

A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Forty-Seven

Second Month, 1985

Dear Friend,

Many times during the past month I have looked up from the keyboard and wondered, "Just whose idea was this Quaker poll, and who roped me into working on it?" A survey questionnaire like this one with 100 data fields yields many thousands of bits of information to be entered, and creates the potential for millions of meaningful cross-tabulations. That's a lot of work, especially at the paltry wages this newsletter pays. Live and learn.

Yet it still seems a useful idea, and a growing number of readers have been asking when the results would be published, so I am glad to be able at last to say, here they are. To be sure, these are preliminary and partial results--partial because there just hasn't been enough time to enter all 504 questionnaires that have come in, and because the full results of the questionnaires reported on here fill nine pages of print; a more complete report with all the numbers will be issued separately soon. In the meantime, as promised the readers of *A Friendly Letter* get the first look at the results; and I believe they will give an idea of what those of you who took the time to fill them out have on your minds and hearts. It is also hoped this issue will provide you and your meetings with food for thought, reflection and discussion.

To make the production of this issue possible, it has been necessary to alter our format, using my computer in place of a typewriter. Your comments on this new look are welcome, as usual; it certainly saves me time and trouble.

On another topic, readers of *Quaker Life* should be sure to check out the Letters section of the First-Second Month issue, which is now out. At the end of the section is a letter from a Canadian Friend protesting the treatment of FUM's former Meeting Ministries Secretary Bob Williams (see AFL #44) by the magazine, in an earlier issue when his name was deleted from a report of the FUM fall Commissions and Boards meeting at which he was present and active. Beneath the letter is an editorial note which allows that this rewriting of history was "probably in error." This was not an isolated incident, however; Bob has been similarly consigned to oblivion in other FUM publications as well since his abrupt resignation in December. There is something sad and unseemly about this blackout; it is too much like what happens when a Soviet official falls from grace in Russia. But such perversions of truth have no place in a Quaker setting. Whatever Bob's failings, he served FUM devotedly for years, and that deserves to be acknowledged. That *Quaker Life* has printed the letter and the comment can be considered as "probably" an improvement.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

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THE QUAKER POLL: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

First, a word about these results: They are based on 163 survey questionnaires taken from a total of 504. The 163 total includes 79 questionnaires from Friends in Programmed meetings and 83 in Unprogrammed meetings. They came from Friends in 22 YMs in 21 states. (As we proceed, Programmed Friends will be designated as Ps, and Unprogrammed by U.) The 79 from Programmed Friends represents all questionnaires received from Programmed Friends; the 83 Unprogrammed questionnaires were selected at random from the 425 total of these. The rest of the Unprogrammed questionnaires will be added when time permits; it is my prediction that they will reinforce the overall results for the Unprogrammed segment of this survey.

Secondly, it is not being represented that these results are based on accurate random cross-section of American Friends; rather, all they reflect with any reliability are the characteristics and views of those who took part. How representative a sample is this? That is a matter for speculation. My hypothesis is that they are reasonably representative of a wide range of thoughtful and active Friends; this is a hypothesis to be tested by more sophisticated researchers. With this introduction, let's look at the results.

Demographics: Age, Work, and Participation

In many ways, both major groups in this survey are much alike, doubtless typical of the population: they are almost evenly split male-female, mostly married (P=73%; U=62%), and mostly Convinced Friends rather than Birthright (P=52%-Convinced, 33%-Birthright; U=69%-Convinced, 19% Birthright), who most likely came to Friends either by being invited by an acquaintance, by marriage or through family connections (the totals for all three are: P=38%; U=30%). They are equally likely to work in academia (P=15%; U=12%) and to have served as an officer of some Quaker organization (P=72%; U=69%). All but two of them are registered to vote. Only about half are readers of *A Friendly Letter* (P=46%; U=53%).

But they are also of course different, in numerous intriguing ways: On the average, Ps are younger by almost a decade (P=44; U=53); and Us are more likely to live either in rural areas (U=42%; P=37) or in large cities (P=5%; U=24%). These differences are more sharply marked when we look at political views and affiliations: Us prefer the Democrats to Republicans by 66% to 12%, more than 5 to 1; similarly, 77% describe themselves as liberal or very liberal in outlook. Ps on the other hand are split right down the middle, 44% Democratic to 47% Republican, and 38% liberal or very liberal versus 37% conservative or very conservative. This result is but the first to challenge the liberal Quaker stereotype of Programmed friends as monolithic evangelical conservatives; indeed, there is more diversity in the ranks of the Ps on many topics, as we shall see, than among liberal Quakers.

On the other hand, Ps do show some clear tendencies, especially in theology and church activities. For instance, on the average they give much more of their income to Friends groups than do Us (P=8%; U=3%); indeed, 56% of them give \$100 or more per month, while only 20% of Us do as well. At the other end, only 9% of Ps give less than \$15 monthly, compared with 20% of Us. Programmed Friends are also much more likely to have read all of the Bible (P=62%; U=28%) and to study it regularly (P=65%; U=16%). They also consider Jesus their personal Lord and Savior (P=66%; U=4%), most call themselves either fundamentalists or evangelicals (P=66%; U=2%), and 60% have read the Richmond Declaration of Faith (U=28%).

Plenty of Programmed Diversity

The range which surfaced in politics, however, shows up again when we turn to issues and concerns. In setting the top Quaker priority, 27% recommended some form of Christian witness, but almost as many, 22%, put peace action first. The diversity among American Friends also evoked differences, with 18% seeing it as compromising and paralyzing and 20% considering it exciting, while 48% seesawed between the two. Forty-two percent think there should be room for non-Christians in a primarily Christian Society of Friends, while 52% think there shouldn't. And while 76% endorse cooperation among Quaker groups, a small but vocal minority of 8% denounces it as compromising and paralyzing. Even homosexuality, our

most divisive issue, brings out differences: while Ps agree, by 77% to 13%, that they oppose marrying homosexuals and lesbians, they are again divided close to evenly--40% yea and 48% nay--on whether such persons should be accepted as members. (Us support membership by 92% to 3%, but split three ways on marriage: 24% yes, 33% no and 43% blank.)

