



TWO TOOTS ON MY OWN HORN: It took more than ten years, but with last month's issue *A Friendly Letter's* circulation reached one thousand copies. And for reasons not entirely clear, it has been added to the entries for the new edition of *Who's Who In Religion*. My thanks to you, Friends, for making these possible.

A Friendly Letter

ISSUE NUMBER 125

Selected for Who's Who In Religion

TENTH MONTH, 1991

Dear Friend,

The ink was hardly dry on last month's report about Friend Nadya Spassenko undertaking a Quaker mission to Russia, when news came of another remarkable Quaker woman about to embark on an equally exciting and pathbreaking journey:

Claire Bateman, from Friends Meeting of Washington, will have left for South Africa by now, to begin a two-year working sojourn. There she'll be applying professional skills in organizational development, which she has been perfecting for over a decade, to the gargantuan task of empowering "grass roots" organizations there to make the most of the transition from apartheid now underway. In South Africa, she explains, "grass roots" usually means black and colored, though she is open to working with anyone. She's already started, in fact: During a visit there last spring, she conducted workshops in fundraising and other organizational skills for African women's organizations and a group of daycare workers from Soweto.

These workshops were something of a test, she explains, to see if she could in fact do useful work there. "After all," she told me, "I have four strikes against me there: I'm white, a woman, an ex-South African and an American." Further, the women were mainly preliterate, which meant all her printed handouts were useless, and the cultural gap between Washington DC and Soweto made her stock of illustrative anecdotes irrelevant. Could she communicate effectively? Would she be accepted?

The answer to both was yes. "The hunger was great," she says. And her white skin may have been an advantage, because the women soon got down to such nitty-gritty questions as: "What if a white person refuses to shake hands with us?" "How should we dress to deal most effectively with the whites?" These may not seem like earthshaking issues; but they are the nuts and bolts of group empowerment, and that is Bateman's mission: "I teach groups how to get what they need to make their lives better: communication, managing meetings, decision-making, problem-solving, things we take for granted in this society[but don't necessarily do very well at--Ed.]."

There's more to Bateman's plan than philanthropy. She was born in South Africa, of an American family

which had prospered selling mining equipment. She grew up speaking Afrikaans as well as English, but was sent to the US at eighteen to attend finishing school. A Quaker aunt in South Carolina steered her to college, and in the early sixties, shopping for a spiritual home in western Massachusetts, she found Mt. Toby Meeting and felt, as so many of us have, that "I had come home."

Her apprenticeship in organizational development was served during more than a decade on the board of the Woolman Hill Conference Center, which she played a key role in keeping afloat. In Washington since 1985, she hung out her shingle as a professional a couple years ago and has worked with groups from Church World Service to ballet companies and William Penn House.

In South Africa she is already booked for a series of workshops at the interracial center operated by the distinguished South African Friend Hendrik van de Merwe (See AFL#110). And she plans to send out an informal newsletter to interested Friends at home(if you'd like to receive it, write to her at: **17 Barry Street, Basing 7610, South Africa**). While she's paying her own expenses, Claire will also be raising funds for a foundation making technical assistance grants to indigenous groups.

Having read our report about Nadya Spassenko (who, by the way, left for Moscow on 9/27), Claire says she feels much the same way about her own journey: a long, varied and unpredictable life experience seems to have finally come into focus and wholeness in this undertaking: "This is a dream I've had for many years, to somehow pay back South Africa for all that it's given me. It shows you can go home again."

Here are real messages of hope; and is it accidental that Quaker women are the ones delivering them?

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. Don't forget, subscription rates go up on 11/15; send in your early renewals and holiday gift subscriptions now!

DODGING THE "REALIGNMENT" BULLET: THE IOWA CONFERENCE MISFIRES

When the Iowa Yearly Meeting "realignment" conference gathered at a Holiday Inn in Des Moines on 9/12-14, a telling monument to its potential stood only a few blocks away: The Des Moines First Friends Church. Only three years ago it packed in over a hundred people every First Day. On the weekend of the conference, though, it attracted barely a dozen, sitting forlornly in its spacious and handsome worship room.

