



CONUNDRUM OF THE MONTH: What to do about and for the Bolivian Quaker farmers who, like others of their desperately poor country, can make the most money by growing coca plants for export as cocaine? How are they different from churchgoing American tobacco growers?

A Friendly Letter

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Dear Friend,

It's here! *The Human Condition*, the book of stories and poems selected by a joint American-Russian editorial board, organized by the Quaker U.S.-U.S.S.R. Committee, and to be published in both countries, is out from Knopf. (Our Friendly Bookshelf has ordered a batch, and you can send for copies with the coupon inside for \$19.95 plus \$2.05 shipping.)

Calling the book "a series of literary snapshots, the Board states that they were "inspired by a vision of 'spiritual linkage' between Americans and Soviets. By 'spiritual linkage' we mean the inner life and the connectedness we all share." How well this pioneering effort has succeeded is for the reading public to judge; my own opinion is that they have made a fine start on what ought to be a long and exciting journey of mutual self-discovery.

The list of American contributors to the book is an impressive one: From Pulitzer Prize winners such as Alice Walker and the Quaker poet Henry Taylor, to stars like Garrison Keillor and Joyce Carol Oates. Most of the Russians are, of course, less well-known to Americans, but they include familiar names like Yevtushenko, Kuznetsov, and Voznesensky.

The Soviet editor, Daniil Granin, calls the book "an act of participation. An attempt. A first, still awkward contact...accompanied, perhaps by a tinge of jealousy and cautious hesitation." A tentative venture in trust. And "Trust," Granin declares, "requires openness. The problem of trust has turned out to be the key problem today. Everyone is afraid to be the first to put down his gun. All you can see through the telescope is an enemy, an adversary. It's hard to make out a human being through it. A Play, a book, or a film can serve here."

The book has already received advance criticism from one of my readers, who doubted that any of the Soviet stories would dare expose the evils of the

communist system, Stalinism and so forth. And to be sure, the KGB is never mentioned. And yet, as is often the case in repressive societies, elements of the truth seep out, and not by accident. They echo through the haunting story "Girl of My Dreams," by Bulat Okudzhava, in which a young man anxiously awaits the return of his mother from a ten-year sentence in the Gulag. They also show up in "Hypnosis," by Arnold Kashtanov, as a doctor struggles with the temptation to join in the pervasive corruption of the higher echelons in hopes of securing a slot in medical school for his studious but insufficiently-connected daughter. And Anatoly Shavkuta's glance at the Soviet black market in "Who Needs a Crystal Toilet Bowl?" is self-explanatory.

No, as William Styron says in his foreword, "There is plenty that is seamy in these stories, Soviet and American," but if there is any "expose" here, it is that "the rituals of Soviet and American people seem chiefly to involve the frustrating business of muddling through...."

Yet there are also moments when muddling is transcended, and ordinary people in the grip of an extraordinary spirit can unlock and begin to open doors that have been locked shut for decades. *The Human Condition* in its small but historic way shows that among Friends we still have those who can thus rise above the ordinary. The book still seems to me a stunning achievement, well worth the attention of anyone interested in creative Quaker witness, good stories, lifting the curse of the Cold War, or all of the above.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

The plenary talk on the last evening of the Fourth Friends Ministers Conference last month was different. Previous speakers had offered up large doses of rousing evangelical reformism. But this final night, Louise Wilson of Virginia Beach Meeting in Virginia gave a shining exposition of Quietist Quaker mysticism. As she finished, the 400-plus pastors, normally a talky, popcorn group, fell into an uncharacteristically deep, if brief, period of gathered silence. After a couple of short messages and a softly-chanted hymn, an older minister named William Wagner rose.

Wagner spoke feelingly of having been active in the round of Quaker ecumenical sessions which began with the St. Louis Conference of 1970, in which evangelical Friends invited participation by liberal Friends for the first time in nearly forty years. He had gone away from that and other related meetings very troubled by the discord and tension he found among Friends, and he had come to doubt whether Quakerism had much of a future. He had attended this conference somewhat reluctantly, he admitted, hoping only to find some fellowship with old acquaintances rather than any real inspiration.

