

A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Fifty-Four

ISSN #0739-5418

Ninth Month, 1985

Dear Friend,

In this issue, Quaker historian Larry Ingle of the University of Tennessee reviews two recent books which interpret important segments of Quaker history from contrasting viewpoints. In doing so he breaks with the tradition of almost unfailingly favorable reviewing followed by most Quaker publications, and in my judgment it's about time. It is very easy to forget that seeking truth is not always a comfortable or comforting process. Friend Ingle, incidentally, is a North Carolina native and a member of unprogrammed Chattanooga Meeting

Speaking of the discomfort of truthseeking, certain events outside Quakerdom look depressingly familiar. Read, for instance, in the 9/20 issue of Christianity Today, pages 30ff, the disturbing report on what happened to prominent evangelical sociologist Tony Campolo. Scheduled as a major speaker for a large youth congress cosponsored by Youth for Christ and Campus Crusade for Christ in Washington, he was unceremoniously dumped after a group of militant evangelical pastors said that their youth would stay away from the gathering if Campolo was kept on the program. The pastors charged that Campolo holds some "heretical" doctrinal views. Among these are his ideas that "God is at work in every human being," even non-Christians, and that "theological systems" are but attempts "to get closer to the truth. No system tells the whole story." Campolo says he is a victim of a "wave of religious McCarthyism," and the hullabaloo is continuing.

Friends have been down this road, too, of course, in the lamentable Elizabeth Watson affair (see Issue #44). But it is also important to take note of Campolo's "heresies," which are vintage Quakerism, right out of Fox and Barclay. This report corroborates what has been asserted here before: *We are in a time of increasing religious conflict; in this struggle, central Friends beliefs and testimonies, such as those Campolo echoed, along with our historic commitment to free expression and seeking, are at serious risk. Those who care for the future of the Society had better be preparing themselves to stand up for these central convictions; because, as the old saying goes, friend: you can run, but you can't hide.*

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. Another followup: On 8/1, President Reagan nominated seven of 15 directors for the U.S. Peace Institute Board (See Issue #43): Sidney Lovett, a United Church of Christ pastor; Richard John Neuhaus, a prominent religious conservative; W. Bruce Weinrod of the Heritage Foundation, and John Norton Moore, of the University of Virginia Center for Oceans Law. Three administration hardliners were also named to official slots: Richard Perle of the Defense Department; Kenneth Adelman of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; and Max Kampelman from the State Department. The four outside names are now before the Senate. It's not an encouraging start.

QUAKER HISTORY: THREE VIEWS

By Larry Ingle

Seth B. Hinshaw, *The Carolina Quaker Experience: An Interpretation*. Greensboro, North Carolina: NC Friends Historical Society, 1984, 342 pp., \$14.00, cloth.

Margaret H. Bacon, *The Quiet Rebels: The Story of the Quakers in America*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1965; 2nd ed. 239 pp., \$8.95 paper.

Upfront, let me state my unhappy conclusion drawn after considering these two books. Put bluntly, it is this: Except for preserving a quaint historical tradition, much of the Society of Friends in America has little real reason for being; it might as well close down and merge with congenial sections of the broader community--there's hardly any difference. In the case of the North Carolina Quakers affiliated with Friends United Meeting, the obvious home would be among Methodists. Except for bishops and sacraments, these Friends differ little from their Wesleyan neighbors. But having accepted superintendents, pastors and programmed services, most Tar Heel Friends probably could easily adapt. In the other case, that of the Quakers described by Margaret Bacon, a number of groups would benefit, including the Unitarians, Ethical Culture and Jungian societies, Wicca feminists and others.

North Carolina: Little to Celebrate?

