

# A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Fifty-Eight

ISSN #0739-5418

First Month, 1986

Dear Friend,

This is our fifth annual *Quaker of the Year* issue, and this time we offer two names: One is **Kenneth Boulding**, dealt with on the following pages; the other is a distinguished Evangelical Friend, **Jack Willcuts** of Northwest YM, who has just stepped down as editor of *The Evangelical Friend*.

Jack has had a notable career as a Quaker pastor, missionary and YM superintendent. Of special significance here are two additional features of his work: One is his support for maintaining Northwest as a stronghold of Quaker peace witness, which has made it almost unique among pastoral Friends groups. The other is the patience and courtesy he has brought to numerous Quaker ecumenical endeavors. I'm not sure anymore whether these undertakings have made much real progress in recent years, at least at the institutional level. But if only because they have enabled me to make the acquaintance of a few such as Jack Willcuts, there still seems to be ground for hope and reason to continue. We don't agree on some major issues; but I admire Jack greatly, and can't think of many on whom the title of *Quaker of the Year* fits better.

Now let me turn to some errata: First, last month we welcomed Marty Walton as the new General Secretary at FGC. But her real given name is Meredith, not Martha as said here; we were set straight on this by reader Allie Walton of Deerfield, Illinois, whose real given name is Alice and who is not to be doubted on such things, as she is Meredith Walton's mother. And second, another Illinois subscriber, Chicagoan Sabron Newton, reminds me that in last month's membership data chart, New York and New England YMs were listed as unprogrammed, whereas in fact both include some pastoral meetings. For that matter, both Western and Indiana YMs, while mostly pastoral, also include a few unprogrammed groups. Yet despite such imprecision, the overall picture of membership trends was accurate. (Our data, incidentally, is corroborated by the work of a third Illinois subscriber, Kenneth Ives, a Chicago sociologist. Ken's pamphlet, "Which Friends Groups Are Growing and Why?" lays out his own analysis in considerable detail.)

Yours in the Light,

*Chuck Fager*

Chuck Fager

Finally, there's some good news and some bad news. The good news is that in two more months, if the Lord wills, we will arrive at issue #60, and *A Friendly Letter* will be (count 'em) five years old. The bad news is that, after absorbing the rising cost of everything (postage alone has gone up over 33%) for that long, we must reluctantly raise our domestic subscription rate by \$1.95 to \$13.95 per year, effective 4/30/1986. Early renewals and gift subs sent in before that date will be entered at the current rate, and are encouraged.

Kenneth Boulding was born in England in 1910, he joined the Society in Liverpool in 1931, then came to America in 1937. His devotion to the Society of Friends and his distinguished scholarly work applying social science to the task of eliminating war are widely known. We won't try to summarize his long, fascinating career here; that has already been admirably done by Friend Cynthia Kerman in a fine biography, *Creative Tension*, (U. of Michigan Press, 1974). Suffice it to say that his life and work offer numerous reasons for naming him a *Quaker of the Year*. The designation is offered here, however, in order to recognize and call attention to one particular piece of Boulding's work, a slim volume called *Stable Peace*. Though published in 1978, the book remains little known among Friends. This is a shame. It should be basic reading for all of us concerned with peace witness.

What makes *Stable Peace* so special? Among the most obvious of its virtues, it is short, easy-to-read, and filled with the revealing humor for which Boulding is so widely appreciated among Friendly audiences. But more important, it is his distillation of four decades of work as a pioneering peace researcher. The book was originally a series of lectures, delivered in 1977 at the Lyndon Johnson School of the University of Texas. (It is available for \$5.95 postpaid, from UT Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin TX 78713). Most of all, though, *Stable Peace* is a book with impact. My own thinking about peace work was fundamentally altered by reading it. Let me see if it is possible briefly to say why.

### *Providing a New Model For Peace work*

For one thing, Boulding effectively challenges common ways of thinking about war and peace. He argues that it is hopeless to search for causes of war using a medical analogy which likens war to a disease produced by some mysterious social virus. This approach is not so much wrong as merely useless, because the world is a much too complicated and dynamic a place for such analysis to be productive. Instead, Boulding proposes what he calls a strain-stress-break model, based on systems analysis. In a typically homely but apt image, he reduces this mouthful to what he calls the Chalk Analogy, which goes like this:

Suppose you held a piece of chalk in one hand and bent it with the other until it broke. What has happened, says Boulding, is that the chalk had a certain *strength* which held it together, which was progressively overcome by the *strain* your fingers put on it, until a *break* occurred. In this case, Boulding asks, did the chalk break *because* the strain was too great, or *because the strength was too little*? His answer is that such a causal inquiry is essentially a meaningless question, especially in any practical sense. The chalk *broke* because the *strain* on it was too great for its *strength*.

