

**THE EIGHTEENTH JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE
1982**

CELEBRATION

A Missing Element in Quaker Worship

JOHN ORMEROD GREENWOOD

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURES

This is one of a series of lectures instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on the occasion of the establishment of that Yearly Meeting in January 1964.

This Lecture was delivered in Melbourne on 5 January 1982 during the Yearly Meeting.

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. He and his companion, George Washington Walker, travelled widely but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through this visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia. James Backhouse was a botanist who published full accounts of what he saw, besides encouraging Friends and following up his deep concern for the convicts and Aborigines.

Australian Friends hope that this series of lectures will bring fresh insights into truth, often with reference to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism.

Ruth Haig
Presiding Clerk
Australia Yearly Meeting

ABOUT THIS LECTURE

Since the time of George and Margaret Fox, Quakers have prided themselves on possessing a religion of experience: "none to profess what he doth not dwell in; and none to profess what he is not" said Fox. For that reason they rejected ritual, formal prayers and the great feasts of the church as outward ceremonies which might not correspond to an inner reality. But in doing so (Ormerod Greenwood argues) they neglected the fact that life has rhythms moods and seasons and these need corresponding celebration. Individual experience, in itself, is not adequate because it can never be universal, and we are called, as William Penn said, "to be universal in your spirits." Celebration and ceremonial are designed to lift individuals out of the isolation which separates us; the essence of celebration is that "everyone joins in"; we are linked with the vast inheritance of the past and with hope for the future in saying "yes" to life rather than "no". In seeking valid forms of celebration Friends may supply a missing element in their own worship, and contribute something to the ecumenical search. The lecture is part of that search.

About the Author

JOHN ORMEROD GREENWOOD was born in 1907 in Fulham, London; and now lives on the south coast of England in Eastbourne, Sussex. He married Jessica Anshell, a young dancer, in 1937; they have three children and four grandchildren. Ormerod read history at Jesus College, Cambridge, and was president of the first dramatic society in the University to include women members; on leaving Cambridge he became an actor, and was secretary of the Group Theatre of London for five years. Subsequently he had a varied career in adult education, as manager of a bookshop, as a BBC producer of religious plays and feature programmes, as freelance scriptwriter for radio and television, and as lecturer and librarian of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. He is the author of a play produced in London, the libretto of an opera produced at the Aldeburgh Festival, and a three volume history of Friends activities overseas called *Quaker Encounters*.

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CELEBRATION:

A missing element in Quaker worship.

1. What is celebration?

When I consult the dictionaries, I find that the word celebration comes from the Latin *celeber* which literally means "much frequented" (of a place or a person) and hence "renowned" or "honoured". So celebration combines the two things - a lot of people, a crowd, come together because of some place or some person who is exciting; and then the praise, fame, or renown which is expressed. It didn't originally have anything to do with religion, but in the dictionaries its current meaning is given as mainly religious. So in Chambers, to celebrate is "to distinguish by solemn ceremonies, as a festival or an event: to perform with proper rites and ceremonies, as mass, the eucharist, marriage etc.," and the Oxford Dictionary similarly, "To perform publicly and in due form (any religious ceremony, a marriage, a funeral etc.)" I am startled to find that I don't altogether agree with these august authorities. For one thing, I would never talk about celebrating a *funeral*; whereas I would expect to find mention of the great feasts of the church - surely we talk of celebrating Easter, Christmas and Pentecost? And to my ear, the word *celebrate* is resuming the secular meaning which it had at first; can we not talk of celebrating a success in sport or business, an examination success, a new house, a new job, an anniversary? Does not Australia Yearly Meeting bear me out, in celebrating the arrival of James Backhouse and George Washington Walker in Van Diemen's Land in February 1832? "Let's have a celebration" we say, for anything that provides a good excuse.

2. Traditional Quaker attitudes to celebration

If we do say that, those of us who are Quakers had better remind ourselves of the traditional attitude of the Society to such things. We don't celebrate Mass, or the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, in any form that other religious bodies would regard as valid. We don't celebrate Christmas, or Easter, or even the Feast of the Holy Spirit at Whitsuntide which might be the nearest and dearest to us. In the 1883 edition of the London Book of Christian Discipline (which in those days applied to you as well, because you were still part of our Yearly Meeting then) I find that Chapter X begins sternly, "Advised, that Friends keep to their wonted example and testimony against the superstitious observance of days." The *days*

are Christmas, Easter and the rest; but it doesn't stop there. We are not to celebrate even Queen Victoria's Jubilees; so how would you justify celebrating her loyal servant James Backhouse? The Discipline goes on:

It is well known that we regard it as a Christian testimony, to refrain from uniting in many of those demonstrations of joy which prevail on occasions of public rejoicing. They not unfrequently lead to practices inconsistent with that meek and quiet spirit which should clothe the disciple of Jesus, and they are often an inlet to excesses which estrange the mind from God. It is not in this way that we should manifest our gratitude for national blessings; but by endeavouring, through redeeming love and power, to live more and more in the spirit of the Gospel, and thus to hold out an example of genuine Christian conduct.

