

# A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Fifty-Nine

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Third Month, 1986

Dear Friend,

If you like this newsletter, you may be interested in some of the others which come across my desk. One of the most challenging, which has been mentioned here before, is *Old Foundation*, published occasionally by Joy Weaver, 20 Jenkins St., Islip NY 11751, and devoted to the concerns and experiences of Friends with a Jewish heritage. Most of the last two issues have been taken up with, first, an anguished and angry letter from such a Friend who felt assaulted by the statements and attitudes of a strongly Christian Friend addressing her YM last year, and then a series of readers' responses. In this and other articles, *Old Foundation* offers a unique glimpse of the tensions and possibilities of this encounter/dialectic of traditions. Joy doesn't really sell subscriptions; if you are interested, send her a SASE and maybe a donation and she'll add you to her list.

Another recent arrival was the 9/85 issue of *Friends In Africa*, the newsletter of the FWCC's Africa Section, edited by its East Africa Secretary, Zablon Malenge. This issue includes a very interesting report on developments among the three YMs in Kenya through midsummer of last year. This report, though brief, constitutes a rare lifting of the curtain of silence behind which this situation has so long been concealed. I look forward to further such reports.

The issue also contains a lengthy account of the United Nations Conference on Women held in Kenya last summer, followed by some sober editorial comments, somewhat reminiscent of Woolman and Fox on "Women and Beauty:" "While we strongly criticize and condemn the spending of huge amount of money on the promotion of armsrace," editor Malenge declares, "we should also condemn the overspending of money on perfumes by women. All the money over-spent on perfumes and other superfluous things by women could save the whole of Africa from starvation....Many women in the world naturally think they were created for the glory of men and therefore scramble for artificial beauty complexion to attract men. Many hours are hopelessly spent on women's artificial beauty which should have been put to proper use in developing the world economically." It has been awhile since I have seen that traditional Quaker testimony so vigorously articulated! (*Friends In Africa* is available from FWCC, Friends International Centre, Ngong Road, P.O. Box 41946, Nairobi, Kenya. No subscription price is listed, but a contribution of at least \$10 to defray the high printing and mailing costs would be appropriate.)

Yours in the Light,

*Chuck Fager*

Chuck Fager

PS. Two quick items: First, there are still some "Say NO to Drugs, Alcohol & Tobacco" bumperstickers left. They are available at no cost; just send a SASE. Second, remember that our subscription rate increases to \$13.95/yr at the end of Fourth Month. Early renewals and gift subs at the old rate are still encouraged.



## QUAKERS AND BIBLE STUDY: GOOD NEWS & BAD NEWS

It is a common criticism of Friends today that we are largely biblically illiterate, especially--but not only--liberal Friends. There is much truth to the complaint. Yet earlier in this century Quakers could be found in the front ranks of biblical scholars; for instance, despite the miniscule size of the Society, Friends were included on the committees which produced the Revised Standard Version in America and the New English Bible in Britain. Moreover, these scholars, such as Henry Cadbury, were mainly from the unprogrammed tradition.

But that was then; this is now. Having long been concerned with the state of Bible study among Friends, I have fretted over the seeming lack of successor Quaker scholars of stature comparable to Cadbury, as well as our general lack of familiarity with scripture as a premier written religious resource. Indeed, it has been my impression that there was little promising Quaker Bible study going on today, especially among unprogrammed Friends.

This impression, it turns out, was mistaken. The widespread biblical illiteracy, though real, is only part of the story; at the same time, there is in fact a surprising amount of high-quality Quaker Bible studies being produced. That's the good news. The bad news is that much of this work is scattered across three nations and two continents, and hard to find, and much could easily be lost. Let's glance at some of these mostly little-known resources, and consider what could be done to make them more available to Friends in general:

### *A Mother Lode From the Mother Country*

The best of the recent work comes from England. And without question, the finest piece of new Quaker biblical exposition and reflection I have seen is John Lampen's small book *Twenty Questions About Jesus* published last year by Quaker Home Service. In it Lampen, a British Friend now living and working for peace in Northern Ireland, raises the tough questions about Jesus' life and work, such as: "What did he teach?" "Whom did he claim to be?" "Did he intend to found a church?" and "How reliable are the stories about him?" In considering possible answers, Lampen shows that he knows his Bible, his church history and theology; yet he tackles his topics from a strongly Quaker perspective, searching our traditions yet open to continuing revelation, carefully respectful of the diversity of view among us, but unafraid to state his own convictions. It is a tribute to the strength of Lampen's book that I know of two meetings, one pastoral and the other not, who have used it successfully in a joint high school First Day class, co-taught by a pastor and a quite liberal Friend. Few other modern Quaker publications could claim such ecumenical appeal.

