

THE NEW HOLY FAMILY
by Rufus M. Jones

THE NEW HOLY FAMILY

by Rufus M. Jones

Early in His ministry Jesus was preaching in a house so crowded with people that "it was impossible even to have a meal," when His family from Nazareth came with the intention of carrying Him home, for "they thought He was out of His mind" (Mark III, 22). Standing outside the house, because they were unable to get in on account of the crowd, they sent in word to call Him out, and someone said to Him, "Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside calling for you." And Jesus said: "Who are my mother and my brothers? I say unto you, Whoever does the will of God is my mother, and my brother and my sister." Here, then, is the "new holy family."

There is not a single great art gallery in Europe that does not have a painting of the Holy Family. Leonardo Da Vinci's in the National Gallery in London is one of the most famous of these paintings. But Raphael and Fra Angelico and Rembrandt and Andrea del Sarto and Fra Lippo Lippi, and many another greater master painted "Holy Families." Always these pictures put the Mother and Child in the center, always with Joseph standing by, often with grandmother Anne included. John the Baptist, as a little boy with a lamb, often got in the picture. Sometimes the shepherds and sometimes the Magi are there. Almost always an ox or an ass or a sheep got a place by the manger. If it was Fra Angelico who painted "the Holy Family," he was sure to have heavenly visitants in the picture—Seraphim in red, Cherubim in blue, and archangels in yellow. If it was Rembrandt, he had the light of the picture burst forth inwardly from the Mother and Child—no light "oped the common outway." In every case "the Holy Family" was small and everything

was done that could be done to glorify the Virgin Mother in the center. Not content with pictorial art, Christian Europe built its most glorious Cathedrals in honor of this small Holy Family, usually with "Notre Dame," Our Lady the Queen Mother, the central figure of the mighty edifice. Chartres Cathedral is the most perfect of these miraculous monuments raised to the glory of this Virgin Mother of the Holy Family.

But St. Mark and the two other Synoptic Evangelists tell us that there was an early time in Christ's ministry when His mother and His brothers and His sisters did not believe that He was the Bringer of authentic tidings. They wanted to take Him home and restrain Him. They were not yet ready for such new and unusual words as He was speaking, and such extraordinary deeds as He was doing. There is significance in His saying at this time, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household."

It was, then, on this occasion that He drew the lines of "the new holy family." There is no canvas large enough for this picture. There is no master great enough to paint it. It stretches out as wide as the world, and it has no time limit; it is confined to no century, no age. Whoever is ready to be dedicated to the great business of doing God's will here in His world and our world belongs in this new holy family. The anonymous saint who wrote the Golden Book of Devotion in the fourteenth century said: "I would fain be to the Eternal God what a man's hand is to the man himself." That may very well be the motto for the members of our new holy family. Emerson wrote of the builders of the dome of Rome's greatest Cathedral:

"He lent his hand
To the great Soul that o'er him planned."

Which is the same idea as that of the anonymous saint.

Most of us do not build cathedrals. Few of us write "Golden Books." But God's work, the doing of His will, is extraordinarily inclusive—raising food on the land, ordering a nurturing home, taking care of a child with loving insight, speaking simple truth, spreading love abroad in any spot of the world, praying and working for the Kingdom of God. Being a cup of strength in some great agony, being heroic in quiet ways, saying the right word when others do not dare, walking straight forward in the path of duty—these are some of the ways of the ways of doing God's will and of being included in the new holy family. As of old it includes mothers and fathers and grandmothers and little boys and girls (who didn't get into the first one), and keepers of sheep and lambs, and magi (scholars), for the original shepherds and magi found their call to the manger while they were engaged in their normal occupations. The great Book of Ecclesiasticus says that it is the "workers" with their hands who "maintain the fabric of the world, and in the handiwork of their craft is their prayer," which means that they belong to the new holy family.

There is an extraordinary text in Ephesians which says that we are "God's works of art." It was translated in the authorized version as "God's handiwork," but the word in the original is "*poiema*" which is best translated as "works of art." This seems to imply that God Himself is the Artist who creates "holy families" without canvasses and without the carved stone lace work of cathedrals, or Gothic arches which rise like martyr flames turned to stone. That art has gone by and no one now can follow in the train of Leonardo and the other masters who painted "Holy Families." But God is still creating His "works of art," His new

creations still go on, even in these shattering years.

There is a wonderful saying in the Book of Revelation which tells how these works of art are made. It says: "Him that overcometh I will make a pillar in the Temple (the Cathedral) of my God, and he shall go no more out (a permanent part of the structure) and I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God (i.e. his face will show the citizenship to which he "belongs") and I will write on him my new name." That is the last act of the artist as he finishes his creation; he writes his name on the work he has made and it henceforth bears the mark of his approval. So this supreme Artist writes His name on each new member of the new holy family. The beauty of the Lord our God shall be upon him and the work of his hands shall be established.

I am eager that we shall discover how to promote a universalizing type of Christianity and to be done with emphasis on divisive isms and party labels. When we get back to the Headwaters of our faith we find no stress laid on the temporal things that separated people in "folds" and "branches." It is all about being ONE as God and Christ are ONE—not about dividing walls and fences. Perhaps our Wider Quaker Fellowship may offer a way to an ever-growing group of this universalizing type, a movement toward the formation of the new holy family.

Rufus Jones, Quaker teacher, philosopher, historian, and author, was the founder of the Wider Quaker Fellowship. "The New Holy Family" appeared in *The American Friend*, a publication of the Five Years Meeting (now Friends United Meeting) of Friends in America in March, 1943.

Reprinted 1991

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP

a program of the Friends World Committee for Consultation

Section of the Americas

1506 Race Street, PA 19102 U.S.A.