciplines is that ministers and elders not be confused with each other, though they work together closely. No one is both a minister and an elder at the same time. The elders' chief task is to look after the ministers, to foster and guide their ministry. What great freedom of spirit it must give a minister to know he has wise elders to guide his spiritual growth and keep him from running out into airy fancies and getting lost in mystical morasses! The elders' other major task is a ministry to the gravely ill and dying. This is the Quaker provision for the last sacrament.

Finally there is the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Neither space nor my own resources will permit me to do more than hint at its centrality to Christianity or at the richness of its imagery. I have known Friends who dismissed this rite as nothing but another cannibalistic tribal custom. They overlook the fact that the stomach is very close to home, and the mouth is the site of a daily drama of need and pleasure. Should not a universal message come to us in the most universal and most vital experiences? Without the images of the broken body and the shed blood our understanding of God's love for us and his expectation of us is drastically impoverished, and we lose an important link with Christians of all the ages and with the truths of Judaism as well.

In keeping with the Quaker avoidance of symbols and rituals that might be surrogates for the genuine encounter, Friends developed structures that left room for the sacramental experience without being in themselves sacraments, and the place into which the eucharist fits is certainly the meeting for worship. An ex-Anglican Friend once described the meeting for worship as the extension of that precious silence so few Anglican priests seem able to sustain adequately after the blessing of the bread and wine. But how are our young Friends, our new members, and our visitors to understand this? How are we to focus our silence without prayer book or ritual?

COMMUNICATION

The head of a Quaker educational institution who was recently defending his school as a Christian one listed several features of the school's program, such as Bible classes and meeting for worship, and concluded his list with "and the breaking of bread together." The context implies the Lord's supper, but we can be sure that this Quaker school has not instituted a communion rite. If the head had meant only that the school community lived in a spirit of caring and sharing, one must ask, "What do ye more than others?" There is nothing intrinsically Christian about a school community that gets along well together. It may be, however, that the bread this Friend had in mind is substantial enough, and that he was thinking of a popular passage that John S. Rowntree attributed to Stephen Grellet: "I think I can reverently say that I very 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 the remembrance of, and some devout feeling regarding the broken body and the bloodshedding of my dear Lord and Saviour."⁵ In the life of Friends this little quotation of doubtful origin functions like a symbol, reminding us that every meal can be a communion. Without this passage there would be few ways for students to see their meals as sacramental. The formalities of dress for communal events, the prayers and silences that surrounded meals, and the formalities of seating and table decor have eroded steadily in our society. There are some Friends' families in which each member is so busy with his individual pursuits that the family never sits down to a meal together, and there are countless Quaker or half-Quaker homes where neither prayer nor silence accompanies a meal. It is possible, though extremely unlikely, that the school in question makes its meals formal enough to convey a sense of the sacred. But even if this should be the case, the question remains: how is the specifically Christian content of "the breaking of bread together" conveyed in all its richness, be it for a meeting context or for a daily supper?

Persistent reading of the Bible will help by keeping the history and the faith of the early church present to the minds of Friends. Pastoral Friends are more successful here than

unprogrammed Friends, who are restrained by their symbolic system from reading the Bible in their gatherings as often as is necessary. Unfortunately, the symbolism that develops of itself when the Bible is *not* read attracts people who pull Friends away from Christianity and prevent the next generation from being raised in the Christian tradition.

One of the two great weaknesses of the Quaker symbolic system is that it is primarily directed at people who are already Christians. That is, the anti-symbol symbol is best understood by people who accept Christian faith and law but can be brought to see the inadequacy of legalism and a creed. Our situation today is more difficult, because we can no longer assume a rudimentary Christianity even within our own educational institutions or families. The other weakness of the Quaker symbolic system is that ritual designed to demonstrate dependence upon the Spirit leaves almost no major mechanical means, such as creed or liturgy, of keeping the fundamental elements of the faith before members and the public. Thus a heavy burden is placed upon those who review applications for membership, and an even heavier burden is placed upon the ministry. If ministers and elders remain aware of the urgent need for a solid, non-peripheral, Christian ministry, and if the ministry maintains a sacramental position, we can have hope for the Society's future.

The strength of Friends' symbolism is an enactment of the words from Habakkuk: "What profiteth the graven image . . . ? Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it. But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (2:18-20 KJV). The attitude of expectant waiting (a variation of silence before the Lord) combined with the Quaker emphasis upon the Lord's constant presence, constant love, and perpetual invitation, is made visible by a style of living that calls for simplicity in architecture, furnishings, and dress, decorum in conduct, restraint in activities, and quiet as the background music of living.

Notes

1. "Wird Christus tausendmal zu Bethlehem geboren / Und nicht in dir, du bleibst noch ewiglich verloren." *Der cherubinische Wandersmann*, Erstes Buch. English translation by Victor Gollancz in his anthology, *A Year of Grace* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 45.
2. [Sarah D. Greer]. *Quakerism; or, The Story of My Life* by a lady, who for forty years was a member of the Society of Friends (Philadelphia: J. W. Moore, 1852), pp. 198-204. The book was first published in England. Her other work is *The Society of Friends; a Domestic Narrative, Illustrating the Peculiar Doctrines Held by the Disciples of George Fox* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1853, but also first published in England).
3. Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 95.
4. In an article, "After the Manner of Friends," *The Canadian Friend*, Vol. 70, no. 2 (April-May 1974), pp. 6-9, I have outlined in some detail what I see as the symbolic content in each part of the marriage procedure. Unfortunately the opening paragraphs were printed in the order 5, 6, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 rather than 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and the one footnote was omitted.
5. John S. Rowntree, *The Society of Friends: Its Faith and Practice* (London: Headley Brothers, 1901), p. 41. The quotation is also printed in sect. 61 of London Yearly Meeting's *Christian Faith and Practice* and has thus achieved its place as an article of Quaker faith.

Looking ahead . . .

Sin, Perfection, and the Faithful Community. 1980 Quaker Hill conference papers by Nancy N. Jackson, Arthur O. Roberts, Dennis Dick, and Sandra Cronk.

A Theology of Evangelism and Outreach for Friends. 1978 Barnesville conference papers by Alan Kolp, Ron Allen, and Larry Barker.

Also in forthcoming issues:

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