Lampen acknowledges in his book the help he gained from Tony Brown, a faculty member at Woodbrooke, the British Quaker study center. Brown has contributed substantially to this field as well, producing a series of "study packs" for use by meetings. Two of these study packs are on biblical topics: one on "Jesus in his Relationships" and the other on "The Parables of the Kingdom." Woodbrooke also distributes a sheet of hints for helping organize discussion-study groups. The study packs are unpretentious, consisting of mimeographed sheets stapled together, their text centering on questions arising from various biblical passages. Yet the topics are challenging and the questions intelligent, non-dogmatic but probing, likely to produce valuable discussion and thinking. Were Woodbrooke able to produce a few more of these packs, they would form the basis for an excellent handbook for meetings.

### *Canada, and Closer to Home*

Luckily for us, women are very prominent among these Bible students. One of the most active is a Canadian Friend, Anne Thomas, who teaches religion at Carleton University in Ottawa. She has conducted Bible studies at several yearly meetings south of her border as well as at home. From this has come a substantial body of study materials, mostly in mimeographed form, though a booklet on Romans 12 will soon be forthcoming as part of the Canadian Quaker Pamphlet series from Argenta Press. Given the level of her activity, American Friends can expect to hear more of Anne Thomas and her work in the future.

Mary Morrison is another woman writer who must be mentioned here. Although describing herself as "49% Quaker and 51% Episcopalian", she taught Gospel workshops at Pendle Hill for



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Few if any Quaker publications have caused as much talk and controversy per page as **A Friendly Letter** since it first appeared in mid-1981. That's because every month since then it has brought a growing number of readers a unique series of solidly-researched, searching reports on the key issues, problems and prospects of American Quakerism in the 1980s. A great many of these reports have been the first, or the only accounts of major issues to appear in a Quaker publication. Maybe that's why, among the hundreds of letters to editor-publisher Chuck Fager from Quakers of all varieties, so many have praised it. Here are a few of the comments:

*"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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20 years. Besides writing several Pendle Hill pamphlets (the most recent, #260, is *The Way of the Cross*) she has prepared a summary of her approach to Bible study in the form of a handbook for study groups which Pendle Hill expects to publish in a year or two.

Perhaps the most familiar and accomplished American Quaker Bible teacher now on the scene is a third woman, Elizabeth Watson. She has given innumerable talks and led many workshops in the field over the past decade, developing an approach strongly shaped by feminism and liberation theology. Several of her studies of Old Testament women were published in *Daughters of Zion* by Friends United Press. In 1984, most readers will recall, she and her approach were at the center of an intense controversy, which led to her being bumped from the program of the Friends Ministers Conference (See AFL #44 for details). As often happens, however, this controversy has resulted in greater, not less, demand for her ministry. She is now at work on a companion series of studies of New Testament women, which is also to be published by Friends United Press.

Last to be mentioned here are my own forays into the field, which in addition to numerous workshops have yielded a booklet, *Three Quaker Bible Studies* and a handbook, *A Respondent Spark: the Basics of Bible Study*, both published by Kimo Press. These have been shaped, as have the others mentioned, by a concern to develop a distinctively Quaker approach to scripture, one which can find in it a resource for continuing revelation and liberation.

### ***No, No--Not Another Quaker Committee!***

No doubt there are some important names which have been missed in the preparation of this list, but that is partly the point that now needs to be raised. Several of the writers mentioned came to my attention purely by accident, or maybe providence. Others were pointed out by those already active in the field. With the exception of Elizabeth Watson, it is fair to say of the rest that neither their names nor their work is generally known among Friends. And that is too bad. With this much energy being creatively applied, the results are interesting and substantial, and could be of value to many if not most Friends. But if, say, a Meeting religious Education committee wanted to track down a cross-section of this work for examination, they would need to write to British Columbia, Manchester, London, Philadelphia, Richmond, Indiana and Falls Church, Virginia, and maybe a couple more places as well. There's got to be a more efficient way to do it.