In fulfilment of this testimony, Quaker tradesmen opened their shops on Christmas day; Quaker children got no Christmas presents; Ackworth School did not even have a half-holiday on Christmas until 1860; Quakers refused to illuminate their houses when there was a great victory like the Battle of Trafalgar (and got their windows broken in consequence). Of course, not all were equally faithful; in 1759 some were reprovved for "the illumination of the windows of their houses, upon what are called rejoicing nights" and were "awakened to a serious consideration of their duty".

3. Why Quakers disdained celebration

I'm not going to spend too much time explaining why Friends felt like this from the beginning down to the end of the nineteenth century; but briefly, they lived by inner experience, not outward ceremony. Quaker wives wore no wedding ring. Baptism was something that happened inside you, not pouring water on you from outside; and besides, Jesus never did it, neither did Paul, even though Jesus had it done to him in Jordan. Christmas, they said, is a pagan feast and celebrated in a pagan way with guzzling and gourmandizing (all of which is true), and no one knows the date on which Jesus was born. What matters, however, is that Christ should be born in our hearts; and as we suffer with him, so we may deserve to rise again with him. The state may celebrate with "rejoicing days" but the rejoicing is usually for the wrong reason, some victory in war or triumph over an enemy which we deplore; and almost always in the wrong way, with drunkenness

and music and dancing and ribaldry and all those things which Friends cannot countenance.

Well, that's how it used to be; but now - as you know - Quaker children do get Christmas presents, and you are ready to join in a "rejoicing day" for Backhouse and Walker. So I am haunted by the feeling that you are going to ask impatiently what I am on about, or why I have chosen such a remote subject for the Backhouse lecture, when there are so many urgent matters on hand. You will have to have patience while I make a very roundabout explanation of why I think celebration is still a missing element in Quaker worship, and why I think it matters.

4. The centrality of experience in Quaker thought

The latest edition of the London Book of Discipline begins with a title page which claims to set out "Christian faith and practice in the experience of the Society of Friends." That work *experience* is central to my lecture as well as to Quaker faith and practice. It is our proudest boast, and justly so, that we live by what we have experienced, tasted and seen; and by truths not second-hand, but "proved on our pulses". What Peter said, or Paul said, is not enough; it is "What canst thou say?" "This I knew experimentally," said George Fox; and by *experimentally* he meant by experience, or in our uglier jargon, experientially. "Our business, after all the ill usage we have met with," said William Penn in his preface to *The Rise and Progress of the People called Quakers*; our business is "the realities of religion, that all may come to an inward, sensible and experimental knowledge of God through the convictions and operations of the life and spirit of Christ in themselves." Or if we turn to our only first-rate religious philosopher, Robert Barclay, trained by the Scottish Kirk and the Jesuit fathers, notice how he puts philosophy and theological systems and human reasoning in their place, with his anecdote of how the Heathen Philosopher who disputed with the Christian Bishops at the Council of Nicaea was converted by a simple old man:

and being inquired how he came to yield to that ignorant old man and not to the Bishops, he said 'that they contended with him in his own way, and he could still give words for words, but there came from the old man that vertue, which he was not able to resist.' This secret vertue and power ought to be the Logik and Philosophy wherewith a true Christian minister ought to be furnished, and for

which they need not be beholden to Aristotle. . . Of which I myself am a true witness, *and can declare from a certain experience*. because my heart hath often been greatly broken and tendered by that virtuous Life, that hath proceeded from the powerfull ministry of these illiterate men; so that by their countenance as well as words, I have felt the evil in me often chained down, and the good reached to, and raised.

(*An Apology for the true Christian Divinity*, 1678; Prop X, 20 pp. 219-220, 223. My italics).

So there it is then, "the antient simplicity of Truth" as Barclay called it. Like him, I too have been moved and taught and tendered (haven't you?) by the "powerfull ministry" of simple men and women with no great learning or worldly standing, speaking out of their experience. Simple does not mean insipid or silly; and there is no question but that the simple - the truly simple - can go to the heart of things. Did not Jesus say so?

But every achievement brings its shadow with it; every quality also potentially involves or includes a defect - they are two sides of the coin. When we stress that our religion is rooted in experience and made valid by it, we ought to reflect how limited our experience is, both in worldly and other-worldly terms. At home, on the other side of the world, I sometimes travel in a train with a racing crowd on their way to Plumpton racecourse for the Spring meeting; and as neither horses nor courses nor bookies are part of my world, I listen to their excited chat realising that *their* world shares neither assumptions nor pleasures nor morals nor satisfactions with mine.

I suppose that every one of us who is old enough to look back associates critical stages in his (her) own development with certain incidents, which may appear to others trivial in the extreme, yet to us who experience them may be turning-points. The incident I want to describe is indeed so trivial that I despair of conveying to you a sense of its importance to me; but I must try.

