

Chapter 27

Unity and diversity

FRIENDS AND OTHER FAITHS

27.01 The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers.

William Penn, 1693

27.02 Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the Spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of Truth amongst them. And as it pleased the Lord to make way for my going at a time when the troubles of war were increasing and when by reason of much wet weather travelling was more difficult than usual at that season, I looked upon it as a more favourable opportunity to season my mind, and bring me into a nearer sympathy with them. And as mine eye was to the great Father of Mercies, humbly desiring to learn what his will was concerning me, I was made quiet and content.

John Woolman, 1763

27.03 Can we settle the question, 'Is the Society of Friends Christian or not?' In the historical sense the answer is Yes: but that does not preclude the possibility that we may now be called to a new and wider perception of the Truth. We have the witness of the Society itself, as well as the example of Jesus, against turning yesterday's inspiration into today's dogma. Today's world-wide knowledge of people and their religions does present a challenge which our universalists are right to try to meet – just as our Christians are right

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to remind us that the insights of the past must not lightly be thrown away. It may be valuable to live for a while in the tension between the universal and the specific; and if so, there may be a special vocation here through which our Society (with its tradition of respect for the divine Seed in everyone) can minister to the church at large. Or it may be that a synthesis is possible, once we can agree on what is essential to being a Christian.

John Lampen, 1985

- 27.04 We have acquired a much greater understanding of non-Christian religions from newcomers who have settled in this country since the end of World War II and this has increased the sympathy and respect of many Friends for these faiths. This broader approach to religion has led to an affirmation by 'universalist' Friends that no one faith can claim to be a final revelation or to have a monopoly of the truth and to the rejection of any exclusive religious fundamentalism whether based in Christianity or any other religion.

The ferment of thought in this post-war period has produced a wide variety of beliefs in our Religious Society today and not a little misunderstanding on all sides. Intolerance has reared its head. Some Friends have voiced objections to the use of Christian language in meetings for worship and for business; others have been told that there is no place for them in our Religious Society if they cannot regard themselves as Christians. It has become quite customary to distinguish between 'Christians' and 'universalists' as if one category excluded the other.

This situation has led many Friends to suppose that universalist Friends are in some way set over against Christocentric Friends. This is certainly not the case. Universalism is by definition inclusivist, and its adherents accept the right to free expression of all points of view, Christocentric or any other. Indeed, in London Yearly Meeting there are many universalists whose spiritual imagery and belief are thoroughly Christocentric.

From the beginning the Quaker Christian faith has had a universal dimension. George Fox saw the Light 'shine through all' and he identified it with the divine Light of Christ that 'enlightens every

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man that comes into the world' (John 1:9). He pointed out, as did William Penn in greater detail, that individuals who had lived before the Christian era or outside Christendom and had no knowledge of the Bible story, had responded to a divine principle within them. In these terms, all Quaker Christians are universalists. Obedience to the Light within, however that may be described, is the real test of faithful living.

Alastair Heron, Ralph Hetherington and Joseph Pickvance, 1994

See also 26.43

27.05 The church [is] no other thing but the society, gathering or company of such as God hath called out of the world and worldly spirit to walk in his light and life... Under this church ... are comprehended all, and as many, of whatsoever nation, kindred, tongue or people they be, though outwardly strangers and remote from those who profess Christ and Christianity in words and have the benefit of the Scriptures, as become obedient to the holy light and testimony of God in their hearts... There may be members therefore of this Catholic church both among heathens, Turks, Jews and all the several sorts of Christians, men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart, who ... are by the secret touches of this holy light in their souls enlivened and quickened, thereby secretly united to God, and there-through become true members of this Catholic church.

Robert Barclay, 1678

27.06 I have assumed a name today for my religious principles – Quaker-Catholicism – having direct spiritual teaching for its distinctive dogma, yet recognising the high worth of all other forms of Faith: a system, in the sense of inclusion, not exclusion; an appreciation of the universal and the various teachings of the Spirit, through the faculties given to us, or independent of them.

