



A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Twelve

Third Month 1982

Dear Friends,

Well, here we are: *A Friendly Letter* is one year old with this issue. Whew! My heartfelt thanks to those of you among the first subscribers who have sent in renewals for another year. I am grateful for your confidence in this small venture. I urge those others who receive renewal flyers in this issue to consider renewing as well. You may know that in the periodical publishing industry, it is renewals that determine whether a publication will sink or swim. I am paddling hard, and appreciate those who have put in an oar.

This month I take a look at a major new book just out from the American Friends Service Committee: *A Compassionate Peace: A Future For The Middle East*, published by Hill and Wang of New York, for \$6.95 in paperback. As my article explains, the book is sure to be widely discussed, and may even be controversial. It would make a good addition to Meeting and church libraries, and a worthy focus for study groups: the Middle East is probably the most volatile area in the world; if we are to prevent World War III, much effort must be focussed there.

Speaking of preventing World War III, I want to describe briefly a project I read about in the San Francisco Monthly Meeting newsletter. It is a program of exchange between families in America and the Soviet Union, being coordinated by the Association for Humanistic Psychology. Here's how it works: An American family takes a picture of its members, including pets if you like, and writes each person's name at the bottom of the photograph. Then the photo is sent to the Association for Humanistic Psychology, at 325 Ninth Street, San Francisco CA 94103. The Association will forward it to Moscow, and in return the American family will receive a similar photo of a Russian family. The Association explains that the purpose of the exchange is to assist people in both countries in seeing the people of the other as real human beings. If the families wish to correspond, that is fine, but the only commitment the Association asks for is that each family keep the photo of the other in its living room, where it can be seen in the round of everyday life.

I like that idea very much, and that's why I wanted to pass it along to you. It is a small thing to do in a world seemingly dominated by huge impersonal institutions and forces. And maybe it won't get very far before we're all blown up. But if there is ever to be a genuine reversal of the nuclear arms race, it will be built upon the transcendence of the pervasive atmosphere of fear that envelops both the United States and the Soviet Union. But the fear of people of other people is conquered one small unit at a time; there is a place for small, personal actions, even if we don't know whether they will succeed. That's what faith is all about; and that is what this photo exchange project seems to me to be: a chance to express our faith, "as a grain of mustard seed." If this idea appeals to you, why not share it with your Meeting or Church, and other concerned people you know?

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager
Chuck Fager

MIDDLE EAST PEACEMAKING: A ROLE FOR FRIENDS?

Of all the difficult, tangled, intractable problem areas in the world today, is there any more complicated and discouraging than the Middle East? The new AFSC book on the region, *A Compassionate Peace*, identifies no less than *nine* distinct but overlapping and reinforcing sources of tension and strife there, among which are: the U.S.-Soviet competition; Arab-Israeli hostilities; intra-Arab struggles; other religious rivalries, including Muslims against Christians, and Muslim sects against each other; conflicts between the Soviets, Iran and Afghanistan; a massive, out-of-control buildup of conventional arms; a budding, even more ominous nuclear arms race; and--who could forget--the control of oil.

As a reporter, I have avoided dealing with Middle East issues, if only because to even begin to do justice to its bottomless complexities requires almost a fulltime effort. Further, the high level of emotion surrounding these issues makes dealing with them even trickier. Thus, I can make no pretense here of evaluating *A Compassionate Peace* on the basis of whether it does justice to all these issues in their setting. Instead, I want to look at it as an example of Quaker service, a concrete effort to make our Peace Testimony practical in a very harsh world. The authors are careful to state at the beginning that they do not speak for all Friends. But does the book uphold and enhance our Reputation of (and for) Truth?

The Background: Intense Controversy

Let me state my conclusion up front: I believe *A Compassionate Peace* is a very good example of Quaker Peace Witness. Indeed, I suspect that the AFSC's major Middle East publications may be among its best work during the last dozen years. It has certainly been some of its most demanding and controversial work.

To show how this judgment on the book was reached, let's first look back to 1970, at the predecessor to the new volume, a report called *Search For Peace in the Middle East* (*Search*, for short). No sooner was it published, than *Search* was engulfed in fierce criticism, both from Arabs (who were urged in the report to accept and negotiate with Israel), and from Israelis (who were urged to begin dealing with the Arabs, in particular the Palestinians). In this country, most objections came from Jews, since there is little visible Arab presence here; and much commentary was very vitriolic. For instance, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith published a lengthy rebuttal, *Truth and Peace in the Middle East*, which described the Quaker report as full of "prejudice" against Israel, tainted by an unadmitted "theological anti-Semitism," and concluded that it complicated the quest for peace with "an unnecessary burden of another false and biased account of the problem, and a misguided prescription for its solution."

Other strongly nationalistic Jews and Israelis were even more vehement. As late as 1979 Rael Jean Isaac, writing in the Jewish magazine *Midstream*, described *Search* simply as "anti-Israel propaganda," while Shmuel Katz, in a column for the *Jerusalem Post* provocatively titled "Quaker Enemy," called *Search* a "virulent anti-Zionist document, replete with anti-Israel mendacities," which "cloaked its anti-Semitism" with "hoary pretense."

The Judgment of Time

In the face of such attacks, it would have been understandable if the AFSC had simply abandoned the field to others with thicker skins or perhaps fewer inhibitions about responding in kind. The organization reportedly lost a considerable amount of funds from donors sympathetic to Israel. But AFSC's involvement in the Middle East, and with many of the people who settled Israel as refugees from war-torn Europe, goes back more than 40 years. And controversy itself is not evidence that an AFSC project has fallen short of its calling as a Quaker body: Faithful Friends for 300-plus years have been no strangers to controversy! Rather, the questions Friends might ask about *Search* would be more on the order of: Was it well-informed and sensitive to the concerns and perspectives of all the parties it addressed? Had it been discussed with thoughtful people from the contending groups during its preparation? Was their feedback carefully considered? Did the report tell the truth, in as loving and forthright a manner as the authors could? In short, and most important, did its prepa-

ration and content express a religious, and distinctively Quaker witness in this area?

