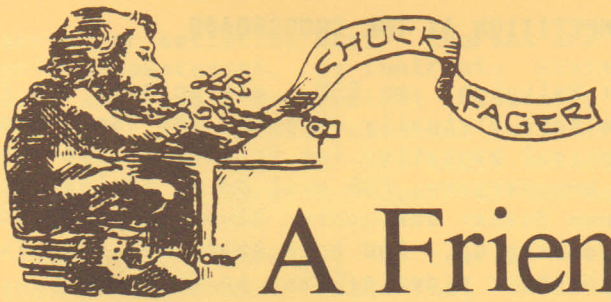

A Friendly Letter

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Dear Friend,

If you recall our listing of a legislative agenda in Third Month's issue, you may be interested in this brief update. Action was urged to: Oppose funds for the MX and the Nicaraguan contras, and to prod the White House to proceed with appointment of the first board of the U.S. Institute of Peace, a board which would include Quakers and not be a captive of the rightwing. Most of us know the outcome of the first two, a loss in the fight against MX and a temporary win in denying aid to the contras. But chances are you don't know what's happening concerning the Peace Institute, and here's the latest: At a Capitol Hill briefing on 5/1, Michael Donley of the National Security Council staff said that a list of nominees had been selected, the names were undergoing routine screening, and the list would be released "shortly." Who is on it? No clues, but two lists of potential nominees have been developed and submitted to the White House by interested groups, and both include Quakers. The administration has also submitted a series of amendments to the Institute legislation, the most controversial of which appears to be a proposal to make the Secretary of State the permanent Board chairperson. Donley repeatedly stated that "The president is committed to making the Institute work." The briefing audience was skeptical, wanting to see some action. So watch that space.

Also in Washington this past month came news that a lobbying group called Citizens for Reagan had filed a complaint with the Internal Revenue Service against a number of religious groups, including the AFSC, for what it alleged was illegal lobbying on Central American issues, particularly Nicaragua. The IRS had no immediate response, but if could attempt to deny the groups' tax exempt status if it feels the complaints are justified. AFSC spokesman Warren Witte told me in response that while AFSC has a wide range of activities concerned with Central American issues, it is very conscious of the legal limits on lobbying and stays well within them, concentrating instead on public education. An attempt by the IRS to challenge AFSC's tax exemption could, however, be costly even if unsuccessful.

One other brief update: two and a half years ago, in issue #20, I reported on a struggle in Indiana between Western YM and a dissident group over control of the Hinkle Creek Meeting. The Meeting had split and one group had asked the YM to support its claim. That conflict, despite efforts at mediation, ended up in court and the group with the YM's backing is now the clear victor. The Indiana Supreme Court recently let stand an appeals court ruling that Western YM, according to its Discipline, was able to take control of the meeting on behalf of the faction it considered legitimate. That group, though reduced in numbers by the struggle, is now meeting there regularly. The other faction has reportedly all but dissipated.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

THE EARLHAM SCHOOL OF RELIGION: COMPETITION AT THE CROSSROADS

When it opened in 1960, the Earlham School of Religion, or ESR, was unique; in fact, Wilmer Cooper, its founding Dean, could be said to have virtually invented the idea himself. His new school had the field of professional theological education for Friends all to itself. Next month, however, when it observes its silver anniversary, ESR will do so in the face of new and increaing competition. Not one but two new Quaker seminaries have now appeared on the scene; one is already in operation, the other gearing up. And both have been established in significant measure as alternatives and rivals to their elder sibling in Richmond.

At ESR's 25th anniversary gathering, Cooper, who is retiring, will receive particular recognition for his work in conceiving and launching the school. Rightly so, too, for his is one of the master achievements of Quakerism in his generation. The school has passed many important milestones since 1960, including the awarding of 224 degrees as of this year's commencement. It has also demonstrated a genuine commitment to full theological education for women, in a field where women are still largely secondclass citizens, when they have any status at all; over half of ESR's student body is now female. Perhaps most significantly, ESR has served as one of the key crossroads institutions in the Society of Friends during the past two decades; its influence is being felt in a widening circle, and from coast to coast.

