Response

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On the whole, I appreciate Dean Freiday’s Comment. My major point of difference with him is his grouping of (3) and (6) together. When Lonergan discusses interiority (3), I think he is discussing a theoretic explanation of what occurs interiorly. This I think is different from what Anselm did, as he was describing his interior experience on a commonsense level (first-order reflection).

While I do not know Arndt and Spener well enough to make an authoritative claim about what they were doing, my impression from the selections from their writings that I have read is that they, like Abelard, were doing first-order reflection, not third-order. I think Barclay was the first to attempt to provide a more systematic theoretic explanation of what was occurring interiorly within those who had been redeemed. (Schleiermacher, I think, was the first to work it out in more detail.)

to proclaim the oneness of the church of Jesus Christ and call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, in order that the world might believe.¹

The objective of the WCC is not to create a “universal authority controlling what Christians believe,”² but rather the visible unity of the various Christian groups. In the words of F & O, this one church is envisioned as

a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same Church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit.³

This fellowship is considered as necessarily “eucharistic” in the belief that the Eucharist is the central act of the Church’s worship, and the visible sign of unity.⁴ Although several varieties of Quakers continue to participate in the WCC, they by no means recognize the Eucharist as the central act of their worship. The quest for unity would seem to require consideration of the perspective of the Religious Society of Friends as well as some reexamination of their views by Quakers themselves.

After outlining the present position of the WCC on the Eucharist as found in the Lima text, and the reasoning behind the historical Quaker position on the Eucharist, this paper will search for parallels between Quaker beliefs about worship and beliefs about Eucharistic celebration. I write as a Friend, in the hope that modern Quakerism will be enabled to come to a better understanding of itself, and be in a better position for dialogue.

In spite of the diverse interpretations of the Eucharist, WCC F & O has commendably established some boundaries for the Eucharist that should enable more branches of Christianity to eat from the one loaf. Much of their success has been due to the recovery of the biblical and patristic notion of the Eucharist as a memorial (anamnesis).⁵ Joachim Jeremias has shown that when used in connection with religious ceremonies, ἐν ἀναμνήσει (1 Cor. 11:24) “is said for the most part in reference to God and it then designates, always and without exception, a presentation before God intended to induce God to act.”⁶ Thus the phrase is to be understood as that God may remember me (Christ):

This means that the command to repeat the rite is not a summons to the disciples to preserve the memory of Jesus and be vigilant

“eucharistic fellowship” — are Friends included?

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During recent decades, great strides have been made within the ecumenical movement toward discerning one all-embracing vision of the Christian faith. Much of this progress has been made possible by the Faith and Order Commission [hereafter F & O] of the World Council of Churches [hereafter WCC]. The stated aim of F & O as expressed in the By-Laws of the Commission, and quoted in the Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry statement usually referred to as “the Lima text” (from its place of adoption) is:
Beyond this reactionary aspect, at least three other reasons have been given for not practicing the Sacraments. The first is that biblical evidence for Sacraments is not conclusive. This “gives grounds for doubting whether the observances can be seen as fundamentally and centrally important as they have generally been held to be.” 13 Modern scriptural scholarship is understood as favoring this assertion (although currently the NT scholarship trend toward emphasizing the liturgical may require a reevaluation). Some have claimed that this attitude toward Sacraments arose first in corporate experience and then was later given biblical and theological justification. 14 Even if this were so, it would not significantly undermine the Quaker position in their own eyes, at least, since they have always located authority in matters of faith in the “sense of the meeting,” rather than in dogma, elaborate doctrinal systems, or magisterial pronouncements. (They nonetheless have a considerable body of theological literature.)