Why this sharp judgment? Let's look at Hinshaw first. His book has two principal problems: despite a celebratory tone, it tells a depressing story, and tells it badly. Hinshaw obviously loves his subject, but seems to think that writing history mainly involves recording historical oddities. North Carolina Quakers may indeed have been neglected by serious scholars, but they deserve better treatment than they receive here. Items:

- Sources and background are often unclear. For example, on page 202, Hinshaw waxes glowingly that mountain mission work was "truly great" and lifted the area to "new educational and spiritual levels," but he does not explain how he determined these things.

- There is no theme. *The Carolina Quaker Experience* is hardly more than a disparate collection of details that the author believes others will appreciate as much as he.

- The organization is haphazard. At times the reader wonders if Hinshaw laid his research notes out and grouped them by some standard he prefers to keep hidden.

- There is little background given. For example, he refers to the Richmond Declaration of 1887 several times, but never summarizes or quotes from this pivotal document.

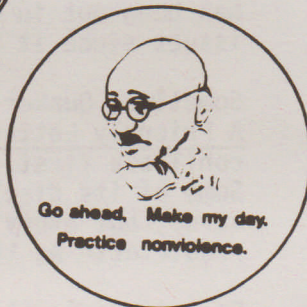
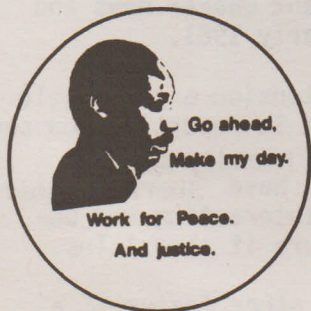
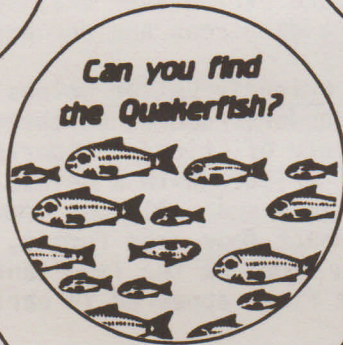
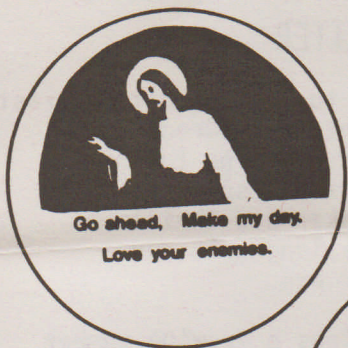
- The book purports to be an "interpretation," meaning apparently that Hinshaw allows himself frequent personal asides. Yet his observations are mainly shallow and banal. Does it really enlighten us to learn that young Carolina Quakers flirted at yearly meeting?

Missing the Point of His Story

Most important, however, Hinshaw recounts a story of declining distinctiveness as if it were a triumph, and never notices the incongruity. From the perspective of a reformer like George Fox, North Carolina's is a sad tale for which elegiac tones would be more suitable. But that this yearly meeting, one of the largest in the nation, has steadily become increasingly accommodated to its southern culture is all but incontestable. The conventional "churchy" air that pervades the book reinforces this conviction. In North Carolina, at least, the "great people to be gathered" that Fox envisioned turn out for the most part to be verily like their neighbors. For those in the tradition of Fox, William Penn, John Woolman and Job Scott (oddly enough one of Hinshaw's heroes), the reality of programmed Quakerism as portrayed here by Hinshaw seems not great, but regrettably commonplace.

As for Bacon's effort, the phenomenon is similar, but in a different direction. Thankfully, her narrative flows smoothly, reflecting her years as a professional writer. However, since it is based primarily on histories written by other Quakers, it is not surprising that she seems unaware of pertinent, critical questions many non-Quaker historians have asked about the Society. Such questions may have been ignored because, like Hinshaw, Bacon aims to celebrate. Her motto also seems to be, "Whatever is, is right." She strains to sanitize the past. The conflicts between Hicksite reformers and Orthodox power brokers are reported as once serious problems which fortunately can be put behind us as we, united in a kind of live-and-let-live tolerance, march arm-in-arm into the brighter tomorrow. Such an

MAKE YOUR DAY---
WITH NEW BUTTONS!



