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## Comments on "Quakers and the Sacraments"

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## Comments

### J. FLOYD MOORE

The purpose of Maurice Creasey's analysis of "Quakers and the Sacraments" is "to look afresh at the Society's traditional attitude to the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper," "to raise right questions rather than to proffer right answers," and to stimulate others to think deeply about this matter. He achieves all three goals successfully, and does so with characteristic care, insight, and devotion.

He develops three main points: the historic Quaker position, both seventeenth century and contemporary; the biblical and theological position of Friends; and relevant contemporary questions. While his method is adapted from the historic Quaker practice of asking leading questions, these queries, like most others, reveal the goal to be desired. What he says, essentially, is that the Society of Friends has often, throughout its history, misunderstood or misinterpreted the New Testament concept of these two Sacraments, that it may have been the loser in doing so, and that the time has arrived to take a new look at them and, perhaps, to use them creatively ourselves.

After asking whether our discovery of the "uniting and mediating power of corporate silent waiting" would be "any less significant if we continued to practice, in appropriate ways and on appropriate occasions, the historic communion of the shared cup and the one loaf?" he answers positively: "It is my belief that not only would it not be less significant, but our gathered waiting would be, more often than it now is, a gathering 'in his name' who used these symbols to set forth to sense and heart the deepest meaning of his presence amongst us."

Maurice Creasey makes it quite clear that he is not speaking of the Sacraments in the sense of Jewish rituals, nor in the Roman Catholic sense of a literal and physical, as well as spiritual, reality, nor in any sense of magic, formalism, or crude ex-

ternalism. He is concerned primarily for depth of meaning and experience which comes from the shared *Ekklesia*, centering in the historic person and spirit of Christ and transmitted by, in, and through the church.

His analysis provides two possible grounds for a reversal of Quaker testimony at this point: first, that the appropriate use of the two Sacraments by Friends is desirable and meaningful in itself; second, that use of the two Sacraments by Friends will enable the Society to participate in closer unity with other Christians in the ecumenical movement. It seems reasonable to some who have shared the profound unity of fellowship with Christians outside the Society whose lives testify to the meaning of these Sacraments, that both of these uses can be recognized and justified. Profound worship and fellowship can and does rise from the experience of Baptism and Communion. The participation of Friends in these Sacraments, especially the Supper, would undoubtedly be appreciated by other members of the World Council of Churches.

Is there not, however, a much larger and more important question which supersedes these? What is the basic nature of Friends' understanding of God and his revelation? What is the basic meaning of Jesus Christ and his relevance? What is the basic nature of the church and society? What is the basic nature of worship, fellowship, service? Friends have, as Maurice Creasey points out, demonstrated faulty biblical exegesis, and have misinterpreted the views of other Christians. This does not mean, however, that the essential Quaker views are either unbiblical or anti-biblical, or that they have necessarily been read back into the Bible. There have been, both among seventeenth and twentieth century Friends, those who find in the history of Israel, especially in the great prophets; in the very nature of Christ, both in life and death; and in Jesus' disciples and in the *koinonia* which arose from faith in his continued presence, the kind and quality of religious experience which brings the greatest fulfillment. The Bible, for these Friends, is in fact the historical ground of their faith.

This fact certainly brought about, in its historical context, an opposition to outward signs, rituals, and symbols. In

some cases it has admittedly seemed to produce a testimony of the necessity of no Sacraments. But does not Maurice Creasey omit the more significant fact, that Quakerism is a positive witness to a truly spiritual experience of God in Christ, in history, in society, in the kingdom which is and the kingdom which is becoming? To live up to this potential, or even to try to, requires all that one can give, and more.

Aside from the traditional testimony, which certainly should not be the grounds for final decision, there is no inherent reason why an individual Friend, or an entire monthly meeting, could not or should not, after careful consideration and in a sense of unity, use either Sacrament. On the other hand, would it be desirable for the Five Years Meeting, the Friends General Conference, London Yearly Meeting, or any other body outside the local community to establish the Sacraments as a recommended or required aspect of Friends' fellowship? What would this do to our basic concept of a spiritual movement grounded in first-hand, immediate experience? How would it affect our total relationship to the Christian world? Just as important, how would it affect our total relationship to the non-Christian world? It is my conviction, based on the study and observation of other Christian fellowships, that the Society of Friends would gradually become another congregationalist-type church, as it already has become in some other respects by adopting Protestant features.