### *Charting the Phases of War and Peace*

Peace and war, Boulding argues, can be looked at most usefully in this same way: There is always an interplay of both conflict and cooperation between nations or societies. Sometimes the strain of conflict rises to a point where it overcomes the *strength*, that is, the ability of their cooperative relationships to contain the conflicts. When this happens, there is a *break*, and conflict erupts into open hostility or war. Thus, where the medical model tends to lead us into a search for some magic social or political "vaccine" to eliminate the causes and hence cure the "disease" of war, Boulding offers an entirely different conceptual framework: To prevent or minimize war, you can do one of two kinds of things: Either *reduce the strains* on a system of international relations, or *increase the system's strength*, its ability to cope with conflict. Or both.

Against this background, Boulding also postulates that societies which survive tend to move through a series of four phases in relation to war: He starts with a phase of *stable war*, where the forces tending toward maintaining the conflict are self-reinforcing and the conflict goes on indefinitely; these could be related to continuing provocations, like a running feud, or a level of weaponry of a limited character, so that neither side can decisively defeat the other. In the second phase, *unstable war*, the forces perpetuating the fighting become substantially diluted by other factors--say, casualties are too high for public opinion, or the economy cannot bear the cost, or one side gains at least a temporary clear advantage. Fighting thus becomes intermittent, if only while the parties recuperate and rebuild. From here he sees an evolution into a third phase, *unstable peace*, in which the

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*"This is a chance for me to say again how important A Friendly Letter is to so many of us and what a superlative job you are doing with it." --A liberal New York Friend.*

*"Thy objective of reaching out to Friends of all varieties is essential, if the Religious Society of Friends is to survive." --A conservative Friend, Ohio.*

*"You would have been pleased to hear the discussion about renewing A Friendly Letter at our last Monthly Meeting. We agreed firmly that we did not always agree with you-- but we agreed even more firmly that we appreciated your willingness to talk about and present information on subjects Quakers wish would just go away." --Des Moines, Iowa.*

*"I think you are doing the most important work among Quakers today and I have wanted you to know it for some time." --A California Friend.*

To be fair, **A Friendly Letter** has also occasionally been called irresponsible, inaccurate, even "a gutter press." But if you are concerned about the present and future of Quakerism in America, perhaps you should form your own opinion about it. It's easy to subscribe; just use the coupon below.

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time between outbreaks of fighting becomes longer than the battles, and the parties are able to cope with more and more of their conflicts without organized violence.

As the population eventually comes to see this condition as a norm, peaceful mechanisms for containing and resolving conflict become so ingrained that even the thought of war between these particular parties becomes unusual, and is not taken seriously. This condition constitutes *stable peace*. If this phase system sounds fanciful, Boulding argues that there is plenty of evidence for it in American history, for instance in our relations with Britain, which have evolved from seemingly implacable hostility to the present state of ongoing comity in which conflicts are so likely to be handled peacefully that that the two nations' respective military high commands no longer seriously maintain contingency plans for coping with an attack by the other, because it seems so unlikely as to be not worth the effort.

While this is an intriguing interpretation of Anglo-American history, the key question to be asked of Boulding is the practical one: how can it be applied today, by Friends and others, in the ongoing and very problematical international relations of our time? Here Boulding admits that application of his model, like the real world it describes, is quite complicated. Strengths and strains in international relations are influenced by a great many fluid, interacting, and not entirely understood variables: history, propaganda, politics, repression, arms races, economic conditions, morale, etc., etc. Boulding readily admits this, and says much more research is to chart them. Even so, Boulding's model would seem to offer at least two distinct advantages for busy Friends who feel a need to work for peace but aren't sure how to do it:

### *Freeing Peace Work From A Need for Labels*

First, it frees peace work from the necessity of carrying a "peace" label. From Boulding's perspective one can increase the strength or decrease the strains on an international system in many ways, directly and indirectly. Thus peace can be promoted not only by peace marches (which can at times be useful enough) but also by, say, increasing food production in hungry nations (decreasing the strain of hunger) or even learning foreign languages (increasing the strength of crosscultural understanding), and so forth.

