

A Friendly Letter

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Fourth & Fifth Months, 1988

Dear Friend,

As you can see, this issue is headed "Fourth and Fifth Months, 1988". Yet it is not exactly a double issue, nor am I skipping an issue, or shortening anyone's subscription. Jumping ahead one month will put me in synch with worldly publishing conventions, and thereby (I hope) relieve many readers of some anxiety.

Before, each letter was headed with the month in which it was written, printed and (usually) mailed; it seemed the plain-speaking thing to do. But the rest of the publishing world dates periodicals in the month in which they are to be received and read, a month or even two ahead. It could perhaps be thought of as a periodical equivalent of Daylight Savings Time.

This singularity has led many readers to wonder if their issues weren't chronically arriving late, and several to ask if I were laggard about getting them out. The answer to the latter is no; with only a few exceptions, issues are out in time. But my way of dating them has bred confusion. Hence the change. I hope this concession to the *zeitgeist* will make this letter seem as timely as more worldly publications.

Now, to some random notes from here and there. Last month we looked at the question of what's in a name, namely marriage. These days names don't always mean what we thought they did. Take, for instance, a magazine called The Friend. If you picked up a religious publication with this title you might well expect it to be a weekly from London Yearly Meeting, because there is just such a periodical, which is well over a century old.

But in fact you might be mistaken, especially if the magazine was big, glossy, and mailed from Salt Lake City. Because, yes, it turns out that the Mormon Church has its own edition of The Friend, for use in its Sunday schools, full of

stories and games and pictures about Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and other such unmistakably non-Quaker material.

For that matter, if you come across another journal with the monicker Friends, don't wonder that it is full of travel articles and Chevrolet ads; it is published for General Motors.

And if that is not odd enough, you could have been leafing through a couple of issues of William Buckley's very conservative National Review not long ago, and come across a pair of articles defending the rights of homosexuals before that journal's typically unsympathetic audience, which were written by "John Woolman"??? Now, the topic alone was troublesome to the even more conservative columnist John Lofton, writing last month in the extremely conservative Washington Times. "And why, adding insult to injury," Lofton demanded, "does Mr. Buckley allow this defender of homosexuality to write under the pseudonym 'John Woolman' when the real John Woolman was a devout Christian-Quaker....?"

Why indeed? Well, the answer is actually quite simple, if intriguingly so: This "John Woolman" turns out to be one Richard Cowan, who says he is a "Christian libertarian anti-communist (rabid)" and "a convinced Quaker." Cowan also runs an investment business in Texas, and his articles undertake to explain why some libertarian conservatives are advocates of gay rights. Cowan does not claim that the original John Woolman would necessarily want his name attached to such notions; but then, you never know about names, especially these days.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager
Chuck Fager

Quakers have been at work in Ramallah, a Palestinian city about ten miles north of Jerusalem, ever since 1889. That year a girls school opened there with fifteen pupils, under the auspices of New England Yearly Meeting.

Today the Friends Girls School, and its counterpart Boys School, serve a student body of nine hundred Christian and Muslim youth, and are under the care of Friends United Meeting. By rights the Girls School, which has become one of the most respected in the region, should be preparing to celebrate its centennial next year.

PAYING THE COSTS OF WAR

But the school may not make it. Instead, Friends' long educational work in Ramallah may now be coming to an end: Because they are in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, the schools' classrooms are empty, and so are their bank accounts. This crisis springs from the ongoing Palestinian uprising against the occupation and the repression with which it has been met. As this conflict goes on, the whole area's prospects grow steadily dimmer, and with them those of the schools.

Every FUM-related meeting and church in the U.S. has recently received anguished appeals on behalf of the schools. All Friends groups ought to listen to these appeals as well, and prayerfully consider their meaning, and appropriate individual and corporate responses.

One appeal came in the form of a letter to FUM from Ramallah, signed by fifty-four members of the faculty. It asks,

"How do we...convey to you...the reality of what is happening here—to our friends, to our families, to us. This is a war. One side is the occupier—uniformed, trained, armed with clubs, tear gas and guns, backed by the American government. The other side is the occupied, a

civilian 'army' of men, women, and children armed with civil disobedience and rocks."