Caroline Fox, 1846

- 27.07 *Henry T Hodgkin (1877-1933) played a leading part in the Friends Foreign Mission Association and the Student Christian Movement, and in founding the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He worked as a missionary in China and came to appreciate the validity of other witnesses to God than the Christian one.*

By processes too numerous and diverse even to summarise, I have reached a position which may be stated in a general way somewhat like this: 'I believe that God's best for another may be so different from my experience and way of living as to be actually impossible to me. I recognise [a change] to have taken place in myself, from a certain assumption that mine was really the better way, to a very complete recognition that there is no one better way, and that God needs all kinds of people and ways of living through which to manifest himself in the world.'

This has seemed to carry with it two conclusions which greatly affect conduct. One is that I really find myself wanting to learn from people whom I previously would have regarded as fit objects for my 'missionary zeal'. To discover another way in which God is operating – along lines it may be distasteful or dangerous to me – is a large part of the fun of living. The second direction in which conduct is influenced is the deliberate attempt to share the life and interests of others who are not in my circle ... [for] in such sharing I can most deeply understand the other's life and through that reach, maybe, fresh truths about God.

1933

- 27.08 The city of Birmingham, England, where I live, is one of the most racially and religiously mixed communities in Europe. It has a stimulating, challenging and exciting atmosphere. On one occasion, at a big interfaith gathering, I was being very Quakerly and very enlightened. The discussion was about prayer, and I confessed that it was my habit to pray anywhere and that I could do so sitting comfortably in a chair. A devout Muslim woman in the conference was shocked at what she saw as my easygoing familiarity with God, my lack of respect, my denial of my own human dignity. When you think of God, she said, there is only one possible response. It is to go down on your knees.

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I recognised the truth in what she said and have acted on it ever since, though I regret I have not yet been brave enough to kneel in the meeting house. That will come. From this unnamed woman I learned something of Islam – submission to God – in a way that no Christian had ever taught me. But the words are immaterial. It was not the Mosque or the Qur'an addressing me, but the living God I know in Christ speaking through her.

John Punshon, 1987

- 27.09 As for me, Jesus is a man so great that you may call him the only begotten Son of God, or Divine. We may call His Spirit Love, Light, Truth or Way. Yet that Spirit is so universal and eternal, that I cannot but believe that it has been prevailing everywhere, more or less in all religions, even from before the birth of the historic Jesus, and I believe that it is living more or less in all human beings in the world. This is why Jesus says all that he has taught us is our Father's and not Jesus' own.

Yukio Irie, 1959

- 27.10 Remember Jesus' answer to the woman of Samaria: 'Neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in Truth.' In the depth of meditation, in the gathered meeting we rise above all limitations. Gone are the concepts of Quakerism and Vedanta. Gone are the ideas of being a Christian or a Hindu. All these concepts are valid on their own level. They have their place, but they are transcended when we merge our minds in Spirit. I believe this is what Jesus and all the other World Teachers wanted us ultimately to do.

Swami Tripurananda (Jonathan Carter), 1979

- 27.11 'What think ye of Christ?' is central both in our relationships with other religions and in our relationship with one another within the Society of Friends... We are truly loyal to Jesus Christ when we judge the religious systems of the world by the standard which he himself used: 'Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord ... but he that

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doeth the will of my Father'. Every tree is to be known by its fruits: not by its dead wood or thorns or parasites, but by the fruit of its own inner life and nature. We all know the fruits of the Spirit and recognise the beauty of holiness in our own ancestral tree... The flowers of unselfish living may be found growing in other people's gardens and ... rich fruits of the Spirit may be tasted from other people's trees. They spring from the same Holy Spirit of Truth, the same Seed of God, whose power moves us through Christ.

Marjorie Sykes, 1957

FRIENDS AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

- 27.12 The unity of Christians never did nor ever will or can stand in uniformity of thought and opinion, but in Christian love only.