The divisions among Ps on this issue are not really surprising, considering that the P answers to the questions about grounds for rejecting membership applications or terminating members were varied, with the most common response being to leave them blank (reject=40% blank; terminate=35% blank). In this their answers were not far behind those of the Us.

A Look at Liberal Stereotypes

For that matter, liberal Friends in the survey did not fit all the common notions about them as secular humanists in disguise either. While they are theologically diverse--and mainly proud of it, even so 66% described Jesus as more than simply one religious teacher among others, and 63% want the Society to remain primarily Christian in its identity, if flexibly so. Further, while 29% say they do not study the Bible, 44% say they do, and 16% do so regularly; this does not sound much like any secular humanist groups we know of.

The difference in outlook between Ps and Us here may be suggested by one striking result: while Ps picked George Fox, the fiery prophet, more often than any other as an early Friend who strongly influenced them (62% did so), among Us Fox was nosed out of first place by the gentle quietist John Woolman (52% chose him; 49% named Fox). This sentiment may also account for the fact that in choosing priorities for Friends, Us opted first for peace action (46%), but not far behind was a concern to pursue and nurture deeper religious experience, both personally and in their meetings (26%). Moreover, Us reported putting more time into working on their concerns (P=26 hrs. per mo.; U=35 hrs.).

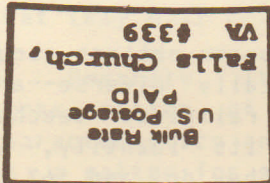
In addition, despite their latitudinarian image Us were only marginally less willing than Ps to face up to setting standards under which membership applications should be weighed and if need be rejected, and memberships terminated; in the case of rejecting applications based on actual behavior, they were actually less likely to pass the matter by (P=40%; U=34%). On the other side of the coin, Us turned out not to be as averse to seeking new members as they are commonly thought to be; in fact, when it came to personally sharing their faith with non-Friends, the surprise result was a dead heat between Ps and Us, with both averaging 12 such presentations per person per year. My guess is that the differences in this area between Ps and Us have to do more with method and organization, individual one-on-one encounters as distinct from institutionally-organized Evangelism, than with any real difference in willingness to bear witness.

A Reflection On the Results of Evangelism

Debate over the value of organized evangelistic methods is not our concern here. Yet it may be worth closing this summary with a glancing look at the ways in which Convinced Ps and Us found their way to Friends to see if these methods seem to leave any discernible traces. We already noted that the most common way in reported by both groups was through a personal invitation from someone who was a Friend (P=18; U=13). Could the differential between these figures suggest the impact of organized evangelism? If so, it is not all that great. Except for such contacts, a person's discovery of Friends is as much a matter of them seeking us out as the other way around, and this seems to be almost as true of Ps and Us. For instance, attending a Quaker school or college often moved them to join (P=4; U=7); others went looking after reading about Friends (P=2; U=6); and the AFSC, as much as many of us decry its secularization, still is a major point of contact, at least for Us (P=0; U=9). Even the looking in the phone book was cited by several (P=2; U=5).

In short, when it comes to outreach, Programmed Friends seem to have an edge, but not by much; most new Friends, whether Ps and Us alike, seem either to stumble across Quakerism or seek it out. There should be food for thought in this result, as in the others.

INSIDE: RESULTS OF THE FIRST
NATIONAL QUAKER POLL



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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

In Second Month, 1854, three distinguished British Friends, Joseph Sturge, Henry Pease and Robert Charleton, visited St. Petersburg, Russia, on a very weighty mission. They were trying nothing less than to prevent a war between their country and Russia in the Crimea. Such a conflict seemed to be imminent: the British cabinet had been whipping up war hysteria, and the Imperial Russian government had been replying in kind. Yet the Quakers were convinced that a war was unnecessary and unlikely to produce benefit for either party, and they traveled to the Czar's palace to plead for patience with Nicholas I. The Czar received them warmly, and they lingered at the palace, hoping to be given some set of conciliatory proposals to take back to London.

But abruptly the mood of their host cooled. Word came from his diplomats that the die was cast, war was inevitable. The Friends were rebuffed and left St. Petersburg empty-handed. Even worse, when they got home they were met with a campaign of press abuse denouncing them as disloyal or worse. The war broke out and just as they predicted it was bloody, expensive and futile. One of the only British public figures to stand against it was the great Quaker MP, John Bright. For his eloquent protests Bright was subjected to so much abuse that by the war's end he was driven into a nervous breakdown. Such are the costs of a peace testimony faithfully borne.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

Two More Beatitudes

Blessed are the front-row Friends:

Who sit solidly in the middle of meeting and help to give it a heart;
Who stride up to the empty benches and listen to every word of the talk;
Who are the first to ask a question and so get a lively discussion going;
Who remember to give a vote of thanks to the tea committee in a clear and well-fed voice.

They are the mainstay of every meeting.

But blessed also are the back-row Friends:

Who creep late into meeting looking both eager and shame-faced;
Who edge noiselessly past protruding knees and then trip over a hassock;
Who subside self-effacingly into the doorkeeper's seat and have to be dislodged.
They remind us that meeting is too precious to miss, even if it always comes at the wrong time.

--Edrey Allott, from the *Friend* of London, by permission.
