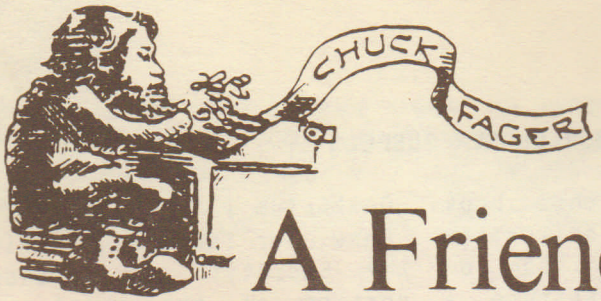

A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Eighty-One ISSN #0739-5418 Eleventh Month, 1987

Dear Friend,

Several readers have written to ask what has happened in the case of the member of Cambridge Meeting in Massachusetts who was disowned for pedophilia, as reported in AFL #76. This was one of the only cases of disownment for cause by a liberal unprogrammed meeting in recent memory. Here is a brief update:

As reported previously, John Van de Meer, who had been active with the First Day School at the meeting, last winter admitted to having had a sexual encounter with a youth in the meeting, and defended the appropriateness of such activity. The meeting terminated his membership and reported him to the authorities. He was arrested and charged; it was not his first offense.

This past summer, after much reflection, Van de Meer came to feel that his action in that incident was inappropriate, and changed his plea to guilty to a charge of rape of a child. Last month he was given a 20-year prison sentence, and he has begun serving it.

Despite his disownment, Van de Meer has stayed in contact with members of Cambridge Meeting, and continued attending its midweek worship (where no children were present) until shortly before entering prison. Cambridge's Ministry and Counsel Committee is exploring possibilities of visitation and ministry to him while he is confined. While the 20-year sentence seems very harsh, we were told that Van de Meer could be eligible for work release programs in two or three years, and parole in a few more. We will continue to follow this story.

Here is another update also, concerning the book project of the Quaker U.S.-U.S.S.R. Committee. The committee is preparing a joint American-Russian book of writings by distinguished authors from both countries on themes of universal experiences of life. This is a truly amazing pioneer undertaking, spearheaded by Friend Janet Riley, who was nominated as a Quaker of the Year in AFL #70 for her effort.

Riley reports that she is just back from Moscow, where a joint American-Russian editorial committee, working more or less by Quaker process, managed to agree on the list of works to be included. There may be a few last-minute changes, but the manuscript is scheduled to be finished and ready for the publisher in Third Month of next year. Alfred A. Knopf, a very distinguished house, will publish the American edition, by early 1989. The list of American authors includes John Updike, Wendell Berry and Garrison Keillor.

Regrettably, like too many other good Quaker ideas, this work has been poorly supported financially by Friends. So I urge you to consider adding to your list of year-end contributions a check to the **Quaker U.S.-U.S.S.R. Committee, 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia PA 19102.**

Yours In The Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

 Subscriptions $13.95/yr.; Canada, $16; elsewhere $20

FOUR QUAKER HISTORIES--FOUR QUAKER GOSPELS

Would you like to read one book that explains what Quakerism is really all about? Or would you like to give newcomers an overview of Friends' history and witness in one compact volume, rather than having to refer them to a whole shelf of weighty tomes?

If so, relax; I've got just the handy survey of Quakerism you want. In fact, I've got **four**, all widely available and each highly regarded by some Friends; but each presents Quakerism in quite different terms. Hmmmmm; that bookshelf is filling up again fast. Oh well, Quakerism is like that.

A survey of these surveys was sparked by the appearance of ***The Rich Heritage of Quakerism***, by the late Walter Williams. First published in 1962, it was reissued late last summer by the Evangelical Friends Church-Eastern Region, based in Canton, Ohio, as part of the celebration of its 175th anniversary. To Williams's text is added a lengthy epilogue by Paul Anderson, a young EFC-ER scholar, who brings its narrative up to 1986. ***Heritage***, as we will call it, offers an evangelical version of Quaker history.