We as a Society stand at the moment potentially capable of making a significant contribution to the people of the entire world, to the non-Christian religions and secular movements. Will we not stand in a far better position to serve creatively in this time of world social upheaval with a strong, positive witness to a religious faith which, however imperfectly, aspires to reach directly to truth and love? Is not our testimony stronger without the historical rituals which, though meaningful to Protestants, may be serious obstacles to others? Friends do not, of course, have to sacrifice meaningful symbolism, drama, or aesthetics. We can hardly live without some of each. A fresh, new surge of appreciation for the aesthetic and dramatic approach to truth could, indeed, be a welcome source of vitality within Quakerism.

Maurice Creasey does not really seem to care greatly whether Baptism is included or not. His emphasis seems to rest primarily on the Eucharist. The Eucharist as a drama certainly can be a means of spiritual fellowship for those who are inwardly prepared for it. However, the fact is that for many birthright, and perhaps for even more convinced, Friends, one of the main attractions of the Society is its non-ritualistic nature. In the recognition of this fact by Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy, the Society of Friends may in the long run gain rightful recognition of its positive witness. Would this not provide a stronger ecumenical witness than the willingness, genuine though it may be, to come to terms with the two Sacraments in the hope of closer unity with others?

The analysis by Maurice Creasey raises other questions which need more time or space for useful discussion, e.g., why does he not include foot washing, which has perhaps better biblical justification than the other two Sacraments, and is particularly appropriate for Friends in its emphasis upon service and humility? In what way would the symbolic use of the two Sacraments help or hinder the relationship of Friends to the Roman Catholic church, in view of recent communications at the Vatican Council? What would be the effect of Quaker adoption of the Sacraments upon the religious education of our children; upon Friends' approach to missions, evangelism, outreach, social service, international relations, and world peace? What problems would arise in planning the necessary external details of Baptism: immersion? sprinkling? should a baptistry pool be built inside the meetinghouse, or would a natural body of water be required? Would each member equally be eligible to baptize a new member, or only ministers and elders? Should Baptism be restricted to children, or to adults? Many similar questions could be raised concerning Communion, with additional ones: a common cup, or individual cups? Use of wine only, or grape juice? Specially prepared wafers? Approved silver service? Who would officiate, and when? How often would communion be held? Who would be eligible?

It may well be said these questions are premature and incidental, and that the issue should be settled on prior considera-

tions. That is certainly true. And yet they would be inevitable and influential. We cannot forget the experience of Friends in Ohio, North Carolina, and Iowa who followed the example and leadership of David Updegraff 80 years ago.\* So far as I know, the experience of American Friends in the use of Baptism and Communion has not produced the kind or quality of Christian experience which Maurice Creasey describes. Perhaps today, under other conditions, this could be achieved. An American Quaker leader told me recently that, in spite of his normal indifference if not antipathy to Sacraments, he had attended two work camps, one in Italy seven years ago, another in the South recently, where, after a period of significant fellowship in work, study, and play, he found himself participating wholeheartedly and with deep spiritual unity in ecumenical Communion services, alongside Christians of a variety of faiths, nationalities, and races.

On the whole, however, it seems to me that Quakerism will do well to achieve its greatest potential as a Society which seeks, in addition to its historic grounding in the New Testament and in its corporate experience, ever new and fresh revelations of God's will in our own time, manifested and made real in our total life together, with positive emphasis on immediate, first-hand fellowship and worship.

#### DAVID O. STANFIELD

I am glad that Maurice Creasey has opened for review the Quaker testimony regarding the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is appropriate for contemporary Friends to re-examine their traditional testimony of the non-necessity of these observances because Friends today are becoming increasingly involved in ecumenical affairs with their "brothers in Christ" who value very highly these sacramental experiences.

When the Quaker testimony on the Sacraments has been supported by the two claims: first, that their observance is not

\* Helpful additional contemporary discussions of this question may be found in Elbert Russell's *The History of Quakerism*, p. 488; Rufus M. Jones' *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, ch. V; and Howard H. Brinton's *Friends for 300 Years*, pp. 70 f.

necessary to welcome the Spirit of Christ into our lives or to establish divine-human spiritual communion, and second, that the outward observance may be a hindrance, rather than a help, to these experiences of the Spirit, I have felt that our testimony was too negative to stop there. We have not always been able to go on to bear witness to an adequate or better means of entering into a corporate experience with the living Christ. For this reason, too, it is well for us to make a fresh examination of our testimony and experience.