5. A crucial experience: Quaker meets Greek

Until 1966, Friends ran a domestic training school for girls in Salonica in Greece, which had begun after the second world war. Girls came in pairs (for mutual support during the course, and after) from remote villages, to learn hygiene and mothercraft and agricultural skills. Let's call it that, though it was

much more - a bit of women's lib., to give the girls pride and make them vocal; a way of raising standards in the villages, of widening horizons and - for us Quakers- learning how to work with the Greek orthodox church. This school had functioned most of its life in old war-time huts left by the Germans; and when these had to be replaced because they were rotting away, we set about raising the money. I never worked there, but two of our dearest friends from our own meeting ran the place for a time. To help our efforts to get money, a young Greek woman, a professional singer who knew about the work, offered to come and sing Greek folk-songs to help the fund. So she came to Friends House in London and performed for us those plangent, rhythmical, melancholy or sardonically gay songs of Greece; and she performed them not only with her voice but with her body, her eyes, her arms. In her own country she would have set her audience clapping, participating, interpolating, weeping, laughing, dancing, screaming. But the stolid rows of Quakers heard her out with unflickering immobility and unshakeable indifference, with no response but polite applause. It was not just ignorance, though many of us were not musical, and we did not know what the songs were about. But even if we had been provided with a translation, we should still not have understood their moods or the Greek experience behind them: the remote tragic past, and the equally tragic recent past, of war, invasion, treachery, revolution, cruelty and inefficiency, pride and passion, exile, sadness and tempestuous joy; the inheritance of the classic past, the clear Greek air, the world of myth. (In our Salonika school you had only to go into the yard to see Clytemnestra feeding the hens, or Ariadne nursing the baby, a real live orphan lent to the community.)

Between the Greek folk-singer and the Quaker audience no current flowed, no sparks flew; two kinds of human experience ran side by side with hardly any contact but mild goodwill. The singer's goodwill to us and our enterprise may also have left her unprepared to appreciate the real virtues behind the Quaker placidity: the tolerance, the discipline, the patience, the steady persistence through obstacles, the love of unknown neighbours which inspires Quaker effort at its best. As I, the Quaker, watched her, the Greek, I would have liked her and her country to share some of those Quaker virtues whose compassion dissolves the excesses of cruelty; but even more I wanted us, the Quakers, to have what she had: the zest, the passion, the compulsive emotion, the outward expression of the inward mood. I began to see why, though I am a devoted Quaker, I am an unsatisfied one. We cannot rely on our experience, if our experience is so incomplete. There are lots of Quakers I respect and many I love; but few who seem to me to be complete human beings.

6. Celebration transcends the limits of experience

Yet there are ways to overcome these barriers, and they are ways of celebration. If I pursue my Greek example, I suppose the most complete would be learning Greek, ancient or modern; for he who has two languages has two souls. But that is inevitably for a few. It is now common enough, however, to go on holiday in Greece; and I don't doubt that in this very Greek city of Melbourne there are many who have made, or will make, that pilgrimage. To sit at evening and drink retsina (or some other drink to your taste) and dance and listen to bazouki music; or to stand in the early morning on the sacred way at Delphi; or to attend a performance of Greek tragedy in the ancient theatre at Epidaurus - any of these help us to absorb the Greek experience; and they are ways of celebration. Celebration lifts us out of the glass cage of personal experience, with its intense separation and inevitable uniqueness, and unites us in a common shared experience that transcends time.

7. Lope de Vega: experience, imagination, celebration

Let me try to think of a man with the widest experience - human experience - that I know. If I were to choose a Quaker, it might well be William Penn, who called on us to "be universal in your spirits, and keep out all straitness and narrowness." But let me look this time beyond the bounds of our Society. I think I would have to choose someone from the Renaissance to express the passion for universal experience typical of that age of exploration. Let me choose Spain's dramatist of the "Golden Age", Felix Lope de Vega Carpio. He wrote hundreds, some say thousands, of plays-heroic, tragic, comic, romantic and religious; but he wrote poems, novels and prose works as well. He served as a soldier by land and sea; fought with the Great Armada against England; married twice, had many love affairs, had children legitimate and illegitimate, and brought them up together; was received at court with flattering success; went to prison and knew disgrace and failure; was for much of his life a layman, but towards the end a clerk in minor orders. You can't ask more of one lifetime than this "monster of nature", the "phoenix of genius" as his contemporaries called him; and I am astonished that no one (so far as I know) ever made a film out of it all. Yet even so, there are plenty of aspects of human life, even of Spanish life, even of Spanish life during the renaissance, that are outside Lope's direct experience. He could never bear a child, for instance; he knew nothing of science, as Leonardo da Vinci did; he practised no sport, as the French poet Ronsard did; he never shared the life of a convent, or the religious ecstasies of St Teresa or St John of the Cross. Perhaps, if

it comes to the final crunch, he knew less of life than quiet William Shakespeare of whom we know so little, but who certainly did much less, wrote only 38 known plays against Lope's hundreds; and drew his experience out of his head. As Lope did too, of course; for when I say that he could never bear a child - in his head, in imagination, in a play, he could. There are different kinds and depths of experience; there is experience and what you make of it; but there is still a world of difference between imagining the birth of a child and actual labour pains; between imagining suicide and swallowing the pills; between talking of imprisonment and being locked in a cell; or even between day-dreaming of wealth and actually turning on the gold-mounted taps in your sunken bath. Life is more complicated than we can ever imagine it; yet we have no other way to enter into experience outside our own, except through the imagination.