Reviving A Story of Revivals

After all, EFC-ER, or Eastern Region as it is called, is the Quaker group which bears the strongest imprint of the famous nineteenth century revivals. This influence shows up in many ways: Eastern Region stands alone among American yearly meetings (and perhaps in the world) in officially permitting baptisms and communion; it has the most centralized structure (discussed in detail in AFL#27), including strong pastors and decisions by voting; its Quaker pacifists are few and far between; it places the Bible, as evangelically interpreted, at the center of its faith; and its devotion to missionary work is unstinted. Eastern Region also has the distinction of having, in 1879, formally rejected the "so-called doctrine of the inner light, or the gift of a portion of the Holy Spirit in the soul of every man, as dangerous, unsound and unscriptural."

Walter Williams served Eastern Region for 50 years, as a missionary in China, pastor, teacher, and finally as Superintendent. ***Heritage*** is the Quaker story retold as the basis of Eastern Region's history and mission. It is not surprising, then, that in this book, Quakerism is a species of evangelicalism. Here, for instance, is his definition of the Society: "...Friends constitute a portion of the total body of Christ, along with true believers in other Christian denominations...[they] hold, in most details, the same tenets of belief that are held in common by all evangelical groups." Moreover, Quakerism's rise in 1650s England looks to him rather like a classic evangelistic mission crusade, with Fox and company "ready for an aggressive campaign" which "could bring revival to all England." Quietism to him was mainly slow backsliding into a spiritual coma; it was the later American revivals, as far as he is concerned, that brought Quakerism back to life.

Only A Few Minor Changes?

By now, an unprogrammed Quaker reader's eyebrows are likely to have been raised repeatedly, and they will be raised again when Williams says, after describing the Hicksite-Orthodox Separation of 1827, that thereafter "we shall give but slight attention to the Hicksite [unprogrammed] group. It has generally failed to be self-propagating and consequently has rather steadily dwindled in numbers." Even in 1962, this was true only if one carefully overlooked the growing unaffiliated yearly meetings--which Williams did; it sounds rather ironic now, when Eastern Region's own growth has slowed to a crawl, and has been outstripped by that of several of the "Hicksite groups."

One of Williams's most eyebrow-raising conclusions comes after he describes the impact of the wave of revivalism of the nineteenth century, in the comment that "In Christian doctrine, as held by Friends, the Great Revival made no substantial change, though emphasis was modified in some areas." All of this is, needless to say, highly debatable. Paul Anderson's epilogue broadens the book's horizons somewhat, to include even the descendants of the Hicksites, but doesn't soften the evangelical focus much. But it is not my purpose to debate with them here. Rather, let me just point out briefly how the other three entries on this list, each in its own way, lays out a vision of Quakerism just as distinctive, and perhaps as sectarian.

The oldest of is Elbert Russell's ***The History of Quakerism***, published in 1942 and

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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.

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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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You might not always agree with what you read in these pages. But I promise to do my best to keep bringing you the most significant items of Quaker news and discussion that I can throughout the next year, plus further glimpses of This Month in Quaker History and samples of Friendly humor in Quaker Chuckles.

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reissued by Friends United Press in 1979. Russell was of the pastoral Quaker stream that, unlike Eastern Region, took mainline Protestantism as its operating model. And he sees original Quakerism as "the most protestant phase of Protestantism," and "the logical conclusion of the Protestant Reformation...." This Protestant Quakerism was of course Christian, but also mystical; and to Russell its key idea is the Inner Light--"the capacity in all men[sic] to perceive, recognize and respond to God...." By this the Bible and all other religious resources were to be judged, and definitely **not** the other way around as the evangelicals prefer.

Russell had been through many battles between his mainline Protestant Quakers and their evangelical opponents, and the central battlefield then(as now) was the Five Years Meeting(now Friends United Meeting). Russell saw its gatherings as "milestones along the way by which the non-Quaker tendencies of the Evangelical and Revival movements were assimilated and neutralized..." and he felt that the Society's history "from 1881 onwards is an account of a slow reaction toward the original Quaker basis of life and worship."

Getting Back To Mystical Basics

Unlike Russell, Howard Brinton was not so sure that this Protestant Quakerism was really where the Friendly action was. Brinton had a wider acquaintance with Quaker variety than either Williams or Russell; he had worked among practically all the varieties, from evangelical to unaffiliated.

Brinton saw value in each stream, but his own perspective was summed up in ***Friends for Three Hundred Years,*** published by Pendle Hill in 1952. In it he argues that "The best type of religion is one in which the mystical, the evangelical, the rational and the social are so related that each exercises a restraint on the others."