Another reason for rejecting Sacraments is the Quaker belief that all of life should be “sacramental,” a concept which usefully links the sacred and the secular, 15 and which is best understood as a reaction to limiting Grace to an event within the Church and controlled by the Clergy. All of life potentially reveals God and ought to promote community. This testimony is a necessary reminder to the liturgically oriented communions, but is not sufficient reason in itself for completely rejecting Sacramental rites so long as they do not exclude or discourage sacramental living. In fact, such a position is only credible when Sacramental practice becomes merely routine. 16

Currently, the most frequently used reason for not practicing Sacraments is the argument of non-necessity. Actually, this is a recent development, not found in the writings of the early Quakers. 17 This argument is usually sugar-coated with language of the New Covenant: the old has passed away and thus there is now no need of a ritual reminiscent of the Old Covenant. However, although Quakers abandoned Sacramental practices, they never abandoned the concepts behind them.

They have always emphasized the reality behind the symbolic rite. Communion did and does occur in Quaker meetings. The worship experience early in their history “was of such a kind that ceremonies added nothing to the experience of the realities which the rites expressed.” 18 Had modern Quakers built their non-necessity argument upon early-Quaker experience, the question would then become: “are meetings for worship still alive with the same vitality which led to the rejection of the Sacraments?” Simply to feel no need for
Sacraments, while lacking the vitality of the early meetings, requires either new theological justification or a change of practice!

These questions would seem to leave the issue of practicing or not practicing the traditional Sacramental rites open to debate. It must be stated again, however, that Quakers do have communion. In fact, they have rituals — even sacramental rituals. Edward Schillebeeckx defines a Sacrament as “an effective sign of grace.” A Sacrament may be further defined as “a visible sign of the divine-human encounter.” Thus, silent expectant waiting, which is an essential element of Quaker worship, is Sacramental, a visible sign of a community seeking and waiting for communion with the Divine. When the Holy Spirit allows such communion, meaningful discourse flows forth from the various members — signifying that communion is indeed taking place. Thus, silent waiting in worship is a ritual in that it is habitually and reverently practiced. It is Sacramental in that is is a sign of Divine-human encounter, and promotes unity in a meeting. Thus, Quakers do have within their worship something which approaches the very goals which the WCC describes as “eucharistic fellowship.” The problem is that so long as efforts are focused solely upon the Eucharist, Quakers will be excluded when the point of visible unity has been reached.

With the above definition of Sacrament, however, the WCC concept of Sacrament could be broadened to take Quaker views into account. As a visible sign of the Divine-human encounter, Jesus Christ may be rightfully considered “the great, original primary Sacrament (Ur sakrament), the personal embodiment of the meeting between God and humanity.” As such, He calls humanity to participate in this Divine-human encounter. At this point Quakers can join in agreement with other branches of Christianity. The difference comes in the means by which one responds to and participates in the Original Sacrament. However, the difference is exactly that — not a difference of goals but a difference of means.

There is then agreement between Quakerism and the WCC that Christians partake of the body and blood of Christ. Difference emerges only over the question of how the partaking manifests itself within the various ecclesiologies. The WCC, as quoted earlier, asserts that salvation comes “through the communion in the body and blood of Christ,” and Quakerism affirms that “as far as all the faithful partake of this one body and one blood, they also come to have a joint communion.” However, it is the spiritual body and blood of Christ of which Quakers partake. What this spiritual body is, is not defined, but communion is described in terms of natural nourishment made possible by the new birth of the believer. The precise nature of this nourishing can best be understood as in the realm of Divine mystery, just as Christ’s Presence in the Eucharist also ultimately must be described as mystery. Such communion “may be witnessed at any time by the faithful, although it is especially so when they are assembled to wait upon the Lord.” From an ecumenical perspective it is important that Quakers do allow that the Eucharist may be a means of communion, though not the only means.

The Eucharistic meal has been bypassed in Quaker worship. From participation in the Original Sacrament, they proceed directly to discipleship. In undertaking the work of Christ, they see themselves as “extended sacraments — extending sacramentally that which Jesus symbolized.” They are to represent the reality of the Living Christ in the world in which they live. Called to the work of their Lord in spreading the gospel and promoting such Kingdom ethics as justice and peace. Thus, from experiencing the inward reality of Christ’s reconciliatory work, Quakers move immediately to living sacramentally and promoting the fulfillment of the Kingdom.