8. The Quakers set limits to experience

What makes me anxious about the Quakers is that they set out deliberately to limit the range of experience into which they would enter, and to control the kinds of experience by which they would be affected. I do not of course mean all of them. What makes George Fox, John Woolman and Margaret Fell outstanding is that they are excepted from this comment. Fox complained to God that he was forced, in imagination, to share the experience of every kind of wickedness, cruelty and perversion; in his own language "The natures of dogs, swine, vipers, of Sodom and Egypt, Pharaoh, Cain, Ishmael, Esau, &c."

And I cried to the Lord, saying, 'Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit those evils?' And the Lord answered that it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God.

John Woolman, during his time of sickness with the pleurisy was brought so near the gates of death that he forgot his own name:

Being then desirous to know who I was, I saw a mass of matter of a dull gloomy colour, between the South and the East, and was informed that this mass was human beings in as great misery as they could be, & live, and that I was mixed in with them, & henceforth I might not consider myself as a distinct or Separate being.

Fox's aged widow Margaret, then in her eighties, was outraged as Friends began to separate themselves from "the World", to wear "plain clothes" as a uniform, and to refuse to attend the christening feasts or funerals of their non-Quaker neighbours. She condemned the "silly poor Gospel" of being "all in one dress and one colour" and said:

Let us beware of this, of separating or looking upon ourselves to be more holy than in deed and in truth we are; for what are we but what we have received from God?

Unfortunately, Friends took no notice of this last and most important message from their great Lady. They gave their children a "guarded religious education" as they themselves called it - meaning that they carefully selected the information and the influences which should reach them; they persisted with their "silly poor Gospel" and tried to keep themselves "unspotted from their world". In order to avoid becoming entangled with too many sides of human experience Friends were forbidden, until the end of the nineteenth century, to read novels or to go to plays. In the Swarthmore Lecture which I gave at Lancaster in 1978 to my own Yearly Meeting, I described the fuss over "modern drama" in a session of the Manchester Conference of 1895, quoting an address by our, and your, Friend Thomas Hodgkin. I will not repeat that discussion here, but remind you that when Tolstoy gave us money from the sale of his novel *Resurrection*, to be used to help the persecuted Dukhobors, we returned the money rather than have anything to do with such a dirty book.

9. Charles Lamb "cannot like the Quakers to live with them"

The writer Charles Lamb, that quiet gentle soul who spent much of his life looking after his sister Mary after she had killed their mother in a fit of insanity, and who was for a time mad himself, was much attracted by our Society, loved a Quaker girl, and thought of joining us. "Her parents kept the Quaker rule, which doth the human spirit cool" he wrote; and the same criticism is comically underlined in his essay *Imperfect Sympathies*. "I love Quaker ways, and Quaker worship. I venerate the Quaker principles," he says, "but I cannot like the Quakers 'to live with them'. I must have books, pictures, theatres, chit-chat, scandal, jokes, ambiguities, and a thousand whim-whams which their simpler taste can do without." He ends the essay with his famous anecdote of travelling with "three male Quakers, buttoned up in the straitest nonconformity of their sect" in a stage-coach to Andover, where there was a row with the landlady of an inn over what

food they had eaten during a stop on the way to Exeter. When she would not agree to the money they were offering:

they all three quietly put up their silver, as did myself, and marched out of the room, the eldest and gravest going first, with myself closing up the rear. . . We got in. The steps went up. The coach drove off. The murmurs of mine hostess not very indistinctly or ambiguously pronounced, became after a time inaudible. I waited, in the hope that some justification would be offered by these serious persons for the seeming injustice of their conduct. To my great surprise not a syllable was dropped on the subject. They sat as mute as at a meeting. At length the eldest of them broke silence, by inquiring of his neighbour, 'Hast thee heard how indigoes go at the India House?'

10. Have the Quakers changed their spots?

You will say that all this happened very long ago and in another country, and that none of what I say is true of Quakers today, and certainly not in Australia; and I don't think we will risk walking out of a restaurant here without paying the bill, even if we think the charge is too high. But I wonder. I think that here and now, as well as there and then, there are people who love Quaker ways and Quaker worship and venerate the Quaker principles, but like Charles Lamb cannot like the Quakers "to live with them". People usually put it in a very polite way, as a lady did sitting and drinking tea in my house while I was writing this lecture: 'I am not good enough to be a Quaker'. Sometimes it's the other way round, "The Quakers are too good for me". I do not take this for praise, but for damning criticism.