More specifically, the schools have been closed by military order since early this year. When they joined other schools on 3/24 in a move to defy the order and reopen, Israeli army troops showed up in force and kept them shut. When the Boys School headmaster, Khalil Mahshi (his first name means "Friend" in Arabic) tried to send lessons to the students' homes for a kind of "correspondence course," he was twice detained and interrogated by military authorities. One teacher who was caught in a demonstration was sprayed with rubber bullets; others have been tear-gassed and beaten. (For more about these incidents, see Quaker Life, 4/1988, pp. 11 and 25.)

With the long closure has come the threat of bankruptcy. The schools are 90 percent locally financed, by tuition. Without classes, there is no tuition income; and with the ongoing economic disruption in the West Bank, few parents could pay anyway. The schools' deficit for this year will approach \$250,000, about half their annual budget.

A SMALL BUT CRUCIAL ROLE

FUM's present role in the schools' operations, while small in dollars and minimal in terms of direction, is crucial nonetheless. It provides several volunteer teachers, and pays the salaries of the schools' principals. But perhaps most important, FUM holds title to the school properties. The importance of this is illustrated by the Israeli army's practice of confiscating properties and demolishing buildings owned by Palestinians. This is harder to pull off with properties owned by citizens of Israel's major supporter. Thus what from some enlightened perspectives might be considered a remnant of colonialism

seems to offer the schools an important measure of protection.

A measure, but at best a limited one. FUM has joined the teachers' appeal for funds to keep the schools afloat during this crisis, and is reaching out not only to Friends but also to Palestinian-Americans, among whom the schools are well-known.

Yet even if FUM can raise \$250,000 to fill this year's gap (and that is a lot of money for Friends), this may not save the schools. That's because, given the circumstances, there simply is no separate solution to their plight. They are part of a community whose very existence is now in question.

NO LAND FOR PEACE

Indeed, the more one tries to discern possible futures for the West Bank, and the schools with it, the more depressing the prospects seem. The seemingly ideal solution would be a "land for peace" deal, where Israel, upon recognition by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Arab governments, withdraws from the territories and accepts the creation of a Palestinian state there. Would-be peacemakers from George Schultz to Mikhail Gorbachev support this, as do most Friends and not a few Israelis.

Yet the Israeli government and its policies are being driven by those forces determined to incorporate the territories into Israel proper. They have built dozens of heavily armed settlements throughout the area, and it is hard to see how they could be dislodged without something approaching civil war. The settlers seem determined to abort any "land for peace" deal, regardless of what any government says, and they might well succeed.

For most settlers and their supporters, the occupation is simply part of a transition, the

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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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end of which is to be the coerced departure of the Palestinians from the territories. Toward this goal, the destruction of institutions serving the Palestinian community is but one more step. The Friends schools are but minor pawns in this deadly game; and to the extent that it succeeds, they have no future.

ANOTHER EXODUS BEGINNING

Nancy Nye, the American Quaker headmistress of the Girls School, reported to me that they have already lost a number of students as a result of the closure: those who can afford it are leaving to continue their education in Jordan, Europe or America. One can hardly blame parents for showing concern for their children's safety and future; but how long can the schools survive such attrition?

Even scenarios which forecast less than the exile of their constituency, however, don't appear much more promising for the schools. The Palestinians are resisting the occupation in a way which has won them wide sympathy around the world. Their uprising could continue indefinitely. But if so, the Israeli repression will continue as well. This would likely mean continued closure of schools, or at best their frequent disruption.

Of course, extended closure in the face of social disorder is not new in the schools' history: During World War One they were closed for four years, and the buildings were occupied by contending armies, first the Turks and later the British. When the war was over, the schools reopened. During the first Israeli-Arab war in 1948, much of the school became a hospital, and the Ramallah Meetinghouse was turned into a refugee shelter; but throughout, classes continued.

Thus, perhaps the most hopeful scenario would be one in which the schools simply hang on until these two Semitic antagonists, Israelis and Palestinians, somehow learn to

live together in the territories, and enough calm returns so education can resume.

That could be a long time coming. The Israeli-Arab conflict often seems like the Gordian knot at the center of the tangled skein of world politics. It also offers a living demonstration of the essential truth of the Biblical account of humanity, which was written in—and about—that neighborhood. After all, Genesis, the Book of Beginnings, is more about feuding Semitic brethren, Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Ishmael and the rest, than anything else. The issues have not changed much since those stories were recorded; but in today's version, with the weapons involved infinitely more deadly, the stakes are much higher.