Those segments of the Church who practice the Eucharist have the same goal: the work of the Kingdom. From the reconciliatory work of Christ the church is committed to an everyday witness in word and deed which will give the opportunity for all the material resources of creation and all occasions of human contact to become the media of that communion with God and among fellow human beings which is marked by justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and in which the Kingdom of God consists. This is not only the work of the Kingdom, but what Quakers call a commitment to sacramental living. The Eucharist serves to celebrate the reconciliatory act of Christ while seeking empowerment and transformation to participate in His work which remains to be done. Thus the Eucharist becomes an event in the life of the Church, symbolizing eschatological tension.

If the Church’s goal is sacramental living within the eschatological tension, then the Eucharist may be understood as an Event within a life of sacramental events. It is an Event, not because it is a primary means of Grace, but because in it Christian faith is encapsulated. The Church, as itself the initiated work of salvation, longs for the consummation of that salvific work. Such an understanding is true to Joachim Jeremias’ recovery of the anamnetic aspect of the Eucharist, and is also compatible with Quaker faith. If all of life is sacramental,
then there is no reason why sacramental rites as events within sacramental living should not be recognized as having sacramental value. Though this understanding is nowhere near the official Roman Catholic concept of Eucharist (perhaps it is at the other extreme), it does allow a shift in thought which would permit Friends to be true to the basic roots of their tradition and still enter the dialogue concerning eucharistic fellowship.

In comparing the various aspects of the Eucharist as outlined by the WCC with current Quaker understanding of faith, other similarities emerge. The Eucharist serves as thanksgiving to the Father. It is “the benediction (berakah) by which the church expresses its thankfulness for all God’s benefits.” Certainly Quakers would not deny that giving thanks is one aspect of a Christian response to God’s saving acts and to the communion with the Divine made possible through the reconciliatory work of Christ. Indeed giving thanks characterizes the privilege of the inward communion of the Quaker worship experience “as words of declaration, prayers, or praises arise from these promptings of the Spirit.” Eucharistic thanks extends further, praising God for what the world is to become: “an offering and hymn of praise to the Creator, a universal communion in the body of Christ, and a kingdom of justice, love and peace in the Holy Spirit.” Although there is nothing parallel that in Quaker worship per se, it is certainly in line with Quaker ideals. This should be obvious from their social work for justice and peace. Thus Quaker worship and the Eucharist again have a common bond.

A second aspect of the Eucharist according to the WCC document is the Memorial to Christ. Quakers have disagreed with the concept of “memorial,” not only because of the common notion of memorial as something done in memory of the dead, but also because some Christian theology saw the Supper as little more than that. The Christ in Quakerism is the Living Lord. No memorial is necessary. Although as recovered by Jeremiahs, memorial does indeed focus upon the Risen Christ, this anamnesis is not a sentimental remembering. One cannot divorce the death of Christ from his resurrection. Not only was the former necessary for the latter to occur, but this life-giving event of Jesus is also remembered by Quakers as having given Life to them by making their inward communion possible.

The WCC affirms that Christ is Present in this Memorial, “granting us communion with himself.” At the very root of Quaker worship is the trust that Christ will be Present as He himself promised: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20). Although this passage is usually applied Eucharistically, there is nothing in the text or context that would justify limiting this presence to the Eucharist. Indeed, central to the rejection of Sacramental rites was the experience that Christ was indeed truly Present in Quaker worship. The various parties ought not to quibble over the type of Presence. The point is that here is another common element between Quaker worship and the Eucharist.

The Eucharist celebration also includes, according to the F & O text, the invocation of the Holy Spirit: “The bond between the eucharistic celebration and the mystery of the Triune God reveals the role of the Holy Spirit as that of the One who makes the historical words of Jesus present and alive.” The Holy Spirit has played a vital role in Quaker faith from its inception, indeed, the Holy Spirit is given priority over Scripture. The Holy Spirit is considered necessary for the interpretation of Scripture, but in no sense can direct revelation of the Spirit contradict the Scriptural witness. It has been the consistent affirmation of Friends that we are “willing for all of our own doctrines and practices to be tried by” the Scriptures, and any doctrine “contrary to their testimony may properly be rejected as false.”