The answers to the first three questions are empirical, and are the same: yes. The last two involve judgments, a looking back at *Search* to weigh its substance in the balance of twelve years of turbulent history in the Middle East. And in this perspective, the answers to last two questions are also almost unqualified affirmatives. Moreover, read in 1982, much of *Search*'s analysis has an almost prophetic ring. Consider these items:

A Record of Solid Predictions

* The report warned that unless there was some serious effort by Israel to address the Palestinian problem, another Middle East war, (the fourth since 1948) would be "virtually inevitable." And just such a war came, only three years later.

* The authors doubted that the Arabs would be willing to enter direct negotiations with Israel until they "feel themselves in a stronger bargaining position than they occupy today...." Indeed, it is commonly held that it was just such a feeling of greater confidence in the late 1970s which helped lead Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to make his dramatic peace pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1970s, opening the way to an Egypt-Israel peace.

* The report concluded that "the emotionally overcharged atmosphere of the Middle East must be cleared...if the first steps toward a settlement are ever to be taken." And this was the effect of Sadat's visit to the Israeli capital, at least between those two countries.

* The authors believed that to make the peace process work successfully, strong efforts by the superpowers, and the services of a persistent, skilled mediator, would probably be necessary. In the Egypt-Israel peacemaking effort, the role of President Jimmy Carter at the Camp David summit filled this description and function almost exactly.

* The report deplored the tendency of American Jewish leaders to identify with hard-line elements in the Israeli government, to "out-hawk the hawks" and ignore or reject other views, in Israel or the U.S. Today, this attitude is clearly being replaced with more pluralism among American Jews, and serious discussion of alternatives is beginning.

This is not to suggest that *Search* was flawless: for instance, the authors were convinced that bilateral negotiations were unlikely to succeed, and recommended instead a comprehensive negotiations process involving the major powers as well. But in fact all efforts at a comprehensive approach have failed, while a bilateral process between Israel and Egypt led to the one major break in the pattern of hostilities. Nonetheless, on balance *Search* stands up remarkably well under the scrutiny of the years. It appears to have been well-informed, perceptive, balanced, and in many ways prescient. I consider it a solid, Quakerly piece of work.

Some New Proposals--A New Controversy?

The most hotly-debated proposals in *Search* were that the Arabs should accept and make peace with Israel, and that Israel should deal with the Palestinians. The new book goes beyond these, and calls for the Palestinians to explicitly give up their stated goal of destroying Israel, and for Israel to accept the idea of a Palestinian state in what are now its occupied territories. It also calls on the U.S. government to stand firm against increased Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, and to begin a dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization. Will these proposals spark a new furor, rather than a constructive discussion? There is some hope that it will not: the book bears statements commending it to readers from Philip Klutznick and Edward Said. Klutznick, formerly U.S. Secretary of Commerce, has long been a pillar of the American Jewish establishment; and Said, a Palestinian-American scholar, is a member of the PLO's Palestine National Council. These are excellent testimonials, and should help bring about a calmer consideration of the book.

Still, if such a controversy does erupt, I say let it come. *A Compassionate Peace* seems to have all the virtues of the earlier study, and possibly more; the Reputation of Truth will be well served by it. The book's eloquent, utopian-realistic call for action to bring peace, justice and reconciliation to the Middle East adds up in my view to a solidly Quaker witness, one in which both the AFSC and American Quakers generally can take pride.

Inside: A New Quaker Proposal
For Peace in the
Middle East

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From: Chuck Fager, A Friendly Letter
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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

On 3/8/1672, George Fox left Jamaica for the American mainland. It took him 41 days to make the passage, almost as long as it had taken him to cross the Atlantic from England to the island some months earlier. During the voyage there were days on end of flat calm, followed by gales which blew so fiercely that they broke the ship's mainstay. But the captain dared not land on islands the passed to try to fix it, because they were reputed to be full of crocodiles, while the waters around them teemed with sharks. Finally they sighted the wild Virginia coast after five days of drifting hopelessly before the strong winds. If that is not bad enough, Fox later found out that another ship which had left Jamaica at the same time, and which he had considered taking, had been captured by pirates.

Fox's journey was undertaken in part to look for suitable locations for a Quaker colony in the New World. Nine years later, on 3/4/1681, King Charles II made this dream a reality by granting William Penn a charter for his "Holy Experiment."

This was almost twenty years after the last of four Friends was hung on Boston Common by the Puritan authorities. His name was William Leddra, and he died on 3/14/1661.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Acting the Part

A senior member of an American Meeting was recently overheard complaining to the clerk of Ministry and Oversight about the presence of an energetic young attender. This newcomer, the older Friend said, did not defer to older, birthright members; furthermore, he dressed very informally for Meeting, and wore an old style black broadbrimmed hat. "Why," concluded the complainer, "what does he think he is doing, affecting to be a Quaker?"

The Clerk of Ministry and Oversight, who was well aware of the youthful attender's activities, hesitated not at all before replying, "Well, I certainly hope so."

--Contributed by A. Nonymous Friend

*My thanks to readers who have sent in Quaker Chuckles. Please keep them coming!
And if you haven't shared A Friendly Letter with your Meeting or other Friends, will
thee do so?*