What happened? In the interim, the church had been effectively "realigned." A new pastor came, an Iowa evangelical determined to uphold his version of orthodoxy and root out all signs of heresy and New Age-ism, real or imagined. The upshot was a classic example of what can only be called evangelism in reverse: the First Friends flock scattered in all directions.

THE HAUNTED AGENDA

The pastor was finally forced out last spring; his part-time replacement, Scott Hinckley, is warm and welcoming. But whether Des Moines First Friends can recover from its abusive ordeal is still in question. Many of the handful now attending have a traumatized look; tears come easily when they speak of what they have been through. Their condition has even touched the hearts of the unprogrammed Quakers in liberal Des Moines Valley Meeting across town, where there is talk of reaching out to First Friends with fellowship and aid, as one might assist survivors of a flood or hurricane.

The fate of First Friends was not on the agenda of the conference discussions; but the prospect of such destruction was on the minds of many who were present. For that matter, it was on the minds of many more Friends who were intentionally not present, and these apprehensions had substantially reshaped the gathering even before it began.

The original idea behind the call for the gathering last spring was to assemble delegates from all the predominantly pastoral YMs who were part of Friends United Meeting, along with delegations from the four YMs in

Evangelical Friends International, and to begin work on a merger between the two. As envisioned by the planners, the ultimate outcome of this process would be a new Quaker body, evangelical and mission-oriented, purged of dross and compromise (represented mainly by the five mostly unprogrammed and liberal YMs in FUM). This idea had first been voiced last fall by FUM General Secretary Steve Main, and put into a formal proposal by Southwest YM in First Month of this year. (See AFLs #119 and #123 for more background.)

To this end, host Del Coppinger, Superintendent of Iowa YM, began his conference flyer with a list of seven theological theses, which delegates were expected to endorse. This seemed logical enough to him, as a way of ensuring that those who came would be of compatible outlook; all the evangelical YMs have similar required doctrinal statements.

A CHORUS OF OPPOSITION

But the theses almost proved the conference's downfall: To some FUM Friends they smacked of a written creedalism which it is a point of their (unwritten) creed to resist; others saw in them the spectre of schism and heartbreak, such as Des Moines First Friends epitomizes.

These sentiments predominated through the summer in the often warm debates in FUM YMs over sending delegates to Iowa. In the end, only two did so: Southwest and Iowa. It was hardly surprising that the eastern liberal YMs did not take part; but the unremitting hostility shown by the leadership of the weightiest FUM YMs was startling—from North Carolina through Wilmington in Ohio, Indiana and Western, to Nebraska, not a single delegate was sent.

In the end, AFL #123's forecast of delegate turnout was almost right on the money: it projected 28 total, with five each from Iowa and Southwest and the rest from the evangelical YMs. That's just how it was, except that there were three fewer evangelicals, only 25 delegates in all. Total registration was

98, with more than half the nondelegates being Iowans, plus 15 from Indiana. Most present were strong "realignment" backers, though there was also a scattering of more skeptical observers from as far away as Philadelphia, Baltimore, Vermont, Maine and Virginia.

Coppinger was clearly taken aback by the overwhelming chorus of nays from FUM YMs. By midsummer he had backpedaled, downplaying the significance of the seven theses and insisting that no one would be turned away as a delegate for doctrinal reasons (though in his own Iowa YM some among the initial list of delegates were purged for just such reasons). And he re-emphasized the exploratory character of the conference discussions.

MORE REVERSE EVANGELISM

Still, once the speeches began, the issues and attitudes which produced the conference were very much in evidence. Ron Selleck, pastor of West Richmond Friends Church in Indiana was the keynoter. (Another vigorous "realigning" pastor, Selleck's tenure at West Richmond, once a thriving and influential congregation, has also been marked by reverse evangelism: attendance has dropped precipitously. With Indiana YM refusing to send delegates to Iowa, after agreeing to be conference keynoter Selleck announced his resignation.)