11. The sin of excessive prudence

Every year London Yearly Meeting writes an epistle which we send to all those we love. We have sent you a copy of this year's and hope you will like it; it was written in the night hours and with great sincerity (I can say so, as I was not involved in the drafting of it). When the draft came to Yearly Meeting, it contained a phrase about "putting aside the Quakerly sin of prudence". A Friend rose gravely to tell us that prudence is not a sin but a virtue; and the draft was altered as you will see to warn us to "put aside the sin of excessive prudence and

dare to live adventurously". I thought of William Blake's proverb in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid courted by Incapacity". Penn was not being prudent when he rode unarmed through the forests of the New World, and Elizabeth Fry was being excessively imprudent when she walked into Newgate.

12. Times, seasons and sacred places

When Friends learnt to be prudent, as they did very early on - their business record proves it - they learned to dread excess and that eighteenth century vice of "enthusiasm" which, said Joseph Priestley, "makes us imagine that we are the peculiar favourites of the divine being". It is not for nothing that gray is the Quaker colour, or that the representative body of London Yearly Meeting is still called by its traditional name, the Meeting for Sufferings. The experience of early Friends and of many later ones, as for example Australian Friends in the struggle against conscription before the first world war or English Friends during that war, was an experience of suffering and the power to use it positively. The "Meeting for Sufferings" was an instrument in that struggle, to obtain justice and redress. Later, the title was extended in meaning as Friends turned to aid the sufferings of others. But the stress was always on suffering, even in Penn's famous proverbial title: "No Cross, no Crown". We learnt how to suffer with Christ more easily than how to reign with him.

When we decided that no special rite was particularly sacred, nor no place, nor no day - whether Sunday in the week, or Christmas or Easter in the pattern of the year, we did something that was magnificent and magnificently true; but like so much that is magnificent, also potentially disastrous. It was a truth, but not a sufficient truth. In the early days it was balanced by the spontaneity which created great occasions, like Fox preaching on Firbank Fell; or the hundred and sixty-four Friends signing a petition to Parliament in 1659 and waiting in Westminster Hall for an answer, "wherein they make an offer of their own bodies, person to person, to lie in prison instead of such of their brethren as were then under confinement, and might be in danger of their lives".

And if you will receive our bodies, which we freely tender to you for our Friends that are now in prison, for speaking the Truth. . . we are waiting in Westminster-all for an answer from you to us, to answer our tenders, and to manifest our love to our Friends, and to stop the wrath and judgment from coming upon our enemies.

I am sorry, but though I believe as a Quaker that all places, times and seasons are equally sacred. I at the same time believe - and no inconsistency in this - that there are places, times and seasons that are specially sacred. I believe that the great cathedrals, Durham and Chartres and St Peter's in Rome are specially sacred; that Swarthmore Hall and Jordans are specially sacred; that Ayers Rock and other places of worship of the Australian Aborigines are specially sacred and there is no way in which the desecration of them can be justified. They are sacred only because at these places and these times men have regularly and with sacrifice and devotion penetrated the veil which separates us from the unseen. The veil might have been penetrated anywhere else, or at any other time, or on any occasion, but these are the places where it has happened and been marked; these are the places of celebration.

13. The rhythm of life and the seasons of the heart

There is a basic fact of all life which we ignore at our peril; life is based on rhythm. We recognise it in the beat of the heart, in eating and excretion, in our breathing, in sleep and walking; we see it in the seasons of the year and, as Keats showed in a sonnet, in the seasons of the heart:

Four Seasons fill the measure of the year;
There are four seasons in the mind of man:
He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
He has his Summer, when luxuriously
Spring's honied cud of youthful thought he loves
To ruminat, and by such dreaming nigh
His nearest unto Heaven: quiet coves
His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
He furlerh close; contented so to look
On mists in idleness - to let fair things
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

14. Quakers and the Christian Year

Of course Quakers have always known the seasons of the heart; and anyone who goes to meeting regularly knows how different moods and attitudes can be communicated and transmitted telepathically in our assemblies. We do not ignore the rhythm of life, but we make the pulse begin internally and individually. Only you and God know when the Eucharist happens between you; Christmas is when Christ is born in you, Easter when you rise with him from your own internal death; and the winter of the soul is a dark night indeed.

But the great seasons of the Christian year are more than this. They were derived from the physical seasons of the earth, and from pagan ceremonies and holy places which existed long before the coming of Christianity. In the northern hemisphere where Christianity first grew and flourished, these places and times and ceremonies took on local colour. Many of the Christmas customs, as early Friends were not slow to point out, are derived from the Roman saturnalia, others from the pagan Yule of northern Europe with its feast of twelve days. Easter in Europe is a spring festival, and in England its very name (as Bede tell us) is that of a pagan spring goddess, Eostre. The last festival of the Christian year, Hallowe'en and Hallowmass (All Souls Night and All Saints Day) is a pagan feast for the dead. The Greeks knew that Britain was famous for it - that was about all they did know about our island on the edge of nowhere; and it was fitly placed at the beginning of our winter. When such celebrations are transferred to a fresh setting in the southern hemisphere they must take on fresh significance; Christmas in Melbourne cannot be the same as Christmas in York. The ancient rites which have passed from one culture to another have been transplanted to a continent where they do not physically fit, and so given a new turn in their long history. They have come, like your race, from far, and their place in the rhythm of the seasons changes its meaning.