Yet such reflections are no excuse for inaction, especially for Friends, with our permanent proclivity for the practical. Nancy Nye told me she felt the Friends schools would be the last ones to be actually taken by the Israeli government. "There is a lot of respect here for what could be called the 'Quaker Underground' in the U.S." This, quite frankly, surprised me; perhaps despite Friends' small numbers, the Reputation of Truth still counts for something in the world after all.

AS ALWAYS, THINGS TO DO

FUM's letter urges several actions, all of which are worth repeating:

1. Write to Congress, urging members to prod the State Department to protect U.S. citizens and institutions on the West Bank, and to urge pressure on Israel to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, or at the least to permit reopening of the schools.

2. Write to the Israeli Embassy in Washington (3541 International Drive NW, Washington DC 20008) raising concerns about the effect of the occupation on Israeli citizens, and calling for

negotiations with the Palestinians.

3. Contribute to the Ramallah Emergency Appeal of FUM, (101 Quaker Hill Drive, Dept. A., Richmond IN 47374). And

4. Send letters of encouragement to the schools directly (Friends Boys School, Khalil Mahshi, Principal, P.O. Box 66, Ramallah [West Bank] via Israel; Friends Girls School, Nancy Nye Principal, P.O. Box 166, Ramallah [West Bank], via Israel.)

AND DON'T FORGET....

One crucial addition to this list, in my view, should be letters to the Palestine Liberation Organization, urging it to accept Israel's existence, give up its stated goal of wiping out Israel, abandon terrorism, and agree to negotiations aimed at a peaceful settlement. Here as elsewhere, it will take two to make peace. (The PLO's address, incidentally is simply Tunis, Tunisia; or write to its mission to the United Nations, directed by Zuhdi Tarazi, at 115 E. 65th St., New York NY 10021—though the U.S. government is now unwisely trying to close this office.)

As insoluble and intractable as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appears, tackling such seemingly hopeless problems has more than once brought out the best in Friends. In 1970, for instance, the American Friends Service Committee published its controversial study, *Search for Peace in the Middle East*; re-read today, its forecasts sound prescient, and its moral analysis rings true and deep. The same goes for AFSC's 1982 book, *A Compassionate Peace*, which happily is to be republished in an updated edition later this year.

Thus if seeking light, speaking truth and working for peace in Palestine has often got Friends in trouble, it has also shown us where faithfulness leads; and the rest is not ultimately our concern.

Two months ago, in AFL#83, I asked for responses to this question: "Do you think 'eventual, organic union' between Friends General Conference and Unitarian-Universalists would be:

- A. A good idea,
- B. A bad idea,
- C. Have no opinion, and
- D. Why, or Why Not?(Briefly.)"

This poll, you will recall, was based on proposals made in letters to a Unitarian magazine following a report on an informal weekend of dialogue between delegations from the two bodies. It seemed to me that it offered a way to get at what some Friends thought the distinctions between the two groups might be; and this data would be of value to those, like me, who are concerned with the issue of Quaker identity in our time.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

At press time, thirty five Friends had replied, almost all from non-pastoral, FGC-type meetings. Despite my plea for brevity, several were unable to refrain from lengthy explanations of their views. And the character of the responses came about as close to unanimity as one ever expects to see among this many Quakers:

2 respondents wrote to say they were not sure;

3 said it was A. a good idea; and
30 declared it was B. a bad idea.

Furthermore, while the three who supported it were rather tentative, many if not most of those who demurred did so quite emphatically; they thought it was a really bad idea. Here is a summary of their reasons, with excerpts following:

1. These Quakers, even the most liberal ones, want to maintain some connection with Christianity, though they are as skeptical of creeds as any Unitarian. And they see Friends as maintaining more of

this connection than Unitarians.

2. They see Friends' religion as primarily mystical and intuitive, while Unitarians seem more intellectual and rationalistic in their approach. And these liberal Quakers cling fiercely to their mystical spirituality. Unitarians are seen mainly as "seekers", while these Friends feel they have "found" something in the Society, even if they are wary of putting it into words.

3. Unitarian churches are commonly pastoral and programmed, and make decisions by standard voting procedures. Such features did not appeal to these Friends, for whom nonpastoral worship and seeking unity in business meetings are essential parts of what they have found in Quaker religion.