REMEMBERING A HERITAGE

Instead, Wagner reflected, by that final evening he had found himself convinced that something new was happening. "There is a peace that is settling over Quakerism," he declared. This was important, he said, not only for our benefit, but for a larger purpose as well: he had heard his wife, a non-Friend, express it to another guest at the hotel where the conference was held: the Quakers, she allowed, "are the conscience of this nation."

Was he right? Is there a peace settling over the Society of Friends in the United States? The Fourth Friends Ministers Conference, which gathered at the Sheraton Denver Tech Center on 4/21-24 was not, of course, a representative cross-section of the Society, since there

were only a handful of unprogrammed Quakers present, and because almost all participants were religious professionals. Still, Wagner's remark did seem to capture at least something about the atmosphere of the gathering. Two things that happened, and one that didn't, will illustrate this:

Of the two things that happened, the plenary talk by Louise Wilson, a woman, was one; a workshop about homosexuality was the other.

What didn't happen was that after these first two, the sky didn't fall. Some readers may remember how the last Friends Ministers Conference, in 1985, was almost aborted by fierce controversy over a woman speaker and the possible mention of homosexuality. (See AFL#44 for details.) But now the unmentionable H-word has become at least mentionable, and the nearly all-male Quaker pastorate is beginning to acknowledge that the roles of women in ministry can go beyond those of unpaid spousal helpmeet and First Day School mainstay.

WITH ALL DELIBERATE SPEED, PERHAPS

These changes are real, maybe even historic; yet they are also moving at glacial speed—the workshop was conducted by a ministry that regards homosexuality as a sin that can and should be cured by grace and counseling; and the leader remarked in perfect innocence that she was glad to be a Friend because Friends don't fight over this issue....For that matter, by bringing in a nonpastoral Friend as their one female plenary speaker, the planners were rather blatantly overlooking numerous pastorally-trained women in their ranks who are seeking—but too rarely finding—more visibility and responsibility in pastoral roles. But perhaps this is too harsh. There did seem to be a general sense of camaraderie among the participants, and the most serious problems among Friends that people talked me about were thousands of miles away.

Perhaps the most timely of these was the grim prospects for the

beleaguered Ramallah Friends schools on the Occupied West Bank. They are still closed by Israeli army order, as they have been all this school year except for a few weeks. Having lost at least half their students, and most of the tuition income which supports them, and with the fundraising efforts of Friends United Meeting and other groups apparently reaching their practical limit, FUM and school staff are now thinking the unthinkable: that the schools, in their present form at least, may be doomed.

The crunch point is not far off: By Sixth Month the schools must tell their teachers whether they will be able to offer employment contracts for the next school year; to do that the schools must be able to see where the money to finance the contracts will come from; and at this point, it is very doubtful that it will be there.

A DOSE OF BITTER MEDICINE

Closing the schools would be a very bitter pill to swallow for all concerned, the students, staff, and the schools' supporters overseas; but the prospect is looming larger every day. It is particularly galling for it to happen on the eve of the schools' centennial, what should have been an occasion for international celebration and thanksgiving.

The schools were closed once before, during World War One, when British and Turkish armies fought over the West Bank, and they managed to survive. Today FUM still holds legal title to the property, which should protect it from seizure by Israeli authorities or settlers; maybe they could be simply boarded up until the West Bank situation is somewhat sorted out, and then reopened. But that possibility is only a dim light at the end of what could be a very long tunnel.

Discussion of the West Bank schools' plight was informal. Another problematic trend that was on the table was a controversial new approach to evangelism, using telemarketing. A California Friend

named Norm Whan, who formerly sold insurance and other products over the telephone, developed this approach to "selling" an evangelical gospel.

The way it works is simple: volunteers from a church call people in their area (20,000 calls is not an unusual number), asking people if they go to church, and if they say no, inviting them to theirs, or more often to a new church group. In only a few years, by his own account, Whan has "planted" more than two thousand new churches in the US by this method, and his nonprofit Church Growth Development International is rapidly becoming a far-flung international operation.