Second, this model makes it possible to think of doing useful peace work quietly on the micro, individual scale as well as the macro, national policy level. Working from this model, you don't have to be Secretary of State or head of the AFSC to do something useful, nor does it require going to jail or adopting some precooked radical political program. Indeed, Boulding is "inclined to think that the largest social changes...are brought about by people who are not alienated from society but who work quietly and unspectacularly within it." I often wonder whether the persistent neglect of this book by liberal Friends in particular may be partly due to its emphasis on the undramatic and its resolutely unradical political stance. Boulding has been a longtime critic of peace work that identifies ending war with achieving some leftist political agenda, calling this "radical humbug."

### *No Room For the Easy Answers*

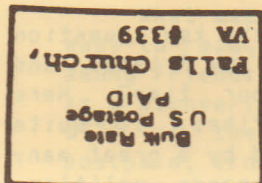
Unsurprisingly, Boulding is also hostile to what he calls "monistic" theories, which tout a single factor as the key ingredient in history, politics or peacemaking. The many such theories can be roughly reduced to a single generic argument: "The *ONLY* true way to peace is: (Fill in your favorite nostrum--free enterprise, socialism, Christianity, Islam, world federalism, the gold standard, vegetarianism, whatever.) Some of these prescriptions contain grains of truth, because their chosen factor is an important strain or strength variable; yet Boulding would argue that by thus oversimplifying the world, they all produce a radically false picture of it, and offer spurious remedies for its ills.

Boulding sums up *Stable Peace* as: "A modest, somewhat piecemeal, but one hopes a realistic approach to a long-run peace policy capable of surviving disappointments and occasional breakdowns...more capable of long-run growth than the grand schemes which have little chance of coming into being or could easily prove catastrophically unstable even if they did come into being." For me, though, the book's modesty and practicality are not only sources of realism, but also of clarity and hope for useful peace work by both ordinary individuals and groups as small as Friends. *Stable Peace* is a high achievement of practical Quakerism in our time, and could be of value to every Friend concerned for peace.

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### *This Month In Quaker History*

In late 1663, a few conspirators in northern England plotted to overthrow the government of King Charles II. The plan came to nothing, but the authorities got wind of it, and as usual they were sure that the rabble-rousing George Fox and his Quaker cohorts were behind it. So in First Month, 1664 they hauled Fox into court, calling him a rebel and a traitor. Fox denied the charges, pointing out that he had been imprisoned for refusing to fight against Charles I, and that he had in fact issued a paper condemning the recent plot even while it was still being hatched. But his effective rebuttals did not stop the justices, because they had a hole card: they insisted that he take an oath of loyalty to the king and against the Pope. When Fox refused, as they knew he would, they jailed him under the provisions of the Quaker Act, under which refusal to swear was a crime punishable by up to life in prison. A few days later, determined to stamp out the Quaker plague at its source, the justices summoned Margaret Fell from her Swarthmore home and put the oath to her as well, with the same results. Fox was in prison for more than two years, til late 1666; Margaret Fell was kept behind bars until 1668.

### *Quaker Chuckles*

As Friends from Wellesley, Mass., Meeting were settling in for their annual retreat at a New England youth hostel not long ago, they were given some instructions about various housekeeping matters. One item concerned the several refrigerators in the kitchen: They were told to be sure to put their food only in the "Quaker refrigerator." Someone asked, "but which one is the Quaker refrigerator?" and a voice piped up from the rear, "Why, of course, it's the one with the Light Within." --Thanks to Sylvia Perry of Dover, Mass.

The late David Scull had a weakness for limericks, and two examples show the fun he had with the genre. One came on the occasion of the 1983 retirement of Bob and Margaret Rumsey from the staff of the Friends World Committee for consultation. The second was one of a group of fourteen penned for another FWCC staffer, Herbert Hadley who spent two weeks in a hospital bed after breaking a leg ice-skating:

Can I turn up a poem on Rumsey?  
All I think of sounds stilted and clumsy.  
And as for that touch  
I fumble so much  
That all of my fingers turn thumbsy.

A Merry old Quaker named Hadley  
Tried skating, but did it so badly  
They had to use pins  
From his neck to his shins  
So he wouldn't disintegrate madly.