Thomas Story, 1737

- 27.13 Even in the apostles' days Christians were too apt to strive after a wrong unity and uniformity in outward practices and observations, and to judge one another unrighteously in those things; and mark, it is not the different practice from one another that breaks the peace and unity, but the judging of one another because of different practices...

And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master, to whom they are to give an account, and not to quarrel with one another about their different practices (Rom 14:4). For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him, and that he walks in his rank, in his own order, in his proper way and place of subjection to that; and this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk.

Isaac Pennington, 1660

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- 27.14 What, then, is the focus for Christian unity? It must be Jesus, who calls us not into structures but into discipleship and to follow him in his way. Can we not know that we are one in him when we are faithful to his calling and when we exercise towards one another that greatest gift of love? Can we not rejoice in our diversity, welcoming the opportunities to learn from each other? Can we not seek a recognition of each other's ministries as the work of the same Spirit? That Spirit can, if we are ready to adventure, lead us into ways we have not known before.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

- 27.15 A rich variety of expression and of practice is to be expected as the Life streams through disciples of every race and clime and condition... It does not press men into a rigid mould of thought or action; rather it would pour its own joy into every mould of humanity. We have sought unity through agreement in doctrines and institutions; and the track of church history, like some new road through the desert, is strewn with the parched skeletons of our failures.

William Charles Braithwaite, 1919

- 27.16 We may picture God as weaving a pattern with the lives of men and women. We can glimpse but small fragments of the whole design; in moments of inspiration we can see more clearly, while the saints see most of all. Through it there runs a Quaker strand. It may be only a single thread but it is not insignificant, for without it the pattern would be marred. Yet that thread of itself does not make the whole design. The Society of Friends is but a part of the Christian church, and the measure of truth which it possesses may only rightly be considered in relation to the whole. The work of the Church in the world today is surely not something to be carried out in miniature by each part, but it is a mighty whole to which each should contribute according to its special gifts and strengths.

William G Sewell, 1946

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- 27.17 Historically our Society stands in the Christian tradition; ... we unite in the desire that Friends everywhere should share in the life and fellowship of the wider Christian community and co-operate as fully as possible in its work... Many of us value opportunities for worship and service with our fellow Christians. No one can measure the debt we owe to the influence and inspiration and leadership of many of our fellow Christians, to the stimulus and fellowship some of us have known in inter-church groups and inter-denominational movements. And there is, too, the valuable service rendered by Christian scholars and thinkers for which we are profoundly thankful.

Friends World Conference, 1952

- 27.18 For the Church ... is really the people – the children and followers of God. Manes and moderators, sermons and synods are the mere packaging of this people, perhaps inevitable, anyway historical, but not to be mistaken for the thing itself. The thing itself, the believing and worshipping people, has two important characteristics which the individual Christian must never forget. The Church is a community, and it is a continuity... Quakers may be an experimental sect – both in the modern sense of pushing forward the frontiers of faith, and in the older sense of insisting upon experience as the basis of their faith – but if we are honest we must admit that we build upon the foundations laid for us over many centuries by the Church.

Gerald Priestland, 1982

- 27.19 Secreted within the organism that is the historical Christian faith, there is a mystical and spiritual tradition which uses metaphor, symbol, image and art to come to terms with the questions thrown up by the lifestyle and religious commitment that it has made and to which it remains loyal.

It could be that the modern ecumenical movement is essentially such a quest for meaning through spirituality. Catholics wanting to take communion with Methodists, or Quakers willing to take communion with anybody, are left in no doubt that they are departing from the party line. One sometimes needs a strong conscience to practise unity against the wishes of one's

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denominational authorities. But hard though it is to see it sometimes, the old, hierarchical, entirely male, theological style of church leadership is weakening. The real ecumenical movement is found among people who have experienced unity, and the universal faith is found there. But this universal faith lives in a way of life, rather than a set of beliefs.