Considering this record, I expected to have to fight to find a seat in his workshop at the Conference. Not so; it was very sparsely attended. And as Whan talked about his experiences, it became clear this was no accident: Fundamentalist and charismatic groups on several continents are clamoring for his time and techniques; but while a handful of Friends churches have used it successfully, most, despite their oft-repeated commitment to evangelism, are staying away in droves.

REPLAYING AN OLD QUAKER MOVIE

When asked to explain this, Whan's answers showed both sadness and a hint of bitterness. He has a special concern for his home denomination, he insisted, offering us priority in his schedule and discounts on his thick, detailed manuals for running telephone campaigns. But even so, he has largely given up on Friends churches and turned his attention to the other denominations which cannot seem to get enough of his help.

Knowing that evangelistic techniques go in and out of fashion just like clothes, I began asking around after the workshop among pastors and yearly meeting leaders to get their perspective on Whan's programs. While the reactions were low-key, they were strong, and in most cases negative.

The telemarketing campaigns hadn't always worked, they told me, and they were expensive, even with volunteers doing the calling. Where they did work, by gathering a large crowd of new people, the sponsoring churches often didn't know exactly what to do with them, and many soon quit attending. Where the approach had been used to increase attendance in an existing church, it often provoked turmoil in the congregation as it attempted to cope with an unexpected influx of people new to its beliefs and practices.

(To readers familiar with American Friends' history, this should evoke *deja vu*: A century ago there was a similarly rapid influx of people untutored in Friends' beliefs and ways, as a result of mass revivalism. This resulted in years of turmoil, from which came pastoral-programmed Friends churches. To this day not all Quakers consider these changes an improvement.)

CAN SIEVES BECOME BUCKETS?

Whan attributes much of this experience to the difference between churches: some are "sieves," through whose doors new people will flow like water without staying, while others are "buckets," able to hold them. He has developed a new program designed to turn "sieves" into "buckets", but it too has yet to catch on among Friends groups.

Whan's whole approach is built on his theology, which is centered on getting people to accept Jesus as personal savior; unless a person does this explicitly before dying, that person will go to hell forever. All other doctrinal or church structure issues are secondary. Hence the urgent need to use the broadest mass marketing techniques to "reach" everyone in the world with this message before it is too late for them.

But in listening to the accounts of resistance to Whan's approach, the suspicion grew that doctrinal and structural issues may not be so irrelevant after all. Some churches operate much like mass marketing organizations, putting most of their energies into "selling" their doctrinal product, and many of

them clearly "succeed".

But many other churches don't operate that way; they may seek converts, but less formally, and they want newcomers to take their time before joining, to understand the group, its faith and ways. For many Friends groups, such an approach is an outgrowth of their belief that all people have access to the spirit, so that an outward profession of faith is not essential to salvation. Nor is churchgoing, however beneficial it might otherwise be.

Such a church group will grow more slowly and organically. The changes newcomers bring to the group will typically occur more slowly. It is likely to have at most a few hundred members rather than a few thousand. But who is to say it is wrong to do so? It appears that most Friends churches, not to mention unprogrammed meetings, are opting for some variation of this second path, to Norm Whan's frustration.

PLENTY OF PITFALLS TO AVOID

To be sure, the slower, "organic" view of church growth can degenerate into a smug clubbiness, as has often become the case with long-established unprogrammed meetings. But on the other hand, mass evangelism can easily turn into little more than a multi-level marketing pyramid scheme in clerical dress, featuring worship as entertainment and frequent passes of the collection plate, as any watcher of TV preachers can testify.

As I said, the debate over Norm Whan's telemarketing evangelism was not overt; it had to be sought out. Yet the difference in the response to his new methods compared to Louise Wilson's exposition of a classic Quaker tradition was striking, and perhaps indicative. It suggests increasing interest among pastoral Friends in reclaiming a distinctive Quaker identity; such openness would provide a basis for William Wagner's sense of peace coming over much of the Society of Friends. I hope he is right, and that it does mean we'll be serviceable for some larger purpose than our own comfort.

Did AFL#92 abandon the Quaker Peace Testimony and advocate civil war in Kenya? Friend Zablon Malenge, Secretary of the Friends World Committee for Consultation's Africa Section in Nairobi thought so.