Selleck's talk, while delivered calmly, was close to apocalyptic in its message: A degenerate "post-modernist" normlessness has settled over our culture, he said, and "*Those who serve this idol...reap only empty souls. It has produced a climate of despair, disillusionment and cynicism. The suicide rate of western industrialized countries is high and continues to rise.... To this institutionalization of normlessness the church must say 'No' or sell its soul.*"

Selleck suggested but did not dwell on the assertion that the liberal branches of Quakerism had become tools of this international plague. This was left to the next three speakers:

Del Coppinger led off, by bringing out an arsenal of smoking guns, first in the form of titles of several workshops from last summer's Friends General Conference Gathering. (E.g., #3. *Are Quakers Christian?* #23. *Female Images of the Sacred*; #46. *More New Age Wisdom*; #53. *Radical Love-From Either/Or to Both/And... Especially for the Bi-identified* [emphasis his]; etc.)

He also distributed a sheet reproducing several paragraphs from AFL #114-115, the report on witchcraft and New York YM. They detailed affinities between some of the new Wiccans and some elements of liberal Quakerism. Thus ripped out of context, they utterly misrepresented the point of the article. (This report, more or less bowdlerized, has been widely circulated among "realigners"; I stand by the reporting, but not by the distorting.)

"REALIGNMENT," YES-SCHISM, NO

Coppinger also spoke candidly of where the "realignment" maneuvering started: *"What is the current impetus for realignment talk? It comes from FUM staff who are tired of the non-Christian pressures and the inconsistencies with Christian teachings tolerated in some FUM Yearly Meetings. There are those of us who agree with them and we join them in their concern."* This was a very revealing comment. To see why, we need to fill in two levels of context.

First, a bit of history: Among the YMs swept by revivalist and holiness fever in the last century, Iowa was one of the most profoundly affected. When revivalist ministers took over, they ruthlessly purged those who clung to other, older views of Quakerism, even revered former YM clerks and ministers such as Joel and Hannah Bean. (The fateful story of Iowa YM and the Beans has been well-told in David Le Shana's *Quakers In California* and Thomas Hamm's *The Transformation of American Quakerism*; it has also been summarily discussed in AFLs # 72, 88, 89 and 106.)

This self-assured, occasionally intrusive evangelical spirit was in turn transmitted to Iowa's daughter YM, California, now Southwest, and both

have long been uncomfortable with the mixed character of Friends United Meeting, in which they ended up. Thus it is no accident that the two have been the main advocates of "realignment" of FUM.

Hence it was logical that Coppinger was followed at the conference podium by Charles Mylander, Superintendent of Southwest YM, who blasted liberal Quakers for holding universalist theological views, interpreting the Bible variously and condoning homosexuality. *"We can no longer tolerate the heresy of universalism,"* he insisted, adding *"We must be equally clear...that we can no longer accept or tolerate the practice and teaching that homosexual activity or heterosexual activity outside of marriage are acceptable to Friends.... Membership in a Friends church must reflect membership in the body of Christ. We cannot have unity among Friends unless our faith is exclusively Christian."*

LEAVING A COLLAPSED HOUSE

Even more vehement was Rick Talbot, pastor of Xenia Friends Church in Xenia, Ohio. *"Because too many Friends have chosen to keep the life of the Society and organizational structure over the spiritual life available to us in Jesus Christ, our Society and structure will eventually, and is now, dying.... Today we seem to be little more than a relic from the past and some of us are proud of it. I am not.... I, my generation, and the generation which will follow will not [emphasis his] remain in a collapsed house of spiritual emptiness...either we fill the void which exists in the Society of Friends today with Jesus Christ or it will be filled with that which is 'Anti-Christ.'"*

(Here is where the other bit of context needs to be filled in: Rick Talbot is the son of Dick Talbot, who is manager of FUM's Quaker Hill Bookstore, and of Ardith Talbot, who is director of FUM's Friends United Press. All are of Iowa evangelical stock, and the senior Talbots were hired by Steve Main, who came to FUM after being Iowa YM Superintendent. The younger Talbot's wife, Chris, is Steve Main's daughter. Nor are such connections unusual; practically all the incumbent FUM staff came from Iowa YM, at

Main's behest. Now the significance of Del Coppinger's comment about FUM staff as the source of "realignment" pressures begins to become clear.)