John Punshon, 1987

- 27.20 The spirit of the ecumenical movement far transcends its rather regressive concern for agreement on beliefs. It is concerned rather more for the realisation of unity in worship, in discipleship, in community and in a common response to the social challenges of our time. In this concern Friends can be wholly one. Our rejection of formal agreements should therefore be balanced by a positive affirmation of a unity of another kind, a unity of spirit, of search and of struggle. For us, real unity between Christians will arise from the honest communication of our faith to each other in our own specific situations, spirit to spirit, and it will take form in lives lived together and work done together. It will be a unity that includes without also excluding, which preserves the core faith without also pruning off the distinctive interpretations.

Rex Ambler, 1989

Creeds

- 27.21 Creeds are milestones, doctrines are interpretations: Truth, as George Fox was continually asserting, a seed with the power of growth, not a fixed crystal, be its facets never so beautiful.

John Wilhelm Rowntree, 1904

- 27.22 All Truth is a shadow except the last, except the utmost; yet every Truth is true in its kind. It is substance in its own place, though it be but a shadow in another place (for it is but a reflection from an intenser substance); and the shadow is a true shadow, as the substance is a true substance.

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Isaac Penington, 1653

27.23 We do not in the least deprecate the attempt, which must be made, since man is a rational being, to formulate intellectually the ideas which are implicit in religious experience... But it should always be recognised that all such attempts are provisional, and can never be assumed to possess the finality of ultimate truth. There must always be room for development and progress, and Christian thought and inquiry should never be fettered by theory... Among the dangers of formulated statements of belief are these:

- a. they tend to crystallise thought on matters that will always be beyond any final embodiment in human language;
- b. they fetter the search for truth and for its more adequate expression; and
- c. they set up a fence which tends to keep out of the Christian fold many sincere and seeking souls who would gladly enter it.

Particularly in these days we need to be on our guard against these dangers. Multitudes of people are being shaken out of their comfortable beliefs by the terrific experiences through which the world is passing, and are seeking a secure basis for their faith. And some are finding a Reality which is much too great to be confined within the narrow limits of a creed.

True basis of Christian unity, 1917

27.24 Rejection of creed is not inconsistent with being possessed by a living belief. We have no creed in science, but we are not lukewarm in our beliefs. The belief is not that all the knowledge of the universe that we hold so enthusiastically will survive in the letter; but a sureness that we are on the road. If our so-called facts are changing shadows, they are shadows cast by the light of constant truth. So too in religion we are repelled by that confident theological doctrine which has settled for all generations just how the spiritual world is worked; but we need not turn aside from the measure of light that comes into our experience showing us a Way through the unseen world. Religion for the conscientious seeker is not all a matter of

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doubt and self-questionings. There is a kind of sureness which is very different from cocksureness.

Arthur S Eddington, 1929

- 27.25 The Quaker objection to credal statements is not to beliefs as such but to the use of an officially sanctioned selection of them to impose a uniformity in things where the gospel proclaims freedom. 'Credo' is the Latin for 'I believe'. The meaning of the word is debased if you confine it to an act of the will giving intellectual assent to articles of faith. It is much better translated as 'I commit myself to...' in the sense that one is prepared to take the full consequences of the beliefs one has adopted. One adopts not so much a set of propositions as the discipline of working out in one's life and experience the consequences of the truth one has espoused. The value of the beliefs lies solely in their outworking. This I take to be the heart of the original Quaker message.

John Punshon, 1978

- 27.26 This is the truth which we know and try to live ... that every person is capable of response to the divine Spirit; that this Spirit, or Light, or God reaches out to each one directly and freely; that if we follow the leadings of this Spirit faithfully we are led out of sin into unity with the divine will; that this unity leads us into love of and care for all humankind, who are our kin; that what the Spirit shows us is living truth which cannot be fettered by words.

Janet Scott, 1980

The Bible

- 27.27 And the end of words is to bring men to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter. So, learn of the Lord to make a right use of the Scriptures: which is by esteeming them in their right place, and prizing that above them which is above them.

