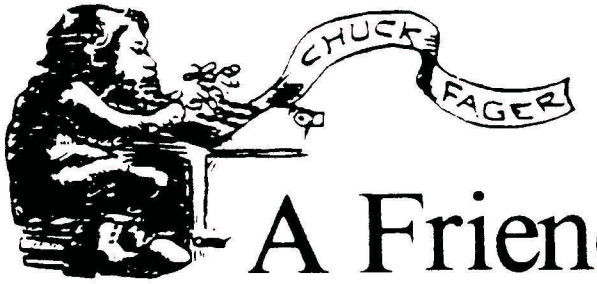

A Friendly Letter

Eighth Month, 1985 ISSN #0739-5418 Issue Number Fifty-Three

Dear Friend,

As Eighth Month opened, the topic for this issue was all blocked out: it would be a close, no-nonsense examination of Friends World College, on the occasion of the school's twentieth anniversary, which was to be observed on its Long Island, New York world headquarters campus. I had been a faculty member there almost that long ago, in 1966 and 1967, under the school's founder, the late Morris Mitchell.

My time at the school had influenced me deeply: it and Morris Mitchell were my introduction to Quakerism; I gained several close friendships there, and learned to look at some problems and issues in ways I had not before imagined. But there had also been endless hassles--no money to speak of, tacky internal politics, and near-total confusion, in the midst of the turbulent 1960s, as to just what we we were all supposed to do and be. I left feeling alienated and confused about the school, and had long been looking forward to the chance to return, poke around a lot, follow my nose and see whether was possible to sort out these feelings into a coherent, perceptive piece in vintage investigative style: Was Friends World College still chronically in as much of a mess as it was then? Was it still in any sense a *Friends* College? Would I want to send my own teenaged daughters there in a few years? All those questions which this journal was founded to surface and relentless probe were to be on the table, and let the chips fall.

Unfortunately, dear Friend, that's not how it turned out. Every time I started to ask tough questions, another intriguingly familiar face would appear out of the past and distract me pleasurably. Furthermore, the school's president, Larry Weiss, spoke about the college's troubled past with candor and its present with good sense, thus making its future, and Morris Mitchell's daring vision of world education, seem finally almost within reach, after two long decades of struggle and false starts. These and other factors combined into a slowly gathering conviction of promise about the school, and by the reunion's last day, when former students and staff gathered to form an alumni association, the feeling was strong enough that yours truly found himself eagerly presiding as the alumni group's first, organizing clerk, as much to my surprise as anyone else's.

I am wondering if such attacks of enthusiasm are common experiences at twentieth year reunions, since this was my first. In any event, it should be obvious that the wonderful time I had there left me with a completely intolerable conflict of interest as a reporter on same. Hence, in keeping with my high standards of journalistic integrity, there will be nothing reported here about Friends World College, lest I be convicted of blatant bias toward the subject, a charge to which I would proudly plead *guilty*.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

ROBERT BARCLAY: THEOLOGIAN OF QUAKER UNIVERSALISM

Is universalism an immigrant into Quakerism--and an illegal alien at that? Or is it an indigenous product, a part of the central religious vision of the early Friends? Many of its critics argue that it is an alien invader, which we would be better off without. Here, however, we will look at evidence that a strong, even radical universalist strain can be found prominently in the work of the premier early Quaker theologian, Robert Barclay.

It is no accident that Barclay's magnum opus, his *Apology For the True Christian Divinity* remains the principal Quaker theological manifesto, even 300 years after it was published in English in 1678. Barclay's vast learning, his fine writing style and the depth of his Quaker experience combined to produce an unquestioned masterpiece. The *Apology* lays out the Society's basic views with such clarity, and answers its critics so cogently that most Friends since have rightly considered it all but impossible, or at any rate unnecessary, to go over that same ground again. New Friends should make a reading of the *Apology* a priority when becoming familiar with the Society. (Fortunately, this task has been made much easier and more enjoyable by Friend Dean Freiday's 1967 book, *The Apology In Modern English*, available through the Friends Book Store, 156 N. 15th St., Philadelphia 19102 for $6.50 plus postage. Freiday's version also includes numerous helpful footnotes.)