I support the author's plea that Friends not exclude the observance of the Sacraments, under certain conditions, as a *possible* means of God's grace. To shift the testimony of the non-necessity of the Sacraments to *the necessity of no Sacraments* reflects an ill-founded assumption that the Sacraments are always a hindrance, and may also imply a spiritual arrogance that Friends are "above" needing any outward "aids." When Maurice Creasey states ". . . that the deepest meaning of the early Quaker movement . . . marked a thoroughgoing attempt to recover the reality of the *Ekklesia* as a 'brotherhood or fellowship of love' gathered around the living Christ, and informed by his Spirit" and goes on to raise the basic question of the paper "would not Friends have been truer to their claim to express a revival of primitive Christianity if they had allowed a place for this reality (sacramental observances) in their corporate experience and practice?" he seems to imply that Friends today need something to rejuvenate their meetings for worship in order to become the kind of Christian fellowship idealized in their heritage. He asks if "in appropriate ways and on appropriate occasions" participation in these sacramental observances would help.

Granted that for many Friends it is a rare experience for them to feel "the reality of the *Ekklesia*" — whether they attend an un-programmed, semi-programmed or fully-programmed meeting for worship — I wonder if the author has given adequate attention to the limitations of human fallibility when attempting to use a symbolic observance to introduce the participant to a spiritual reality?

The paper suggests that early Friends arrived at this testimony primarily from observing the unfruitful results of the

sacramental observances of others, and later sought biblical justification for their attitudes. The weaknesses of Gurney's and Barclay's biblical exegesis are pointed out, but little credence is given to the validity of the early Friends' observation and personal experience in support of their testimony. Friends have noted the difficulties of participants sensing the immanence of the living Christ when they heeded only the outward mechanics of the rites or attributed some magical import to them. Friends have also observed the difficulties of participants believing in their immediate access to the living Christ when officiating clergymen assumed they were the exclusive agents for administering an exclusive means of God's grace.

Although few churches today claim the use of the Sacraments as an exclusive means of grace, there remains the problem of an implied double standard, at least, when only certain duly ordained men can officiate. But Friends have not relied entirely upon their own observations; they have also claimed support for their testimony in the Scriptures. The earliest description of "the Lord's supper" in the New Testament (I Corinthians 11:17-34) illustrates the human problems that can easily arise to complicate the observance of a sacramental rite. Paul is disturbed that for the Corinthian church this had become a festival occasion rather than a solemn commemoration. The lack of "a brotherhood or fellowship of love" was all too apparent.

In reviewing the Friends' theological and biblical support for this testimony I wonder if adequate attention has been given to their use of Jesus' attitude concerning the secondary place he gave to ritual and ceremony as compared with the primary importance he placed upon fruitful relationships, such as when he suggested postponing the ritual act of making a gift at the altar until a reconciliation with one's brother had been accomplished. Although there is no indication that Jesus rejected completely the use of ritual, his ministry was focused on resolving the problems of right motivations when the outward and symbolic act became an end instead of the means to corporate religious experience. ("You cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity" Matthew 23:25.)

The writer notes that the Quaker testimony on the Sacraments underwent "significant changes" around the turn of the present century, but suggests that the results did not materially affect the traditional position. The implication is that Friends then were only reiterating the older arguments of earlier Friends. From my casual reading of Quaker histories of what was happening among American Friends during the later part of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century, there was intense interest and lively discussion concerning this testimony. Because some Friends meetings had begun to practice these sacramental rites, there was an earnest review of the traditional testimony. (Incidentally, this situation prompted the calling of several conferences and the eventual formation of the Five Years Meeting of Friends to encourage greater unity among American Friends.) Such Quaker leaders as Bevan Braithwaite, James Rhoades, and John Carey Thomas, in addition to Rufus M. Jones, shared in the re-examination of this testimony and found new support for it.

Although we would recognize the impact of the Last Supper upon the small fellowship of the disciples, and that in retrospect the spirit of that occasion was a cherished memory for them, I continue to hold reservations about the effectiveness of a symbolic rite designed to recapture that spirit. The risk of some "appropriate" sacramental observance in a Friends meeting for worship becoming a hindrance to experiencing "the reality of the *Ekklesia*" might for a time be less than in some of our sister denominations because of our emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and the immanence of the living Christ. Yet, to Maurice Creasey's question this reader would respond that the New Testament evidence and Quaker experience indicate that sacramental observances pose more problems than help to our quest to become a "fellowship of love gathered around the living Christ, and informed by his Spirit."