Isaac Penington

27.28 From these revelations of the Spirit of God to the saints have proceeded the Scriptures of Truth, which contain:

- a. a faithful historical account of the actions of God's people in divers ages, with many singular and remarkable providences attending them;
- b. a prophetic account of several things, whereof some are already past, and some are yet to come;
- c. a full and ample account of all the chief principles of the doctrine of Christ, held forth in divers precious declarations, exhortations and sentences, which, by the moving of God's Spirit, were at several times and upon sundry occasions spoken and written unto some Churches and their pastors.

Nevertheless, because they are only a declaration of the fountain and not the fountain itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the adequate, primary rule of faith and manners. Yet, because they give a true and faithful testimony of the first foundation, they are and may be esteemed a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit, from which they have all their excellency and certainty: for as by the inward testimony of the Spirit we do alone truly know them, so they testify that the Spirit is that Guide by which the saints are led into all truth: therefore, according to the Scriptures the Spirit is the first and principal Leader.

Robert Barclay, 1678

27.29 A host of scholars have been at work for centuries to discover and understand the Jesus of history, and with strangely divergent results. The great quest still goes on and I seek to learn from it. But I cannot separate the Lord and Master of the first disciples from his risen spirit and personality which has gone on unfolding itself to those who seek him, healing, renewing, inspiring, redeeming and guiding.

Thus I try to keep in touch with his life and message given first in Palestine, with the impact of his life and personality on the early disciples, as day by day I read a portion of the New Testament; I try, too, to learn something of what his spirit has enabled others to be down all the ages since, from the study of the lives of the saints,

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both canonised and uncanonised, and by reading some of their writings. In the life of many who would not be called saints, and some even who might not be thought of as good men or women, I find flashes of light which to me are sparks or gleams from the light of Christ. I know that my own thoughts of God, my experience, my clumsy and imperfect prayer, are all penetrated by what Jesus Christ has meant to me. In doubts and difficulty his faith in God's love, his willingness to face even the awful burden of the cross and all that it involved, are a constant stay, bringing renewal of faith and of hope.

T Edmund Harvey, 1949

- 27.30 As a book containing foundation documents of both the Jewish and Christian religions, the Bible has, of course, unique historical value, both faiths having contributed richly to the world's culture and public life. Again, our Quaker forerunners' use of the Bible to nurture and check the working of Light Within was both wise and profitable. So it is for us. Yet the Bible's supreme value resides in the power of its finest passages as expressions of vital religion which is both personally and socially transforming.

What kind of approach to the Bible leads to that discovery? An intelligent analytical and critical approach has its rightful place. We then stand over the Bible as subjects investigating an object. An inversion of this subject-object relationship is, however, possible. We then approach the Bible not mainly to criticise, but to listen; not merely to question, but to be challenged, and to open our lives penitentially both to its judgments and to its liberating gospel.

Pathways to God are many and varied. Friends, however, along with a great company of other seekers, have been able to testify that this receptive personal response to the biblical message, and especially to the call of Jesus, leads to joyous self-fulfilling life, and to a redemptive awareness of the love and glory of God.

George Boobyer, 1988

- 27.31 How much the Bible has to teach when taken as a whole, that cannot be done by snippets! There is its range over more than a thousand years giving us the perspective of religion in time, growing

and changing, and leading from grace to grace. There is its clear evidence of the variety of religious experience, not the kind of strait-jacket that nearly every church, even Friends, have sometimes been tempted to substitute for the diversity in the Bible. To select from it but a single strand is to miss something of its richness. Even the uncongenial and the alien to us is happily abundant in the Bible. The needs of men today are partly to be measured by their difficulty in understanding that with which they differ. At this point the Bible has no little service to render. It requires patient insight into the unfamiliar and provides a discipline for the imagination such as today merely on the political level is a crying need of our time.