No Apology For the Ambiguities of Quaker Universalism

Barclay's universalism shows up primarily in his discussion of what he calls "universal redemption" in Propositions Five and Six of the *Apology*(pp.72-124 in Freiday). In them he attempts to show how early Friends believed people can overcome their alienation from God, that is, how they can be saved or redeemed. Barclay's answer is a paradox: As a Christian, he believes firmly that it was only through the life and death of Jesus Christ that salvation has been made possible for all people; yet, as a universalist, he also insists that one need not know or believe in Jesus in order to partake of this salvation.

This position seemed contradictory to its numerous critics. How does Barclay handle this apparent contradiction? First, he argues that the effects of Christ's work extend to all people; quoting Hebrews 2:9, he says "Christ has tasted death for everyone...everyone of every kind."(Frieday, p.72.) The universal effect of this redemption is the basis of the Quaker conviction of the Light Within all people; this "Light" is not a pantheistic bit of God, but rather the effect in every person of this universal redemption, namely the *capacity to respond to the grace of God working in the heart of the individual.*

Speaking With More Power Than He Knew

Unlike many other Christian groups both then and now, Barclay and early Friends insisted that this capacity or Inner Light was, because of Christ's work, available to all people, as the Light which enlightens everyone mentioned in the Gospel of John, Chapter One. All people who chose to "mind the Light" and respond to the divine work were thereby "saved," that is, brought into an ongoing and authentic relationship with God. Such a relationship for Barclay constituted membership in the "true church," which was invisible, its membership list known only to God. As Barclay says later, in a startling passage: "There may be members of this catholic[i.e., universal--ed.] Church not only among all the several sorts of Christians, but also among pagans, Turks[i.e., Moslems--ed.], and Jews. They are men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart. They may be blind in their understanding of some things...yet they are upright in their hearts before the Lord, aiming and endeavoring to be delivered from iniquity, and loving to follow righteousness."(Freiday, p.173.)

Why was outward profession of Christianity not necessary for salvation? Barclay argues that "salvation does not lie in the literal knowledge of[Christ's] name, but in the experience of what it signifies. Those who merely know his name, without any real experience of its meaning, are not saved by it. But those who know the meaning and have experienced his power can be saved without knowing his name."(Freiday, p.113.) He also(p.114)uses a medical analogy: "Many have been cured by medical remedies without knowing how the medicine was prepared or what the ingredients were, and often without knowing who made it."

In this position are contained the seeds of the current Christocentric-Universalist debate among Friends. And while he was an astute and erudite thinker, I wonder if Barclay understood just how far-reaching the full implications of his position were. The radicalism of his vision is revealed, however, when he includes "Turks" or Moslems as well as Jews in his list of those eligible for membership in the "true church." That is because these groups were not simply ignorant of Christian doctrines and history, as were the heathen in the distant jungles; no, these religious groups were quite familiar with their Christian rival, at least in its institutional manifestation, and wanted nothing to do with it.

Why did Barclay make such a daring assertion? According to the distinguished Quaker writer Elton Trueblood, in his book *Robert Barclay*, "He took this position firmly because he could not deny the evidence of new life among all the varied groups which he had met....If the facts were in conflict with dogma, it was too bad for the dogma.(p.171)" In other words, his theology was based, in proper Quaker fashion, on his experience.

If The Turk and the Jew, Why Not the Universalist, Too?

Barclay also argued that an outward, visible Christian church was a gathering of people who did accept Christian doctrine, and who had also experienced its meaning in their lives. Yet based on his premises one could also assert, as today's Universalists do, that an equally authentic religious fellowship could include people who were felt to belong to the "true invisible church" because of the evidence in their lives of responsiveness to the Light's work in them, even if they could not, for whatever reasons, accept formal Christian doctrines. After all, as Barclay says it, "such knowledge is not absolutely necessary for those from whom God himself has withheld it."(Freiday, p.73.) And this "withholding" is not to be equated with simply never having heard it; the "Turks and the Jews" had heard it many times, and had rejected it. Many Universalist Quakers, including some who consider themselves as much Christians as did Barclay, have come to see in their mixed meetings just such authentic, if formally unorthodox bodies of "believers."