But, he added, "in Quakerism the optimum is not equality in rank of the four....The mystical is basic." Quakerism is "a group mysticism, grounded in Christian concepts." It was unique in Christian history, since it was based not on the Bible, which early Friends agreed was marred by human errors and corruption, nor on any church tradition, or even on reason, but on the experience of the Spirit which underlies them all. And its mysticism provided a link to non-Christian religions as well.

Thus, if for Elbert Russell Quakerism was a **Christianity** that was mystical, for Howard Brinton it was a **mysticism** that was Christian. He considers it, with Robert Barclay, "a third form of Christianity." He viewed revival-centered groups like Eastern Region dubiously: "through such influences a large proportion of the Society of Friends became removed from its foundations...." But he also questioned the religion of rationalism and social action which was widespread among unprogrammed Friends, warning that it was "too often cold and impersonal"; and that a Quakerism reduced to social activism often "ignores defects of the inner life which cause the outer disorder."

John Punshon, Tutor in Quaker Studies at London YM's Woodbrooke College, issued his survey, ***Portrait in Grey***, through Quaker Home Service just over three years ago. Unlike American Friends, British Friends have somehow managed to contain their diversity without big separations, and they have often tried to play a reconciling role in our conflicts (usually, alas, with not much success). And so Punshon's book tends to tread lightly over the conflicts in American Quakerism, noting diplomatically "the extreme difficulty in making [Quakerism] correspond to any of the various models suggested for it. If it had Puritan features, it was also spiritual. If it was mystical it was also highly biblical. If liberal, it was also evangelical. It was both conservative and progressive, simultaneously libertarian and theocratic." He is clearer about the early Friends movement, seeing it as "a distinct emphasis within Christianity" one built on the universality of the saving light of Christ. He finds in the first generation the root of all the major present Quaker streams.

So what are Friends: evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Christian mystics, or mystical Christians--all(or none) of the above? By the book, you can take your pick. Better yet, study them all and get the best each has to offer: Punshon's sketch of Quaker origins is by far the best of these four; Brinton skimps on history, but shows great wisdom and a sure grasp of the variety of American Quakerism; Russell and Williams articulate our Protestant and evangelical inheritance. I wish it were possible to dub one the authoritative, definitive overview of the Society of Friends; but there just is no such animal here. Maybe there can't be. **(Incidentally, any of these books can be ordered from the Quaker Hill Bookstore, by calling them toll-free at 1-800-537-8838.)**

From: Chuck Fager, *A Friendly Letter*
P.O. Box 1361
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INSIDE: UNDERSTANDING QUAKERISM
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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

All through 1940, American Quaker leaders, along with Mennonites and Brethren, negotiated with the government about provisions for conscientious objectors to the new military draft. The churches hoped to duplicate Britain's comparatively generous policy: there, local boards could send applicants to noncombatant or alternative service, or even exempt them entirely.

But the U.S. government was not so cooperative. Thus the peace churches proposed instead to operate a series of conservation-oriented camps for their CO members, with government-operated camps for COs of other denominations or none. By late autumn, they thought they had a deal; but then the plan was vetoed by president Roosevelt's direct order. Instead, the churches were told they would have to operate camps for **all** COs regardless, but under government supervision. The COs, moreover, would serve **without pay.** Take it or leave it.

What were they to do? The plan did not sound very workable; but they all recalled the ordeals of COs in World War One, when there was no government recognition at all. So in Twelfth Month, 1940, the churches accepted the plan; CPS officially began a few months later. The leaders' fears proved justified: many COs resented their collaboration with the government, and there was continuing friction within the program.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Warning to the Subject

One older member kept objecting to a decision the Meeting wanted to make. Finally he was asked to meet with a small committee in private. Afterward he agreed to go along with the proposal, and when it was all over a Friend asked, "Well, did thee finally see the Light?"

"Not exactly," he replied, "but I sure felt the heat."

--From George Newkirk, Ocala Fla.

Putting Him In His Place

The story goes that Herbert Hoover could be rather gruff in manner when he felt irritated. And at one private White House dinner, he became piqued when one of his guests, a Quaker minister, responded to his request for a blessing by praying in a very low tone.

The exasperated president finally interrupted the prayer with a curt, "Louder, Fred--I can't hear!"

Without looking up, the minister paused, then said, distinctly, "Herbert Hoover, I was not talking to thee."