Further the Bible is a training school in discrimination among alternatives. One of the most sobering facts is that it is not on the whole a peaceful book – I mean a book of peace of mind. The Bible is the deposit of a long series of controversies between rival views of religion. The sobering thing is that in nearly every case the people shown by the Bible to be wrong had every reason to think they were in the right, and like us they did so. Complacent orthodoxy is the recurrent villain in the story from first to last and the hero is the challenger, like Job, the prophets, Jesus and Paul.

Henry J Cadbury, 1953

- 27.32 If we no longer believe in the Bible in the old way, what do we now believe? This question must be put to each one of us, and we have to find an answer. Knowledge of the Bible is very important, but it is unnecessary for us to accept it as infallible or as a legal document; we must think and judge for ourselves, listening to that which speaks to our innermost being.

The Bible is not sacrosanct. It comes from times very different from our own with a different concept of man. It does not contain the absolute literal truth, but it can teach us the truth of life. Dogma is the language of theology. I do not set any limits for my thought in seeking truth in intellectual honesty. But more important than anything else is an anchorage in the divine which is to be found in the depth of every human being; it cannot be formulated in words but must be expressed in life and in relations with our fellow men.

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Jesus is the most important person in the Bible, not because the Bible or the churches proclaim it, but because he gave men a new concept of God.

Elsa Cedergren, 1982

- 27.33 Personal experience makes me think that Bible study is more rewarding undertaken by a group than in solitude... A group may pool their insights and reactions, their knowledge, doubts and stumbling-blocks, and together arrive at greater understanding (of themselves as well as of the Bible) than they could ever have done separately... Though the purpose of study should be serious (indeed without a fundamental seriousness a group will not last for long), surely it need not be over-solemn. The Bible is a human book, and you will find everything human somewhere in it, including humour. We must be prepared for conflict; some of the truth we discover may be unpalatable; and it is essential that we do not cheat, but keep on looking for the truth.

Joan Fitch, 1980

- 27.34 We understand the Bible as a record arising from ... struggles to comprehend God's ways with people. The same Spirit which inspired the writers of the Bible is the Spirit which gives us understanding of it: it is this which is important to us rather than the literal words of scripture. Hence, while quotations from the Bible may illuminate a truth for us, we would not use them to prove a truth. We welcome the work of scholars in deepening our understanding of the Bible.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

See also 26.42

Priesthood

- 27.35 The priesthood of all believers is a foundation of our understanding of the church. Our own experience leads us to affirm that the

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church can be so ordered that the guidance of the Holy Spirit can be known and followed without the need for a separated clergy... The Spirit in which the apostles lived, ... which was poured out at Pentecost on all the church, young and old, women and men, continues in our experience to empower all members of the church in a variety of ministries.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

- 27.36 Just as Quakers do not limit the service of God to certain times, or places, or people, so they do not have a set-apart priesthood... There is no need for any specific person to be designated prophet, priest, or church leader. Quakers would say that if people are open to the power of love and light in their lives then they will themselves become prophetic and priestly, and will not need to follow the external authority of church leaders. They will become empowered to be themselves, to find God in their hearts and to serve other people.

Harvey Gillman, 1988

See also 10.05, 12.02 & 19.31

Sacraments

- 27.37 Jesus, when he took up the little children and said, 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven', was speaking of Jewish children, who, according to the Jewish custom, would not have been baptised, and the Quaker position is really summed up in the words 'John indeed baptised with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. It is the inward change, the inward purification, the spiritual fact and not the outward symbol, that belongs in truth to the Kingdom of God. Neither in the refusal to baptise nor to take the supper do Friends set forth a negation. They assert, on the contrary, the positive truth that the religious life is the inward life of the spirit. But no place or time can limit its action, nor any symbol adequately express it.