The Holy Spirit’s role is to illumine Scripture, including the making of the historical words of Jesus present and alive for Quakers. And in seeking to live a life under the guidance of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is again making the words of Jesus alive and visible through the faithful following of his example. The Holy Spirit is depended upon not only to infuse life into the worship, but to bring about sacramental living. Just as “the whole action of the Eucharist . . . depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit,” Quaker worship and living both depend upon that same Spirit.

A fourth aspect of the Eucharist as outlined by the WCC is the “communion of the faithful.” Here, the Eucharist is concerned to manifest the unity and oneness of the Body. Similarly, in Quaker worship when the corporate body becomes “centered” in worship, that becomes a visible sign of the quest for such oneness. Similarly, unity is also evident in Quaker business sessions, which are conducted as an extension of the worship experience. As the corporate body acts, it does not look for a “majority,” but rather the way in which the “sense of the meeting” can reflect the mind of Christ as conveyed by the Spirit. Unity and oneness arise from such an experience. The seeking of this visible sign of unity is not limited to local meetings, but extends to regional, national, and international gatherings — wherever Friends gather.
Finally, in the eyes of the WCC, the Eucharistic meal serves as “the meal of the kingdom” opening up “the vision of the divine rule which has been promised as the final renewal of creation, and is a foretaste of it.” Once again, although no material elements are involved, Quaker worship parallels this aspect of the Eucharist. As mentioned earlier, it was Quaker experience that Christ was Present in a way which was not enhanced by the use of the Sacramental rites. A vision of Divine rule was fostered by their worship and certainly served as a foretaste of it. Unfortunately, there may have been failure in Quaker circles to realize that this Presence is only a foretaste, a failure which would lead to loss of the eschatological tension which is necessary to even justify the existence and purpose of the Church.

This examination has illustrated that Quaker worship has enough in common theologically, and even practically, with other Christians, in spite of its unique style, to justify dialogue concerning “eucharistic fellowship.” The use of outward symbols is now the primary objection raised against ecumenical dialogue, and requires Quakers to examine their own history from several perspectives.

Since this formative perspective developed partially as a reaction to a problematic situation, is that sufficient reason for totally rejecting potentially meaningful rituals in worship? Could it have been more appropriate to have corrected the abuses? This is not to deny the contribution that Quakers have made to faith and worship, nor to advocate adoption of Sacramental rites. However since Friends do not constitute the totality of the Body, they must also acknowledge and learn from the position of others. Moreover, the reevaluation by Roman Catholics themselves, of their traditional views, in spite of their doctrine of infallibility, suggests that Quakers need to open up their understanding of the position of others. This should go beyond their usual extension of tolerance to other practices no matter how little they have understood them.

Quakers have rightly pointed out that rituals can become meaningless and even degenerate into “magical” acts which supposedly operate regardless of the faith or attitudes of the corporate body. As such, rituals are shallow. However, much worship among Quakers today is shallow as well. The vitality and dynamics of the earlier generations have cooled. Thus, Quakers must acknowledge that deterioration of worship may occur with or without symbols.

Quakers have rightly maintained, and should continue to do so, that the celebration of the Eucharist does not impart Grace which is not otherwise available. Nor does the celebration of the Eucharist guarantee that enabling and transforming Grace will be given. Only God has authority to impart Grace. The most the Church can do is hope that Grace will indeed abound.

Notes

2. Ibid.
4. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, p. 10; also Wainwright, p. 75.
5. Wainwright, p. 6.
13. Ibid., p. 195.
17. Ibid., p. 28.
18. Creasey, p. 5.
23. Ibid., p. 328.
24. Ibid., p. 333.
25. Ibid., p. 333.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p. 13.
33. Barclay, pp. 51, 60, 63.
36. Ibid.

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