A Landmark--And Also a Target

Yet with such distinction has also come a steady beat of criticism. The most frequent complaints have come from evangelical Quakers; and the character of ESR's new competitors shows that the criticisms were serious and abiding. Let's take a look at these new entrants. They are the Houston Graduate School of Theology in Houston, Texas, and the Friends Center at the Asuza Pacific University Graduate School of Theology in Azusa, California. The Houston School has been in operation since 1983; the Azusa Center is just getting underway. Both are closely allied to local Friends groups: Houston with the Texas Area Friends Churches, which are affiliates of Mid-america Yearly Meeting, and Azusa with California YM(California YM Friends also had a hand in establishing Azusa Pacific U. back at the turn of the century).

The two new schools are quite different in their structure and scope. The Azusa Center is just that, an adjunct to the larger seminary, providing a specific accent to its educational framework. The Houston effort is much more ambitious: The founders were much influenced by the fact that the city of Houston, a major and growing metropolitan area, had no Protestant seminary. Their school intends to fill that gap, and clearly hopes to become a major institution. "When Yale and Harvard are 600 years old," the Houston catalog declares, "the Houston seminary should be 300 years of age."

Minor Similarities, Greater Differences

Both schools have in common, however, a theological perspective which is consciously intended to be quite different from that of ESR, and indeed, represents something of a challenge to it. This is evident from their literature, and centers around the simmering dispute, not peculiar to Quakerism, between "liberal" and "evangelical" versions of Christianity.

Take, for instance, the three schools' theological slants. From an Eastern Hicksite perspective, they might at first glance appear to be rather similar. ESR describes itself as "committed to a historic view of Quakerism grounded in Christian faith and life," and says its "main function is to prepare men and women for ministry." The Asuza School's catalog states that its degree programs "are designed to prepare men and women for ministry in the church, both as lay persons and as ordained professionals." Houston likewise affirms that it aims at "the education of persons preparing for the ministry."

But such a focus on apparent similarities would be very misleading. Read a little further, and differences spring off the pages. For instance, ESR's educational goals include "developing Friends leadership for both programmed and unprogrammed meetings" and "fostering unity in the Society of Friends." Furthermore, while it describes its educational approach in unmistakably Christian and biblical terms, ESR is also careful to state that "The presence of these emphases does not mean that these beliefs or any others are forced upon [students] in

a narrow or sectarian way. Courses are taught from a nondogmantic stance...." The Azusa Center's announcement, by contrast, states clearly and repeatedly that its purpose "is to recruit and equip evangelical leadership to minister more effectively for Jesus Christ and His Church." The Houston handbook says firmly, "Our goal is to produce expository preachers of the Word of God who will cause others to hear the message of salvation through Jesus Christ in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God."(Emphasis in the original.)

The key word here is, of course, *evangelical.* To the Houston founders it is a key part to their definition of Quakerism, which they call "The Friends Church," and describe as "a form of historic evangelical Christianity that has persisted from the days of the apostles to the present," adding that "our spirit and faith include what is held in common by the various evangelical denominations."(My emphasis.) The Society of Friends, then, is seen as a subset of the larger evangelical stream of Christianity. Within that framework, the schools seek to preserve Quaker "distinctives," and fend off their abandonment by pastors trained in other evangelical traditions and who are unfamiliar with or unsympathetic to Quaker ways.

One Person's Crossroads As Another Person's Dead End

This evangelical perspective is, however, exclusive. From its standpoint, the "nondogmatic stance" of ESR's Christianity is not just different, but heretical. Equally unattractive is the crossroads ecumenical character it has maintained. To many evangelicals, such an atmosphere makes ESR, by definition, "liberal," unsound, and subversive of the true evangelical Christian faith. This outlook was summed up by C.W. Perry, pastor of California YM's Rose Drive Friends Church and a major backer of the Azusa Friends Center, in a conversation last summer. Asked why he had said he couldn't support ESR, he replied that "We just can't be sure, when we send somebody out there, that they'll come back believing the same things they did when they left." Most of those associated with ESR would take this as a compliment; but to Perry and many others, it is a fatal shortcoming.