John Wilhelm Rowntree, 1902

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27.38 Alongside Friends' stress on the primacy of God's action, we set great store by the centrality of ordinary experience. We agree with the witness of the universal church that mystical experiences are attested by the moral quality of people's lives. The whole of our everyday experience is the stuff of our religious awareness: it is here that God is best known to us. However valid and vital outward sacraments are for others, they are not, in our experience, necessary for the operation of God's grace. We believe we hold this witness in trust for the whole church.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

27.39 To Fox and the early Friends the whole of life seemed sacramental, and they refused to mark off any one particular practice or observance as more sacred than others. They took the same stand with regard to Sunday, or First Day; it was not in itself more holy than Saturday or Monday; every week-day should be a Lord's Day. Their whole attitude was gloriously positive, not negative. They were 'alive unto God' and sensed him everywhere.

We do not say that to observe the sacraments is wrong, but that such observance is not essential to wholehearted Christian discipleship and the full Christian experience. We do not judge our fellow Christians to whom the outward sacraments mean so much. Rather do we wish, by prayerful fellowship with them, to be led unitedly with them to a deeper understanding of what underlies those sacraments, and so to share a richer experience of the mind of Christ.

Gerald K Hibbert, 1941

27.40 The Quaker conviction is that the operation of the Spirit outruns all our expectations. We acknowledge that the grace of God is experienced by many through the outward rite of baptism, but no ritual, however carefully prepared for, can be guaranteed to lead to growth in the Spirit. A true spiritual experience must be accompanied by the visible transformation of the outward life. Our understanding of baptism is that it is not a single act of initiation but a continuing growth in the Holy Spirit and a commitment which must continually be renewed. It is this process which draws us into a

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fellowship with those who acknowledge the same power at work in their lives, those whom Christ is calling to be his body on earth.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

- 27.41 We would assert that the validity of worship lies not in its form but in its power, and a form of worship sincerely dependent on God, but not necessarily including the words and actions usually recognised as eucharistic, may equally serve as a channel for this power and grace. We interpret the words and actions of Jesus near the end of his life as an invitation to recall and re-enact the self-giving nature of God's love at every meal and every meeting with others, and to allow our own lives to be broken open and poured out for the life of the world.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

- 27.42 Many of the testimonies and practices established by early Friends have survived only in part. One which has almost died out in Britain is the naming of days and months by number instead of by names of pagan origin. It is rare now to hear 'first day' instead of 'Sunday' or 'third month' instead of 'March', though the practice is still acceptable.

Another testimony held by early Friends was that against the keeping of 'times and seasons'. We might understand this as part of the conviction that all of life is sacramental; that since all times are therefore holy, no time should be marked out as more holy; that what God has done for us should always be remembered and not only on the occasions named Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

This is a testimony which seems to be dying of neglect. Many Friends, involved with family and the wider society, keep Christmas; in some meetings, Easter and its meaning is neglected, not only at the calendar time but throughout the year. What I would hope for is neither that we let the testimony die, nor that we keep it mechanically. I hope for a rediscovery of its truth, that we should remember and celebrate the work of God in us and for us whenever God by the Spirit calls us to this remembrance and this joy.

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Janet Scott, 1994

- 27.43 We need to guard against under-valuing the material expressions of spiritual things. It is easy to make a form of our very rejection of forms. And in particular, we need to ask ourselves whether we are endeavouring to make all the daily happenings and doings of life which we call 'secular' minister to the spiritual. It is a bold and colossal claim that we put forward – that the whole of life is sacramental, that there are innumerable 'means of grace' by which God is revealed and communicated – through nature and through human fellowship and through a thousand things that may become the 'outward and visible sign' of 'an inward and spiritual grace'.

A Barratt Brown, 1932

- 27.44 I personally believe that there is a quality in the bareness of Christian Quakerism, which may act as a bridge between the past and the future, allowing space for Friends to dare to search within... To be a Quaker is by no means to say goodbye to myth, ritual and symbol, but rather to find myself set free to discover them as the very essence of the way I now experience... Quakers are bridge people. I remain on that bridge, part of my roots reaching back into the Christian past and part stretching forward into the future where new symbols are being born.

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985

See also 26.15