The piece in question called for a reexamination of plans for two major international Quaker conferences in Kenya, in 1991 and 1993, in light of the increasing reports of serious human rights violations and erosion of democratic processes there. It mentioned the case of lawyer Gibson Kuria, who was jailed for ten months without charge and tortured after trying to defend political dissenters. Kuria was given the Robert Kennedy Human Rights Award last year, but the Kenyan government did not let him come to Washington to receive it. I asked what Friends planning to go to Kenya ought to do about this disturbing trend: Keep quiet? Speak out? Move the conferences elsewhere?

A LENGTHY, ANGRY RESPONSE

Zablon Malenge's advice on these questions is clear: keep quiet. But let him speak for himself:

"Remember, there are over 22 million people in Kenya. We cannot put their lives at stake because of the small things we can easily tolerate....I believe, to be a leader of an economically deprived country like Kenya is not an easy job and we need to hold such leaders in prayer and love them in spite of their weaknesses instead of criticizing them and discouraging them by campaigning against them through the press."

My piece also quoted Kuria's comment that the Kenyan government's recent repressive actions, which include abolishing the secret ballot in elections and ending the independence of the nation's judiciary, could eventually produce a civil war, an outcome he wanted to prevent. To Malenge, however, this allusion amounted to advocacy:

"Are you suggesting that civil war would be a solution to

Kenya's problems? It is strange that a Quaker like you should arrive at such a conclusion—that war can solve problems or am I putting words into your mouth?"

Indeed, he was; I never suggested any such conclusion. However, Malenge continued to write as if I had done so:

"Civil war is a terrible thing to wish for. U.S.A. has experienced civil war....Maybe in your opinion that war solved U.S.A.'s problems. Your contemplation of civil war in Kenya is the point that has hurt me most. How could you? It is better to overlook some of those small things and march ahead for greater things, for a great future."

Finally, Malenge upbraided me for raising these concerns in connection with plans for international Quaker gatherings in Kenya:

THERE I GO AGAIN?

"When I looked at the [item] on Kenya I sighed with grief—'Oh! NO! Chuck is at it again!! Why always at the time when we want to hold a meeting in Kenya. Why not at any other time if one cares at all' However, even if things were too bad here, must you wait until the 200 overseas Friends are coming in order to become fussy? Don't you care about the 22 million Kenyans? Maybe in your opinion the overseas Friends are more valuable...."

In fact, five issues of this Letter (#s 4, 16, 32, 39 & 48) have dealt with various Kenyan Quaker concerns, as many as on any other subject. And further, it is out of concern for Kenyans that they were mentioned in #92. Kenyan Friends serve in Parliament and the government; should other Friends be wise as serpents when they go there, or simply harmless (and ignorant) as doves? Do they not thereby risk becoming propaganda stooges for the repressive policies of a repressive government?

Does this seem exaggerated? Consider these three items: One was

a letter from another Friend in Kenya, who asked not to be named or quoted directly, asserting that the concerns raised in #92 were on target, and that the situation in Kenya was indeed bad and worsening.

The second was a report in the *Washington Post* on 3/31/1989, on a visit to Kenya by Ethel Kennedy to deliver attorney Kuria's human rights award to him. In an audience with Kenya's strongman president Daniel arap Moi, the *Post* reported, Kennedy "pressed the president on human rights issues," including the cases of several dissidents being held without trial. Moi defended his government's record, which is not surprising. What was surprising was the next day's headline in the officially-owned *Kenya Times*: "Kenya's Human Rights Record Wins Praise." And, added the *Post*, "None of the country's four daily newspapers mentioned any criticism of government policy."

AND NOW, A WORD FROM ROME

Finally, the *Post* noted that the Kenyan Catholic bishops have sharply criticized the government, warning "that the totalitarian atmosphere engineered by President Daniel arap Moi signals a frightening departure from Kenya's democratic, parliamentary system." Such forthrightness is sobering (and risky), and contrasts starkly with Malenge's submissiveness.