Early Australian painters still saw gum trees as oaks and elms, just as your first poets ignored the wattle and remembered the primrose, and musicians echoed European rhythms. The struggle of the Australian arts for their own vision, fed by the landscape and seasons and the long silent vistas of the past, has to be paralleled in religious terms. One of your own poets, Norman Talbot, who was born in Suffolk, England, has brought art and religion together in Christmas poems which expresses the new vision. I should like to quote from his poem "Christmas Storm" (This Place, Poetry of the Hunter Valley [ed. Bennett]) which, on the literal plane, describes a desperately needed but very violent storm which

struck his house in a tiny sheltered valley in New Lambton in 1979. In this "different' Australian version of Christmas" as he calls it, he sees Christ's coming as "a long-awaited storm, a southerly of the spirit, desperately needed when everything was hot and dry and dying:"

Now our parched, cynic, secular valley
Flails alive with rain,
We are gasping cold air, a mighty fact
has come back into the world.

The black storm's got in the house!
It reels. In throes we quicken,
grin at each other, born
into a real place again

* * * * *

World round there's a story of steady light
under a stable roof-tree,
That story's a shock too, a chill
smack of starting out.

Light without scars? Stormlight.
Light inside and out. The lawn
cries now like a baby
for the lightning of the skidding sky.

A storm is given us, light and dark
at once. Right now. Feel it?
You couldn't catch that wind!
You couldn't crib that child!

15. Bread and wine in a rice culture

I was very struck when I read that the nineteenth century Hindu reformer, Keshab Chandra Sen, pointed out to the Christian missionaries in India that the celebration of the Mass or Holy Communion could not have the same significance in the sub-continent as it has in Europe. Neither wheat nor the vine are staple

products in a large part of India, and therefore neither their literal nor their symbolic significance could be the same for Indians as for Europeans. When Christ prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread", when he took bread and broke it and shared it with his disciples, he was doing what came naturally - the most everyday thing possible. Behind it lay the symbolism which everyone recognised because it happened all the time in their fields and under their noses - the grain had to be laid in the earth and die before it could bring forth fruit. The vine was there on the hillside, the stem and the branches, and its blood was shed every year when the wine was made. But the rice culture of India all these things were merely exotic; they were things you could read about and learn about, but they were never your life, your daily sentence, the things you had on your plate or which you saw when you looked out of the window.

16. The changing face of religion

Of course, since it is the essence of religion that it spreads from place to place, it is always involved in a process of adaptation. The cult of Dionysus came from Thrace (round the Black Sea) but it was only when it got to ancient Greece that it produced the huge open-air theatres and the great plays which are still performed. Buddha was an Indian prince, and the religion he founded spread over the great mountains into Tibet, China, Korea, to Japan. The Noh plays which it produced there, and the form of meditation which we call Zen Buddhism are still Buddhist, but very far from anything in India. When St Augustine of Canterbury was sent to England from Rome, his wise instructions were to adapt wherever he could; so many of our English cathedrals stand in pagan holy places and are all the holier for that. There is no reason why your Australian Quakerism should be the same as English or American or Kenyan or Japanese Quakerism; and it is only so far as it is truly Australian that it is a living, growing part of this country and an inspiration to Quakerism world-wide. It is not for me, a stranger and a newcomer, to suggest how; but I commend to you the suggestion that it might accord with your temperament, and be a contribution to your national identity as well as to your Quakerism, if you sought ways to use the element of celebration in your worship. The very fact that we as Friends are not wedded to the traditional forms of "sacrament", but see all life as sacramental; and that we do not observe the great feasts of the church in our own worship, puts you in a particularly free position to do this.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am not thinking, nor proposing, that the traditional meeting for worship should be scrapped or altered. There is nothing

national about the meeting for worship, and nothing exclusive about it either; I have seen Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews as well as Anglicans Roman Catholics and others participate in it freely. All I am asking is that we should replenish and revivify its resources by recognising that the rhythm of life does demand great occasions, changes of mood, occasions for saying "yes" to life in all its fullness and variety. Let me try to summarise some of the things being said to us by a non-Quaker writer, Harvey Cox, who has spoken very much to my condition in a book called "The Feast of Fools".¹

[1. Harvard University Press. 1969; Harper and Row. "Perennial Library" paperback. 1972.]