4. Any such mergers would sharply accentuate the fragmentation among American Friends groups, which most respondents wanted to see bridged as much as possible.

Practically everyone spoke appreciatively of Unitarians, and seemed ready to support cooperative ventures where way opened. And several underlined their comments by noting that they were former Unitarians themselves. But let's hear from some of them directly.

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS

First, to those who liked the idea. One was Sue Snider of Celo Meeting in North Carolina:

"I grew up attending U-U churches in Pasadena, Calif. before I began attending Orange Grove Meeting when I was 16...So I have some basis for comments and comparison.

"The emphasis on individual conscience and searching is similar in the two groups—but the Quaker conviction based on experience that 'There is a spirit...' is a major difference. The willingness to

accept a mystical dimension of Truth (even though it doesn't provide all the answers) made Friends meeting a very different experience....

"Now, in spite of all this I think that union between U-Us and FGC Friends might be a good idea. I think both groups might be stretched and enriched. My own spiritual path within Friends has been from a more specifically Christian approach to a universalist one—though still based on experiential mysticism. So the idea of 'U-U Friends' is reasonably comfortable to me."

From Des Moines, Iowa, Elizabeth Lamb wrote that:

"The Unitarian Friend idea appeals to me....Pros:

"1) Religious 'liberals' should get together—hopefully to act as leaven for the world. People who have a religious sense of relationship to the world and the fellow beings, unhampered by dogma and clannishness, should be joined in fellowship.

"2) Open discussion won't hurt Quakers. After almost 30 years I'm getting tired of Quaker 'politeness' which sometimes prefers to pretend a question doesn't exist rather than discuss it."

"QUAKER POLITENESS?" NOT HERE

Fortunately, no such "politeness" inhibited those who did not favor the idea. One intriguing analysis came from the only Friends pastor to respond, Pieter Byhouwer of Rhode Island:

"First of all, I like the U.U. Fellowship. I respect them and find the pastors in this area both congenial in beliefs and persona kind to me....I think you will agree that U.U. is not the issue; Quakers are.

"Recently, or perhaps again, a partisan spirit has infected us. Most of us may not be deeply involved in the parties....Yet they are real. There is the renewal movement called 'New Foundations' and their articulate opponents called Quaker Universalists....In that context, it seems to me that affiliation with the U.U.'s would allow the Q. U.'s to score a point against the NF Fellowship. And to do so would aggravate the conflict.

"Such maneuvers are a diversion from the real task of Friends—to decide what we as Quakers stand for, who we are, what we believe. Even to ask the questions can be divisive. I think both NF's and QU's may be able to make a contribution to the Quaker identity search, together with other Friends from the 'programmed' traditions, represented...worldwide by the great majority of Friends."

MORE EX-UNITARIANS SPEAK

Dana Sawyer of Wakefield, Mass., writing "as a former third-generation Unitarian," said:

"...I can think of a number of problems. The most obvious difference is the mostly pastoral and always programmed style of worship in UUA. But more important, I fear that union would only worsen the lack of spiritual depth within FGC. In my own spiritual journey, I found some of my fellow Unitarians becoming insecure and even hostile as I became increasingly convinced of the reality of God. In contrast, I felt welcomed and at home among Friends. Despite similarity in theory, I believe that in practice there is more tolerance of religious diversity in FGC than in UUA."

Maurice Boyd of Washington DC is another UUA dropout:

"I had the Unitarian-Universalist experience from age 19(am now 71)....My wife's family was Unitarian, although individually they are no longer active, which I think is the usual outcome in U-U

families.

"Unitarians will want to consider all FGC(they probably don't know about the other varieties) as "liberals", whatever that means. They will want to insist upon consensus, if not parliamentary procedure for business meetings. They will fail to comprehend the idea of business in the worship setting. They will want to bulldoze 'minor differences' in our respective backgrounds. If our similarities are so great I wonder how the U-U's will explain the flock of former U-U's I have met in Friends meetings."

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

The meaning of Friends' business procedure was a principal concern of John Sharpless of Binghamton, New York, based on:

"...a realization I came to while reading John Punshon's...book, Encounter With Silence. Punshon points out that the thing which unifies all Friends is not any doctrinal tradition, but rather their manner of doing business. That is to say that regardless of the way in which different Friends conduct their worship services, they all still conduct their business in a manner which concretely demonstrates that they believe enough in the immediate revelation of the holy spirit to rely upon it for making business decisions.