It is worth recalling here an incident at the World Gathering of Young Friends in 1985. The Planning Committee agreed that, given the short time and the group's diversity, the conference should not consider any minutes expressing opinions on current issues. This policy was adhered to until, under pressure from Kenyan Friends, including Malenge, a minute against apartheid in South Africa was rammed through.

Why then should overseas Friends muzzle themselves about human rights violations in Kenya? For my part, Malenge's objections notwithstanding, I repeat the call to the Friends World Committee for Consul-

For more than four years the Quaker U.S.-U.S.S.R. Committee has been at work, with a joint committee of American and Soviet editors and writers, to assemble and publish, in both countries, a book of stories and poems which will provide citizens of each country a literary opening into the lives of people on both sides of the polarized divide that has riven the world for more than forty years.

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tation and Friends United Meeting to take these issues into account in their planning for the 1991 & 1993 gatherings. They should at least assure that overseas Friends are well-informed about these issues, that they are permitted to speak their minds, and that they be educated forthrightly about the public roles of Kenyan Friends, whether that be as victims of repression, or (let us hope not) as its supporters.

* * * * *

The flap over *The Satanic Verses* has died down somewhat in the mass media, but it has been heating up in my mailbox. A few kudos have come for my offering of it to readers in AFL#95 when many booksellers were backing away from it. But several readers have challenged this action. Ted Webster of Waltham, Massachusetts put it this way:

TWO DISSENTS ON RUSHDIE

"Chuck, in the case of your spirited defense of Rushdie and the free publication of ideas, I think you're responding to the noise rather than the Signal....As Friends, I think part of the idea is to see—and respect—the God in all people....The book is clearly offensive to millions....Why do you dismiss these millions and defend the book? Rushdie is a clever and well regarded author, no doubt, but what is he up to? Entertainment. Making money by writing a book that takes a cheap shot at Islam, parodying the holiest archetype as a dog....Is it really adding to the light to promote such a book that offends so many?"

Bob Fraser of Langhorne, Pennsylvania felt much the same way:

"I was disappointed by your rash embrace of the secular libertarian apologies for Salman Rushdie and rather surprised by your professed opinion that the promotion of Rushdie's insulting and insensitive novel is somehow in accordance with Quaker values. Surely if there is anything we Friends stand for in the secular world, it is respect for the beliefs, feelings, and customs of those who differ from us: it is difficult for me to see as Quakerly the

promotion of a second-rate novel that (among other things) portrays the prophet Muhammad's wives as whores. To bring my point closer to home, suppose some misguided Hollywood studio were to do a remake of D.W. Griffith's offensively racist masterpiece *Birth of a Nation*. And suppose some black militant leader threatened to kill the director. Would you be totally without sympathy for the militant? Would you respond to his/her call by offering to sell...tickets to the movie?

In response, I must first admit that my championing of the book so forcefully may have been rash; my wife thought so, contending that I might thereby be subjecting our family to avoidable hazards. Also, I still haven't read it; I tried, but the opening pages were less than enthralling, and my attention soon wandered. Nobody told me blasphemy could be boring.

Further, I agree, and said so, that Friends have a duty to understand and empathize as best we can with those of different and even conflicting faiths. To that end I have enclosed, with each copy sold, 17 pages of articles by Muslims explaining their objections to it.

BUT NO SYMPATHY FOR TERROR

And yet. Having said this, I still stand by the decision to advertise and sell the book, risks and all. (So far, the risks seem theoretical, though a couple in a southern state reported that their copy of issue #95 arrived with the edges charred and holes burned in it; so one never knows.) And I still believe that defending access to such allegedly "blasphemous" materials is a legitimate form of Quaker witness. Empathy for those tempted to censor "blasphemy", yes; tolerance for censorship, persecution or murder of "blasphemers", never.

There is more involved here than one book: As writer Susan Son-tag told a Senate subcommittee hearing on 3/8, we are facing a quiet chill of self-censorship: "Most of these decisions—the book not written, the manuscript rejected, the book order not made, by individual

or school or library—will be hidden from public view." One example surfaced in *The New York Times* of 4/18. Filmmaker Cyrus Nowrasteh told how his film *Veiled Threat*, a thriller which deals with Muslims in Los Angeles, was killed off commercially when distributors were scared off by telephone threats in the wake of the Rushdie affair. Nowrasteh says his film "is not inflammatory and is very respectful toward Islam," but it has nonetheless been sunk. Who will be next?