17. The human need for festivity and fantasy

He talks about festivity and fantasy as "absolutely vital to human life". He says that we, the industrial nations, have paid a frightful price for affluence - paid it ourselves, as well as what we take from the poor nations and the poor within our gates. We have placed an enormous emphasis on our human functions as worker and as thinker (and none are more guilty than the Quakers) and "this worker-thinker emphasis, enforced by industrialization, ratified by philosophy, and sanctified by Christianity, has helped to produce the monumental achievements of Western science and industrial technology" (to which Quakers have contributed much, much more than their share). The victim is our shrunken psyche, which "is just as much a victim of industrialization as were the bent bodies of those luckless children who were once confined to English factories from dawn to dusk". Two of the elements which have been destroyed are festivity, the capacity for genuine revelry and joyous celebration, and fantasy, "the faculty for envisioning radically alternative life situations". These enable a person to relate to the past and the future in ways impossible to the other animals. Porpoises and chimpanzees may play, but only mankind celebrates; and celebration "arises from mankind's peculiar power to incorporate into life the joys of other people and the experience of previous generations." Festivity, therefore is associated with the past and with memory of an event, an occasion, a hero or a god. Fantasy is a form of play "that extends the frontiers of the future". That is Harvey Cox's definition, though to my mind fantasy includes much more than that.

18. The essence of celebration

Our loss of the capacity for festivity and fantasy is important to religion, because "the religious person is one who grasps his or her own life within a larger historical and cosmic setting" which for Christians is traditionally somewhere "between the Garden of Eden and the Kingdom of God". Celebration requires a set of common memories and collective hopes. A festival is only successful when everyone has imbibed its spirit; if someone is left out, we all feel the worse. The essence of celebration is participation and equality.

Festival is a time for saying "yes"; and this is specially important to Quakers who spend such a lot of time saying "no". We don't have priests, we don't have sacraments, we don't believe in war, we don't believe in gambling; and this is the way we present ourselves to the world, though what we really mean is that we are all priests, all life is a sacrament, we believe in peace, we believe that people should not be able to grasp an unfair share of power or resources either by accident or design. We know that the best Quakers have shared the world's suffering; indeed one of our famous moments was the prayer with which John Wilhelm Rowntree ended the great Manchester Conference of 1895: "*Lay on us the burden of the world's suffering*" - a prayer all the more telling because he was a sick man destined to die before his time. It is a prayer for saints, and only for the strongest of them; and balanced in them by a sense of the beauty of the world and the life-giving divine power which upholds them. It is possible to reject injustice and hate cruelty without ceasing to think of man as restored to his primal innocence, and the world as turning in the perennial cycle of decay and resurrection. We suffer from a surplus of means and shortage of visions; we have lost the capacity for Utopian thought.

19. Fantasy and prayer

There is much more in Harvey Cox's book *The Feast of Fools*, but I will draw just one more thread from it. There is nothing that makes contemporary Christians more anxious than the impoverishment of prayer. Harvey Cox treats prayer as a form of fantasy, which to him is not a word of disparagement but a life-giving thing. In supplication - asking God for something, in Christian terms - we imagine a situation which is richer or better in some way than the present; we meditate on the condition to be achieved and explore ways to achieve it; and in adding "Thy will be done" we recognise that there may be more to the situation that we ourselves can see. In intercession we identify with someone else's

situation, perhaps "afflicted in mind, body or estate." The prayer of thanksgiving expresses gratitude, joy and bliss; the prayer of penitence enables us to see ourselves in a new perspective, to set us free from the compulsions of the past and let us start again. We need not be inhibited by the thought that God does not need to be told things; the exercise is for our benefit, to enlarge our sensibility and sensitivity, our strength and vision; and though traditional forms may help us, we are free (and who more free than the Quakers, with their absence of any set liturgy) to invent as we like.

I am near the limit of this lecture; and I imagine, as I leave the hall, someone plucking me by the sleeve and saying: "Very well, you have convinced me - for the sale of argument I'll say that you have convinced me, that Quakers have neglected the element of celebration; have been too set in their ways; too cautious and prudent; too exclusive to many aspects of life, too afraid of fun and fantasy; too ready to say "no" to what is wrong than "yes" in gratitude to their Maker for what is right. So what do you propose we should do about it? Put on comic noses and jump in the air?"

20. An unsuccessful experiment at Woodbrooke

I could take shelter behind my position as a visitor to your shores; I have said that it is for Australians to find their own way of celebrating, but it would be a cop-out if I rested there. I will begin by describing an unsuccessful experiment from which I think we can learn quite a lot; and it is indeed the nature of experiments that some succeed and some fail, and the failures are part of the success. At the beginning of this century, Friends founded in Birmingham, England, a curious kind of college called Woodbrooke, described in its official history as "a Quaker Experiment in Religious Education". It started in 1903 under a distinguished scholar, J. Rendel Harris, as its first director of studies; and it has grown into an international college with ex-students all over the world. Rendel Harris was an extraordinary character; he was very learned and very homely, very serious and very, very humorous; a careful scholar and a fantasist; far-travelled, warm, spontaneous, and certainly not "prudent". He had a "child's zest for living" says H.G. Wood in a biographical sketch, and included in his daily prayers the phrase "Give us this day our daily discovery". In his love of extemporary spoken prayer and evangelical hymns he seemed to belong to the tradition of Moody and Sankey and the nineteenth century "Holiness" movement, and he would have been quite at home with our charismatics. But when he lectured on the Scriptures and the early Church he was completely open-minded; nothing was too "sacred" to be