ORDER FORM

Please send me the following buttons, in sets
of FIVE for \$4.95 postpaid:

Make My Day:

___Jesus

___Gandhi

___Quakerfish

___Dr. King

___Fox

Send to: NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

ZIP _____

Mail to: Make My Day, P.O. Box 1361
Falls Church VA 22041

SUBSCRIBE TO A FRIENDLY LETTER

The days and months ahead promise to be an exciting, fast-moving period in American Quaker history: Groups that have been estranged for decades are talking to and learning from each other. There is widespread concern for deeper engagement with our Quaker and Christian heritage. We face ever graver challenges to our Testimonies in a dangerous nuclear age.

Every month, A Friendly Letter brings a growing number of thoughtful readers reports on these developments within the Society of Friends, reports they don't get anywhere else. Written with a unique combination of journalistic skills and religious commitment, and published in a compact four-page format, A Friendly Letter has been out in front on the important Quaker news and issues since it first appeared in early 1981.

Sometimes Quaker life is marked by tension and struggle. A Friendly Letter has been unmatched in reporting on such conflicts first, and in a fair and Friendly manner. Some of its disclosures and comments have sparked controversy; but every issue has been as interesting and unpredictable as the rich Quaker culture it chronicles.

Each issue is also enlivened by two other features: a glimpse of our fascinating past in This Month in Quaker History, and samples of that special Friendly brand of Quaker Chuckles.

Subscriptions to A Friendly Letter are inexpensive, only \$12 for 12 issues. Won't you send in the coupon below with your check today, and be sure to get every issue?

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please send me 12 issues of A Friendly Letter; my payment is enclosed.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

ZIP _____

Mail to: A Friendly Letter, P.O. Box 1361,
Falls Church VA 22041

interpretation is vigorously disputed by many Friends today, but you wouldn't learn that here. Likewise, she says little of programmed Quakers, the majority of American Friends. Bacon correctly notes (p.203) that "Quakers, a predominantly middle-class group, share the tastes and interests of most middle class Americans," but she doesn't stop to notice the implicit criticism in this statement, which could have been the theme of her story.

Unprogrammed Quakerism--Integrated or Assimilated?

Quiet Rebels instead emphasizes how Friends have been an integral part of the growth of modern America. It leaves the impression that without us America would not have reached its current heights. Thus she announces on page 58 that the writers of the U.S. Constitution could look at Penn's "Holy Experiment" and see democracy at work. They did look, of course, and were so horrified that they crafted a document designed to prevent anything like that from ever happening again. The principle is, asserted one of the Constitution's defenders at the time, "that government originates from the people, but let the people be taught that they are not able to govern themselves." If Bacon considered histories written by non-Quakers, she might find less reason to remain smug. Twenty pages later, Bacon renews her integration of Friends into the American tradition she acclaims: Writing of the westward movement, she enthuses, "Everywhere, the Quaker pioneers brought ideas of democracy, religious liberty, and racial equality to the frontier." If *The Quiet Rebels*' uncritical civics class approach represents high school texts--according to Bacon's 'Acknowledgements' one of its possible uses--secondary education richly deserves its recent knocks.

(There's another juicy irony here. This new edition of *Quiet Rebels* is published by the Movement for a New Society, a member of which presumably wrote the introduction that sharply undercuts Bacon's interpretation at nearly every turn. Rather than promoting integration, it champions a fundamentally radical assault on society's structural problems, about the last thing most well-adjusted middle class Quakers seriously think should happen here.)