This is hardly the first time the ambiguity in Barclay's thesis has been noticed. The British historian John Punshon in his fine short history, *Portrait In Grey*, states that in these sections of the *Apology*, "Barclay unintentionally expressed the central ambiguity of Quakerism and posed a problem which the evangelical and liberal traditions were later to solve in characteristically different ways." (P. 122.) The late Francis Hall, a deeply Christian Friend, noted in a 1965 article in *Quaker Religious Thought* that "Barclay makes no attempt whatsoever to resolve the difficulties presented by these two sets of beliefs[Christian and Universalist--Ed.], both of which he fully holds."(Spring issue, p. 19.) Hall adds that while "Barclay did not succeed in truly synthesizing these two elements of his faith...the problem is a profoundly difficult one for the Christian theologian."

Which indeed it is, because this paradox of Christian Universalism did not begin with Robert Barclay in the 1670s. Indeed, the roots of it go right back into the New Testament, where passsages such as John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man [or woman] cometh unto the Father, but by me," do not easily jibe with such other passages as Matthew 25:31ff, in which Jesus describes the last judgment as based on deeds, with no mention of doctrinal tests. (Compare also John 1:7-9; Romans 10:8; and Titus 2:11, to name a few other of Barclay's citations.) The tension between a particularist, exclusive way of salvation and a mysterious inner process of grace available universally is not a new Quaker problem; it is a red thread running throughout the Christian history from which Quakerism emerged.

It is easy to see, as critics of Universalist Quakerism do, the pitfalls of legitimizing any detachment from its Christian substrate: wooly-mindedness, superficiality, vulnerability to religious fads and spiritual charlatanism of all sorts. These are real enough risks. Nevertheless, if universalism is not only embedded in the best writings of early Quakerism, but in the basic Christian texts as well, this suggests that, whatever the risks, it is an issue which will not go away, and which has a legitimate place in the Quaker theological mix. The dilemma which Barclay's *Apology* expresses is one that all Christians who take their sources(and their Source) seriously are faced with, and have been, from the beginning. How can the Society of Friends be both authentically Christian and meaningfully universalist? I am not sure of the answer, beyond the conviction that this is the right question to be grappling with.

INSIDE: UNIVERSALIST QUAKERISM:
BLAME IT ON BARCLAY

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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

It was in Eighth Month, 1681, that William Penn wrote in a letter the words for which he was to become most famous, in stating his belief that he had come into possession of the Pennsylvania colony by divine providence, in order to make it a model state, "...that an example may be set up to the nations; there may be room there, though not here[in England] for such an Holy Experiment." And so he did, with fair treatment of the Indians, toleration of various religions, and what was for his time a very humane penal code, among other "experiments." In time, power in the colony passed from Penn and his coreligionists to others, and the Holy Experiment became history, but of a sort that few other colonies could match.

In another Eighth Month, that of 1914, British Friends found themselves in a country sliding into the largest war in history. As the war fever heightened, so did the threat of mob violence directed against Germans, Austrians, Hungarians and other natives of hostile countries who were living or just stranded in England. Friends responded by forming an Emergency Committee, which helped organize work and entertainment projects for twenty-three thousand such people who ended up interned on the Isle of Man during the long, bloody years of the war.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

Clerks Take Note:

Excerpts from a letter in the *Vermont Castings'*[wood stove] *Owners News*, Summer 1985 issue: "You need to be advised that the use of your stoves may be HAZARDOUS to religious observances....I am a member of a small [Quaker] meeting....After meeting we have a pot luck....In the winter, when meeting is at our home...as people arrive we put their hot dishes on the Defiant[stove] to keep warm....Inevitably, about a half hour into our silent meditation the aroma of the foods warming on the Defiant reach those in meeting. About five minutes later the rumbling of stomachs will be heard. About ten minutes of this is the longest even the most weighty...Friend can stand without some sound emanating from their midsection. A typical schedule of events from this point is: five minutes from stomach rumblings to swallowing sounds and lip smacking, another five minutes...to fidgeting, and another ten minutes to the end of meeting....A clerk...who refuses to end meeting and the agony of those in attendance may find him/herself at the end of the food line and accused of...torture....Do you feel it advisable to send a warning to customers...advising them of this hazard?" Signed by Peter Bunting of Jackson, California. [Thanks also to Sally Campbell of New York.]