examined critically and scientifically. "The Doctor" as he was always called at Woodbrooke distrusted institutional religion, even the institutions of Quakerism; but one of his convictions was the necessity of a liturgical element in worship. Accordingly he invented a set of Three Woodbrooke Liturgies, and as the copy I have is of the second edition, it is clear that they had some success. The liturgies of the Skylark, of the Rose and of the Falling Leaf were keyed, as he explained, to the seasons: "one has the sadness of autumn, another the rapture of spring, a third the glory of the summer" and their object was "to have our inward ears opened to the Voice of Nature and to the Voice of God". They were written in parallelism, like the Psalms, and in dialogue; and this had to include what he called "the babbling of mirth" because we must never say to our souls what Hadrian said when he was dying "Thy merry quips are over". "If we banish humour from our thought of worship, the kingdom of God is not yet fully come. 'They began to be merry,' saith the Scripture: and they continue therein." But the mirth was balanced by weighty quotations from Tertullian, Suso the mystic and George Herbert. To some at least they were very embarrassing; one woman describes arriving at Woodbrooke in 1905 and finding the "entire company out in the garden in two rows facing each other, singing and reciting under "the Doctor's" direction a curious and fanciful composition of his own. . . The performance seemed a foolish waste of time for rational adults. Some of the party looked as if they thought so too, and others as if they hadn't had the foggiest idea what it was all about!"

One can understand her embarrassment by reading the text of the "Liturgy of the Rose", in which one row of students carry rosebuds, and the other open roses; and at one point they approach a rose-bush and kiss the rose, twice, saying the first time: "We love thee in God" and the second time "We love God in thee". If that seems to you not merely puerile but pantheistic, Rendel Harris is not afraid of that; he says that in the litanies "there is a Pantheistic, or if we prefer, a Panchristic element, something akin to the exultation of the Sufi;" and if we want to laugh, he is quite prepared for that. "Now let us leave the rose-garden, "he says in his homily, "and go in search of the Christ."

Do you find this account of the Doctor's experiment in celebration touching, silly, or quaint? I find it a bit of all three; but it has not passed the test of contributing any lasting element to the Woodbrooke curriculum, and I think it fails ultimately because it is too arbitrary; too much of an anthology of favourite passages without a root in some occasion felt by all to be deeply significant. A liturgy like this would have to grow, like the orthodox Church liturgies, out of common memories and felt needs. All the same I find it a fascinating and thought-provoking episode, and adore its craziness.

21. Positive attitudes

I am going to end by making the following suggestions. First, that you should adopt a more open attitude to the ceremonies of other faiths than Friends sometimes do. When you are invited to participate in them, do so as if they were your own. If you do not, or cannot, participate, adopt a positive and reverent attitude towards them. I am not thinking merely of the major Christian bodies, but of other faiths, beginning with the rich inheritance of the first Australians. I am astonished how much, in spite of their neglect and decay, the Aboriginal ceremonies and vocabularies and myths have contributed to your art and to the creation of the Australian personality. Second, when you find opportunities for celebration, however "secular" these may seem to be, use them, and where possible, build on them. In England we have begun to hold, every four years, a "Residential Yearly Meeting" much longer than the annual series in London; and this has become a "Celebration" without that having been its original purpose. There are fringe activities, concerts and exhibitions of all sorts; and at the last one in Lancaster we had a procession of 2,000 Friends and others to the castle where George Fox and Margaret Fell were both imprisoned, with songs and street theatre and a huge dragon made by our children during their stay. It was at the same time a public testimony, a demonstration of our presence, a gesture towards our history and the devotion of the first Friends, and a life-enhancing occasion. Or there is our Peace Action Caravan, which holds a small group of Friends who have by now visited almost all the Monthly Meetings in England. They perform sketches in the street, in halls and in schools; they address meetings on peace and answer questions and show posters and engage in debate. Here again, there is a primary purpose - peace propaganda - but there is a bonus of celebration, of fun, of imagination, of joy, which has affected the meetings they have visited as well as those public meetings which they have addressed. I know your circumstances are different, and I am not asking for what we do to be copied, but only for it to point ways of looking for the right approach.

Ours is a dark time; tragedy is part of our destiny and catastrophe is always possible by earthquake, fire, or human stupidity or wickedness. We Friends do, and have always done, our part in comforting the afflicted, the sorrowing, the homeless and the refugees; we have done our part in the struggle against injustice, though we could always do more. But what is required of us also is to say "Yes" to life; to love its fun, its beauty and its strangeness, and to be ready to celebrate what our London ad vices used to call "The life of joy and victory to which we are called."

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