Bacon's assumptions reflect the problem of humanistic Quakerism, just as Hinshaw's exhibits the shortcomings of the "Friends Church" tendency. Both write about major segments of a once dynamic religious movement that have largely succumbed to the temptations of different American cultural trends and lost much of their vitality. Instead of celebrating, the authors should be mourning and exploring how and why the vigor was sapped. Hinshaw's version of Quakerism, evangelical, churchy and middle American, has long since forsaken Fox's prophetic calls to renew the covenant for accommodating its southern milieu. Bacon's Friends, who are perhaps more sophisticated, broad-minded and cosmopolitan--and if anything even more comfortably acculturated than Hinshaw's--are uneasy with such language and prefer busy social action to talk of commitment to a transcendent God.

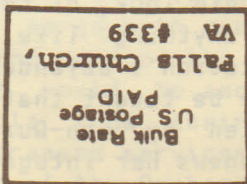
What Would Elias Hicks Have Thought?

Perhaps the much misunderstood Elias Hicks, long since mistagged a "Quaker liberal," could offer both groups a way out. While studying his career in depth, I was surprised to find him one who called for a Quaker reformation, disdained empty traditions, attacked the capitalist world he saw unfolding, and spoke forthrightly of sin, personal as well as social. For instance, in December, 1824 he preached a sermon whose words echo across time, a judgment on both Hinshaw's midmost and Bacon's urbane Quakers: "So they who presume to build up a structure with their own materials, they shall die to God; because by so doing, they turn away from the divine law and command." (NOTE: The results of this study will be in my own book, *The Genesis of Modern Quakerism: The Hicksite Reformation*, to be published next year by the University of Tennessee Press.)

As Hicks knew, Friends were always at their best when seeking to recapture primitive Christianity rather than defend established institutions or adjust to cultural mainstreams. Hence we need histories that refuse to shout approval just because some group that denominates itself Quaker has managed to survive. Lots of groups have survived, after all--the Christian Church did, for 16 centuries before Fox, but he pronounced it apostate. The Quaker historian's task today involves showing that the Society of Friends is not intended to be just another auxiliary of the Civil Liberties Union or the Friends United Methodist (FUM) Church, and that as we become such, we fall short of our heritage. Then we might be able to explore what it could really mean to be "the people of God called Quakers."

INSIDE: AMERICAN QUAKER HISTORY--
A SUCCESS STORY OR NOT?

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



THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

In Ninth Month, 1778 the Quaker community of Nantucket Island off Massachusetts was saved by contrary winds. On 9/10/1778, a squadron of British troopships headed for the island from Martha's Vineyard, a dozen miles away. The British had shelled and then looted Edgartown on the Vineyard, which was known to be a rebel stronghold, and had loaded their holds with all the guns, gold and livestock they could find, including hundreds of cattle and sheep. They expected even richer pickings on Nantucket, undefended because of its Quaker peace witness, and wealthier because of its burgeoning whaling and shipping industries.

But abruptly the winds changed, so that the ships could not proceed. On and on the contrary winds blew, while the animal stench from the ships' holds became steadily stronger. After three days, the commander couldn't take it anymore; he ordered the squadron to head the other direction, with the wind back to New York. The islanders, who had learned of the ships' approach and had been praying fervently, were certain that only Providence had preserved them.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

A Sober Story

William Penn, according to the book 10,000 Jokes, Toasts and Stories, was once asked by a drunkard how to overcome the addiction to drink. "Why, it is as easy as opening thy hand," Penn replied.

"Convince me of that," said the drunkard, "and I will promise to do it."

"Well, my friend," said Penn, "when thou findest any vessel of intoxicating liquor in thy hand, open the hand that contains it before it reaches thy mouth and thou wilt never be drunk again."

And verily, says the book, the drunkard kept his promise ever after.

Yet Another Sober Story

A young man once asked a solemn elder for help in interpreting two pieces of advice he had received about imbibing: "Dr. Barker says it's his rule never to take a drink when thee feels like thee needs one. And Dr. Webber says never take a drink except when thee does need one. How do I know what to do?"

After a pause, the elder answered, "Follow both rules, and thee will be all right."