"As the Friends Journal article[reporting the FGC-UUA dialogue—Ed.] points out, the Unitarian-Universalist representatives placed more reliance upon intellectual debate as a means of discerning the truth. Unfortunately, in my view, the article makes this difference out to be merely one of style, whereas it is in fact a central difference which would make it impossible for the two organizations to merge."

If I might make a comment here, I think that while Punshon somewhat overestimates the universality of

traditional Quaker processes among Friends today, nonetheless he is on to something. For Royal Buscombe of Evanston, Illinois, on the other hand, the key difference was something else:

"The great mystery of the relationship between God and Christ, of why he came into the world, of the working of the spirit of Truth in all of us, all this is a part of our heritage which I for one have no intention of letting go. Acknowledging that mystery and my lack of understanding of it enables me to worship with others of a wide range of religious belief so long as the spirit that moves in the meeting for worship brings about a unity which undergirds and transcends our differences. It can sustain even those who do not feel it."

Hugh Barbour, the distinguished Earlham Quaker historian, echoed this sentiment:

"Basic beliefs, however risky to encyst in words, are also vital here. The classic Unitarians like Channing believed as passionately in God as Friends....Most UU's today, however, are frankly humanists or at most Deists and rationalists. Friends' relationship with God or Truth remains personal, an 'I-Thou relationship' including self-searching and obedience."

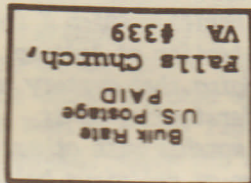
There was much more eloquent commentary among the letters, for which we have no more space. Again, lest these excerpts seem too much like Unitarian-bashing, I repeat that almost everyone added that they liked and respected Unitarians, and supported joint effort where appropriate; but as Sally Campbell of New York put it, "Let's be 'just good friends.'"

Oh yes, as to my own views: Thine truly is another ex-Unitarian who thinks Quakers are—and should stay—very different, and these Friends pretty much speak my mind as to why.

And: Quaker-Unitarian Merger Poll Results
Can They Survive The Upswing?

Inside: Quaker Schools In The West Bank--

Address Correction Requested



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

For more than twenty-five years, Christina Jones and her husband Willard worked at the Friends Boys School in Ramallah. They saw the last years of the British Mandate government there, and lived through the first Israeli-Arab war of 1948. During this conflict, Christina Jones kept a diary, which she excerpted at length in her book The Untempered Wind (London: Longman, 1975). Here are a couple of passages:

"[23 April] Fighting is going on all around us and last night many wounded were brought to Ramallah. Willard made a trip to Nablus with two men in a very critical condition....

"[29 April] Graduation is usually at the beginning of July...but this year we had it today. The British will be gone in two weeks and

we do not know how long we will be able to carry on with school after that....As the programme neared the end, one father of the graduating class, fleeing from Lydda with his family to Damascus, rushed up to the door of the auditorium and asked us to get his son at once....

"I tried to tell him that the programme was almost over and it would be a pity to disturb it. It would mean going down to the front rows to get his son, perhaps creating panic. He finally submitted, but as the graduates marched out to the strains of beautiful music, he pulled his son out of the procession and took him off, leaving all his possessions behind. Ahmad's clothes were finally given to a refugee, who accepted them gratefully."

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Around Golder's Green in London there are two churches, one Anglican and the other Catholic, and a Friends Meetinghouse. The Anglican vicar one day told the priest and the Meeting clerk that he had found a way to tell which denomination God loved the most: each of them should go into their respective place of worship and pray for a sign, returning in an hour to report the results.

When the three gathered, the priest announced that the Blessed Virgin Mary had appeared and

given him a message, but he wasn't allowed to reveal it just yet. The Anglican said that he felt the same about what Jesus had said to him in answer to his prayer. At this the Quaker pulled from her purse a big piece of engraved vellum and shouted triumphantly, "Can't reveal your messages, eh? Then listen to this." She unrolled the scroll and read, "Dear Friend, Please tell thy colleagues that I love all my denominations equally." The two clerics received this message with nods of the head. But then the clerk added, "And it is signed, "Thy loving Friend, God."