## LEWIS BENSON

Near the beginning of his paper Maurice Creasey observes that the early Quakers did not understand their testimony on water, bread, and wine to be a "corrective to what was an essentially right but actually exaggerated practice of the church" but that they took their position on theological grounds and sought to justify it by biblical exegesis. He further states that what early Quakers believed about Baptism and the Supper was not an isolated theological doctrine but the result of a "radically different understanding of the nature and scope of the divine action in Christ." I agree with this much of his thesis.

He then summarizes the early Quaker affirmation in the form of two complementary assertions: First, that "with the coming of Jesus Christ as the inaugurator of the New Covenant all ceremonial or outward forms of worship, being essentially 'Jewish' and belonging to the Old Covenant, were in principle abrogated"; and, second, that "their present experience [of Christ] was of such a kind that the merely symbolic feeding upon Christ and the symbolic baptism with his Spirit could add nothing to their experience . . ."

His criticism of this position is that, first, Baptism and the Supper in the New Testament are not essentially Jewish but Christian; second, that Quakers wrongly identified inward with spiritual and outward with non-spiritual; third, that outward forms cannot be avoided and Quakers have never avoided them; and fourth, there should be a place for a ceremony to remind the church that Christ is coming a second time. I do not feel that these four points deal with the most weighty reasons for the early Quaker position.

Both Quakers and non-Quakers have argued that the Christian rites of water Baptism and the Supper have their roots in Jewish practices. Whether they do or do not need not prevent us from agreeing with Maurice Creasey that they held a distinctively Christian significance by the time of Paul. In any case, it is not their possible Jewish derivation that furnishes Fox with his primary reason for rejecting them. He rejects them because they represent to him a reversion to the old cultic way to God in place of the new non-cultic way to God inaugurated by Christ.

Fox does not claim, as Maurice Creasey asserts, that the "handwriting of ordinances" blotted out by Christ are intended by Paul to refer specifically to Christian water Baptism and the Supper. The ordinances referred to, says Fox, are those that "had formerly been taught the people" by the Levitical priesthood under the Old Covenant. He says that in the "first covenant there were ordinances and statutes" which the prophets "saw beyond" and when Christ, the Second Covenant, came, whom the prophets had foreseen, then the First Covenant in which were ordinances, "he blotted them out." Fox had carefully studied that aspect of prophecy that described the day of the New Covenant as a day in which God would no longer be approached through a cultus but in a new and more direct way. He believed that in the disciple-master relationship to Christ we know him to *be* this new and living way and to *be* the covenant of prophecy and promise.

Fox's use of the terms "inward" and "outward" needs to be understood within the framework of a comprehensive understanding of his whole Christian position. In the quickly developing Quaker jargon of the seventeenth century these words became invested with connotations not directly related to the Christian revelation. For some Quakers *everything* outward belonged to false religion and *everything* inward was associated with the true religion. Maurice Creasey has called our attention to the wrongness of making an absolute identification of inward and spiritual and outward and non-spiritual; surely he has made a valid point. But it is not characteristic of Fox to make such an absolute identification. He often uses "inward" when he is speaking of the new way or New Covenant which is essentially a master-disciple relationship to the risen Christ. He objects to the externalizing of this New Covenant into a cultic system. It is when he sees the New Covenant being transformed into an "it" — an objectified system of religion instead of a living relationship to a living Lord — that he employs the word "outward."

There were many in Fox's day who called themselves Quakers but who looked with disapproval at the outwardly visible Quaker community that was beginning to appear. They objected to *all* form and structure, order and discipline, and

pleaded for an individualistic Quakerism of pure inwardness. Fox spoke out against "such as go under the name of Quakers" and "cry against Quakers meetings, saying away with your forms." Such, he says, are in a confused state without the "right form" for "the form that God hath made was never denied by the men and women of God." While Fox has much to say against empty forms, man-made forms, formalism, forms without life and power, etc., he also has much to say in defense of the "form that God hath made." Much of his writing is in defense of this "right form" and against those who attacked this good order "under the pretense of keeping people out of forms." The form that Fox pleaded for was the product of faith. This form exhibits a wholesome order as long as it is nourished by a living faith. It is not a form or structure that can have existence apart from faith. The difference between this form and order and a cultic system of religion is that a cultic system can by its very nature exist apart from faith. The Quaker position did not claim that all outward forms were bad but rather maintained that there is a form that belongs to and flows from the experience of Christ as he gives himself to his church in all his offices in the New Covenant. This Fox called "the life that gave forth the form."