Thus it was quickly obvious what these Friends were **against**. But when it came to describing what they were **for**, what "realignment" might mean in practice, that old liberal Quaker demon *diversity* raised its ugly head. Mylander had the most ambitious plan: He called for a crusade to plant 2000 Friends churches by the year 2000, and to support this thrust, creation of a single **United States Yearly Meeting** of evangelical Quakers. Sheldon Jackson, a former clerk of Southwest (and FUM), offered a more modest outline for a regional association of YMs west of the Mississippi--basically three evangelical YMs with Southwest and Iowa transplanted from FUM.

REMEMBERING THE MAIN

Del Coppinger was even more restrained. He told the group he did not think Iowa could leave FUM without suffering a schism that would rend many churches right down the middle. So he suggested that groups like his should instead pursue dual membership in FUM and EFI, the way the five liberal FUM YMs are also part of Friends General Conference.

This stance hardly jibed with his lengthy indictment of the supposed saturnalian paganism infecting FUM through its liberal wing. But with the example of Des Moines First Friends in the background, it made sense. Doctrinal purity is one thing; but tear up a few more churches that way, and there would be no yearly meeting for him to superintend.

Coppinger's programmatic caution was hardly enough for Rick Talbot. Impatient with talk, he insisted that it was time for action. Specifically, he called for a campaign to repudiate the FUM General Board, which had reproved Steve Main for advocating the demolition of the body he had been hired to serve. The Board also had advised Main not to attend the Conference, and this rankled Talbot and several others as well.

In fact, the conference reached

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Dear Friend,

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I hope you'll consider sending gift subscriptions to Friends. In the past year, I've been trying to keep up with controversies over Witchcraft and satanic child abuse, a major war, and the rigors of "realignment"--to name only a few. Chances are the pace of news won't slow down much in 1992.

Once I thought that with practice, producing *A Friendly Letter* would get easier; but it hasn't. The issues facing Quakers seem to get more complex, not less, and the cost of keeping up keeps going up. Not only are phone bills always high from long-distance interviews with Friends around the world, increasingly the reporting involves travel, which is expensive. And you know what's happened to postage rates. So....

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its low point when an Iowa pastor named Ralph Kessler rose on the final morning to insist that the whole FUM Board should be recalled, and replaced with true Christians who are still able "to call sin sin," and who would have the sense to line up behind Main and the staff. Challenged to explain just when Board members like Clerk Sarah Wilson of North Carolina, Marilyn Bell of Western, and Bill Samuel of Baltimore (to name only three) had ceased to be Christians and lost their moral compass, Kessler hastily replied that he had not met any of them, and did not approve of name-calling--as if his ignorance made it less insulting to portray the whole Board as a band of half-wits and heretics.

Boorish as it was, Kessler's intemperate outburst may have been a blessing in disguise. That's because shortly afterward delegates from the evangelical YMs came to the microphone one after another, to point out and underline that they had not come to join in any FUM-bashing, and would not be parties to any such campaign emerging from the conference. They were happy to talk "realignment" with anyone who was interested; but they wanted no part of character assassination.

NO MANDATE, NO MOMENTUM

Coming from the quarter in which the hosts were hoping to find allies (and which sent the most delegates) this rather quickly squelched Talbot's campaign against the FUM Board. But that still left the problem of the conference outcome. Were they promoting a single United States Yearly Meeting? A regional association? Dual affiliation between existing bodies? Or even, as a few lonely voices made bold to suggest, an effort to preserve and revitalize FUM rather getting rid of it?