The point here is simple: our vaunted freedom of expression is in truth very fragile. It can be lost by a kind of silent leakage as well as through direct threats. And such leakage is now underway; the Ayatollah has partly succeeded even though Salman Rushdie is still alive.

Another source of this leakage is the willingness of major Western religious leaders to join the Muslim call for banning Rushdie's book. These include Britain's chief rabbi, one of the chief rabbis in Israel, and the Vatican's semiofficial newspaper among others. As the *Economist* of London said of this in its 3/11 issue, "Rabbis, priests and mullahs are, it seems, uniting to restrain free speech lest any member of their collective flock should have his feelings hurt."

A WORD ON BEHALF OF BLASPHEMY

The *Economist* further asserts that "there are few ideas that do not, or did not, cause offence to someone....From Socrates to Galileo to Gorbachev, mankind has advanced by ruffling feelings....Is blasphemy uniquely awful? No. Most religions began as blasphemy against another."

Such was definitely the case with Quakerism. And I am still persuaded that helping to make the world safe for blasphemy is a logical, and I would argue vital implication of Quaker faith. And yes, if it would help stop the leakage of this freedom, I might be willing to sell tickets to a Griffith remake; if so, I would use the proceeds to finance a picket line protesting both its racism and the threats against the director.

INSIDE: THE FRIENDS MINISTERS CONFERENCE--
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ALSO: LETTERS ON RUSHDIE & KENYA

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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

On Fifth Month 9, 1961, an integrated busload of Freedom Riders rolled into Rock Hill, South Carolina and pulled up at the Greyhound station. First out of the bus was John Lewis, now a member of Congress from Georgia, then a student at Fisk University, followed by Friend Albert "Bert" Bigelow. Bigelow was an architect who had been a Navy captain in World War Two. His combat experiences turned him into a pacifist and a Quaker. In 1958 he had attempted to sail his boat, *The Golden Rule*, into an American atomic bomb test site in the Pacific, and spent time in jail for his efforts.

The pair, with more riders behind them, headed for the terminal's segregated lunchroom, where white toughs were waiting for them. Lewis and Bigelow were attacked and beaten to the ground; when a police captain waded in and stopped the beating, he asked the victims if they wished to file assault charges against their attackers, and they declined.

That night, after a mass meeting at a local

black Baptist church, Lewis received an urgent message, which was both good and bad news. The good news was that he had been picked as a finalist for a grant from the American Friends Service Committee to live and work among the Gandhians in India for two years. The bad news was that he had to leave the Freedom Ride to fly to Philadelphia for an interview immediately; AFSC had sent money for his plane fare.

Reluctantly, Lewis left Rock Hill and headed north. Bigelow and the other Freedom Riders headed further South, where on the 14th, Mother's Day, their bus was firebombed outside of Anniston, Alabama and other riders were viciously attacked in Birmingham and Montgomery. These attacks brought Lewis and other volunteers back to the buses, and within a few weeks there were dozens of Freedom Riders in jail in Mississippi. It was from behind these Mississippi bars that Lewis sent AFSC a message, withdrawing from the India grant program, to work full time in the South against segregation.

A CHUCKLE FROM FOURTH FRIENDS MINISTERS CONFERENCE

A woman Quaker pastor was called to the hospital bed of a member of her church by the member's wife. While the two women prayed by the bed, a man and a woman in white hospital coats came in and examined the patient. "He's dying," said the man. "You might want to call your pastor."

"Our pastor is here," said the patient's wife. A few minutes later, the same thing happened: the two hospital staff came in, pronounced the patient moribund, suggested that the pastor be called, and ignored the response.

By this time, the woman pastor was getting very upset, and decided that she could not let such a sexist slight pass unremarked. So when the hospital staffers came in and went through the same routine a third time, she stepped forward as they turned to go, and tapped the man on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, Doctor," she said assertively, "but I am the pastor."

The man pointed to his colleague and replied, "Sorry lady, she's the doctor; I'm the nurse."