What Maurice Creasey discusses under the categories of the "now" and "not yet" raises some important questions. There is a distinctively Quaker view of eschatology and this view maintains that the call of God in the Christian gospel is to receive Christ and enter his kingdom *now*, and that the redemptive work that Christ came to do has been fully accomplished by his life, death, resurrection and continued presence among his people. From the Quaker viewpoint the Christian's fellowship is a fellowship which receives him who has come and enters into his kingdom. That God will bring history to an end and that Christ will reappear in some special way at that time was an object of belief for early Friends but it did not have evangelical significance for them, and they did not think of their fellowship as a fellowship of waiting for this final event. It was because their eschatology took this form that they rejected all theological distinctions between "church" and "kingdom" and they certainly had no con-

ception of a church whose fellowship is in waiting for a kingdom that will not appear until Christ comes a second time at the end of the world. Therefore, Quaker religious thought knows nothing of an "interim church" or a "church between the times." In the Quaker understanding of Christianity there is less tension between the "now" and the "not yet" than there is in those Christian bodies who see the ultimate purpose of God only partially revealed through the Christ of history and of faith and who see the church as a fellowship in waiting for further redemptive activity on God's part. This distinctively Quaker eschatology explains why Quakers have not felt the need for reminders of the "not yet." The Quakers believed that Christ fulfills the promises and is the substance of all that was foreshadowed. He is the answer to "the hopes and fears of all the years." For Quakers the emphasis on the "not yet" tends to reduce the sufficiency of Christ's coming, and reduces the church to a community who have inherited from the Jews the role of waiting for God's final redemptive act.

In concentrating his criticism on the question of formalism, the misuse of "inward" and "outward" and the question of the "Jewish" derivation of Baptism and the Supper, Maurice Creasey has diverted attention from that which seems to me to be the real basis of the Quaker position, namely, the belief that the New Covenant as foretold in prophecy and fulfilled in Christ is a cultless, religionless covenant — a covenant which is a person and is experienced only through a personal disciple-master relationship to him.

From the beginnings of Christianity there has been a tension between those who saw Christianity as a new cultus and those who saw it as the new and non-cultic way to God. For the most part Christianity has taken the form in history of a religious cultus. But early Friends identified themselves with the long forgotten vision of a religionless, cultless New Covenant. *This* is the Quaker's radically different understanding of the nature and scope of the divine action in Christ. This position has a biblical and theological basis but it is not toward this position and this basis that Maurice Creasey has directed his criticism.

Behind the Quakers' testimony on the "sacramental" is their general conception of the nature and purpose of the Christian dispensation and behind this general conception is the distinctive Quaker understanding of the right place and use of the Scriptures in the New Covenant. We cannot come to a right view of the Quaker position on the "Sacraments" or any other feature of Quaker church order if we do not recognize that the chief distinguishing principles and testimonies of Friends are nearly all to be accounted for by the fact that Friends have had a distinctive doctrine of the Scriptures. Quakers approach the Bible differently from most Christians and this must be first understood if we are to understand Quaker practice. Early Friends did not consider the practices of the first-century church as furnishing a normative pattern for the Christians of all future ages and they did not regard the New Testament as an encyclopedic handbook for a new cultus. Both Fox and Pennington point out that when the New Testament is used in this way it becomes one of the major causes of divisions among Christians. Fox returns to this theme at least twenty-five times. One would hardly receive the impression from the brief passage quoted from Pennington that this is extracted from a plea for a radically new approach to the use of the Scriptures. He is maintaining that the Quakers' disuse of the Bible as the authoritative sacred scriptures of a cultic system is justified by the Bible's own testimony. It was because David B. Updegraff regarded the Bible as the Christian's "supreme law" that he not only rejected the Quaker position on the "Sacraments" but went on and rejected nearly every other feature of the Quaker conception of gospel order.

Maurice Creasey rejects the Quakers' claim that their testimony concerning the "Sacraments" expresses the mind of Christ and the true meaning of the New Testament. He sees no positive principle in this testimony but only a "negative principle of fellowship." But to see it as no more than a negative testimony against sacramentalism is to misunderstand it in the same way that it has all along been misunderstood by its Protestant critics.

What response Friends may make to Maurice Creasey's proposals to include water Baptism and the Supper in our corporate experience and practice will depend on the extent to which his

comparatively low estimate of the significance of this testimony is shared throughout the Society. The early Quakers' testimony was no mere negative protest but a positive affirmation about the nature and scope of the divine action in Christ. Whether, in this age of ecumenical encounter, we will be able to maintain this testimony on any but this positive basis only the future will reveal.