These theological differences produce differences in educational emphasis: For instance, Houston lists eight courses on evangelism and missions. Asuza, however, lists only two, no doubt because it has the smallest course list of the three. ESR offers only one. Houston also predictably has the most Bible course offerings, 37 to to ESR's 19 and Azusa'a seven. Similarly, Houston offers nine courses in preaching to ESR's one and Azusa's two. When it comes to Quakerism, Houston matches ESR, four courses each; Azusa's new director, Glenn McNeil, told me he expects to offer one or two Quaker courses there.

But on the other hand, ESR has a whole program of peace and justice studies, with 15 offerings, that neither of the other two provide, except in scattered courses. Further, it is alone in explicitly affirming the unprogrammed branches as part of its constituency. And ESR lists four courses dealing with feminist and gender issues, which show up elsewhere in but one course at Houston, and there as but one of three topics.

What Does The Future Hold?

As these three seminaries develop, what will their impact on the larger Society in America be? Here are three possibilities which occur to me: First, I think it is likely to promote fragmentation among Friends, by increasing the ability of evangelical groups to operate independently of other branches at all levels. Second, by drawing away evangelical students, it seems likely to accelerate the "liberalization" of ESR, and the dilution of its crossroads character. ESR has been steadily attracting more and more unprogrammed Friends anyway. ESR has tried hard to emphasize its basic Christian character in response to evangelical criticism; but the bottom line seems to be that for many or most evangelicals, ESR's "nondogmatic" style of Christianity is simply not authentic or reliable.

A third effect, however, could be the emergence, probably first from Houston, of a new generation of strong, articulate evangelicals well-trained in their version of Quakerism, and ready to challenge the views of other branches.) While the encounters between such Friends and those of other traditions run the risk of generating more heat than light, such threshing can be creative and enriching as well. Where all this would leave ESR in another twenty-five years is anyone's guess. But in the meantime its status as a pioneering Quaker institution of our time seems secure, and well worth celebrating, whatever the future holds.

From: Chuck Fager, *A Friendly Letter*
P.O. Box 1361
Baileys Crossroads, VA 22041

INSIDE: THE EARLHAM SCHOOL OF RELIGION FACES NEW COMPETITION

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

Last month we told of the bravery of members of the Friends Ambulance Unit in Burma during World War Two, where they helped Dr. Gordon Seagrave, an American missionary, treat many war victims. One of their most amazing exploits, however, began on 5/6/1942, when seven of them were among a motley collection of over a hundred refugees, soldiers, nurses, cooks and porters, which was gathered around U.S. General Joseph Stilwell, chief of staff of the Chinese troops which were then in panicked retreat from the Japanese forces. At daylight that morning, Stilwell spoke to the group. His message was somber: The Japanese had cut off almost all escape routes. To avoid capture, he said, the group would have to walk, climb and swim some 140 miles through jungles, down rivers, and over 7,000 foot mountains, out of Burma and into India. And they would have to march at least 14 miles a day if they were to make their food supplies last, and elude both the Japanese and the approaching monsoon rains, which would make the mountains impassable. *"By the time we get out of here,"* he concluded, *"many of you will hate my guts but I'll tell you one thing: you'll all get out."* He offered to let anyone who wasn't prepared to follow him take a share of supplies and strike out on their own: there were no takers. The Quaker contingent performed admirably during the epic trek, and on 5/20, Stilwell, Quakers and all arrived in India without losing a single person. Stilwell went on to Delhi to plot a reinvasion of China; the Quakers followed Seagrave to another field hospital, and went back to their own kind of war work.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

A young Quakeress's parents were upset because she had become engaged to a young man who said he was an atheist. "We'll not have thee marrying an unbeliever," declared her mother.

"But what can I do? I love him," the daughter wailed.

"Well," her father replied, "if he loves *thee,* he'll do anything thee asks. So talk Christianity to him. If thee is persistent, he will see the light."

Several weeks went by, then one morning at breakfast the young woman seemed absolutely heartbroken. "What's the matter?" asked her mother. "I thought thee was making such good progress in talking to thy young man about Christianity."

"That's the trouble," the daughter said, "I overdid it. Last night he told me he had decided to become a priest."