What is it? One possibility would be the formation of a new Friends Committee on Bible Study, devoted to collecting these materials and making them available from a central location. Such a group would require sponsorship, either of a yearly meeting, some larger body or philanthropically-minded individuals, and this makes it unlikely in my estimation. A second option would be for some existing body to gather and evaluate these materials and publish the best in a new series of Quaker Bible studies. Such publications programs, though, are expensive and time-consuming. Besides, most of these materials are already published in one form or another.

### ***A Concern Waiting To Be Taken Up***

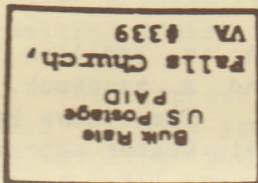
Perhaps a more practical way of dealing with this would be for one of the associations, either FGC or FUM, to add a Quaker Bible Study component to their existing publications program, seeking out, collecting and distributing material as demand warranted. This would be an easy way for these groups to broaden their Bible study resource lists. It is an embarrassing fact, for instance, that the Bible study materials currently listed in the FGC publications catalog are rather sparse, and most are more than 20 years old; and the FUM and EFA lists are not much better. This is incongruous in light of the volume, variety and quality of material being produced among Friends at large. It would also be helpful if one of the major Quaker magazines would make Bible studies a regular feature, to provide an outlet for this work.

Or maybe there are some better ideas which someone else can come up with. In any case, let us hope some person or group will begin to see to it that this work will not continue to be so largely obscure. The Bible is too important, its study is too rewarding, and a Quaker perspective has too much to offer, both inside and outside the Society, for that to be allowed to happen.



INSIDE: QUAKERS AND BIBLE STUDY--  
WHAT'S HAPPENING?

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



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### THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

On 2/10/1791 a remarkable encounter took place in Paris. A group of American Quakers, led by William Rotch of Nantucket, appeared before the new revolutionary Assembly to ask for recognition of their testimonies on peace, oaths and marriage ceremonies while they developed a French whale fishing industry based in Dunkirk.

The Quakers' appearance at the Assembly drew a capacity crowd, and the Friends' petition was eloquent, praising the new government's decree of "a general liberty for all forms of worship," and asking "that we may be suffered...to conform to some principles, and to use some forms, to which the great family of Friends called Quakers, have been inviolably attached ever since their rise." In reply, Assembly president, Mirabeau, spoke respectfully of Friends' principles, but succinctly articulated the traditional objections to their pacifism: "You also say that one of your religious tenets forbids you to take up arms, or to kill....It is certainly a noble philosophical principle....But consider well, whether the defence of yourselves, and your equals, be not also a religious duty? You would otherwise be overpowered by Tyrants!"

Rotch later wrote that "The object of our Petition was of little consequence to me...compared with the opportunity we now had, of somewhat spreading the knowledge of our fundamental Principles, above all that of the Inward Light or Spirit of God in every man, as a primary rule of faith and practice." In any event, the rapid descent of the French Revolution into violence and terror rendered the petition moot, and within three years the Friends had left France to its fate.

### QUAKER CHUCKLE

Surely few Friends watched last month's worldly spectacle called the Super Bowl, but some may have overheard the record "The Super Bowl Shuffle", issued by the Chicago Bears in the burgeoningly popular "rap music" style. No doubt religious Rap records will soon appear. As evidence, consider this excerpt from a soon-to-be released evangelistic single, "Rapping George Fox," which was leaked to us by an inside source. (Keep in mind that there is usually no real melody to such songs, the words being carried mainly by a loud, insistent backbeat.)

Hey, all you heavy rappin' dudes and you fly girls too,  
Rappin' George Fox is here to rap with YOU!  
I wanna tell you 'bout a thing called the Inner Light,  
If you follow where it leads you, hey you'll be ALL RIGHT!" Etc.

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