There was nothing approaching unity on any of these, nor any clear sense of how to proceed. After some confusion, Coppinger and the clerk decided simply to prepare a summary of the proposals, to be distributed to interested Friends and meetings for further discussion. (The summary is now available, along with tapes of most of the sessions, from Iowa YM, 411 College Avenue, P.O. Box 657,

Oskaloosa IA 52577.)

Rick Talbot had predicted that *"this conference will be remembered in Friends history as the renewal of the vision which was begun and first articulated at the Richmond Conference of 1888."* The rhetorical impact of his declaration was substantially diffused when one recalled that the Richmond Conference was actually in 1887.

Similarly, when the Des Moines gathering broke up on Saturday afternoon, there was a sense of diffuseness and anticlimax about it: Attendees left without having produced a "realignment" manifesto, or even any formal minutes representing a unified agenda for further "realignment" discussions. If there were any signs of a groundswell of momentum building from Des Moines behind "realignment" I couldn't see them. The existence of Friends United Meeting hardly seemed in jeopardy at the end of the gathering; if anything, its prospects had improved.

ATTRITION, NOT "REALIGNMENT"

Predictions are hazardous, but it looks from here as if the most likely fallout from the Des Moines conference and associated "realignment" efforts could look something like this:

Attrition from FUM: Charles Mylander called for yearly meetings to move as a body from FUM to form his new national Quaker group. This could well end up meaning no more than that Southwest YM will finally leave FUM for EFI, as has long been expected.

In Iowa, a dual affiliation approach could ease some of the pressure that undermined viable churches like Des Moines First Friends, by simply letting churches, and even individual Friends, concentrate on the groups they are drawn to, without having to face an inquisition. It is a remarkably simple idea, which works well for liberal Friends; it can work for Iowans, if they will let it.

FUM Staff changes: With his "realignment" campaign formally repudiated by seven of FUM's member YMs, and the Des Moines conference a misfire, Steve Main is wholly without credibility as FUM General Secretary,

and it is hard to see how he can last long in the position. And given the "Iowa Mafia" character of the rest of the staff, his departure could well provoke others. Such changes, regretably, are overdue; it does not serve a broad body like FUM to have a staff cadre drawn almost exclusively from so narrow a slice of its membership, especially one given to presuming an almost proprietary sense of control over its self-definition, direction and staffing.

Revitalization: The whole "realignment" struggle has been debilitating for FUM; so as it fades, there is plenty of institutional ground for FUM to recover. This recovery could be hastened by what has been termed revitalization. While this idea too needs fleshing out, the basic thrust is simple: intensive work within the community of Friends under the FUM umbrella, to relate them to one another meaningfully and productively as a diverse but authentic community of faith. With new staff dedicated to the project and the body, there is no reason why it cannot succeed.

ANOTHER "GREAT COMMISSION"

Many of the "realigners" consider such a priority unworthy of much investment of time and resources. All that matters is Matthew 28:19, the "Great Commission", which they interpret as demanding nonstop mass evangelism. But in my Bible there are at least two "Great Commissions"; the other is John 13:35: *"By this shall all men [and women] know you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."* At first glance this may seem to deal only with internal community matters; but its implications are much broader. The quality of the Christian community is as essential an element of its evangelistic message as any proclamation--indeed, perhaps more important because it provides the proof of the kerygmatic pudding.

For hard evidence of this thesis, we need look no further than Des Moines First Friends or West Richmond, and consider their experience of evangelism in reverse. Jesus also said (Matthew 7:16-23) to judge a tree by the fruits. A visit to these victims of "realignment" is sufficient to show the melancholy harvest it yields.

INSIDE: "Realignment" and Reverse Evangelism--
The Lessons of the Des Moines Conference

Forwarding & Address Correction Requested

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

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

Imagine, if you can, a modest, colonial style wood frame house. The house stands in the small town of Salem, Ohio, and we are seeing it in Tenth Month, 1901. Leaves are falling around it, brown, yellow and orange, and the day is cool, but not yet cold, as Indian summer keeps alive the memory of departed summer.

Now bring the house closer, homing in on the tall rectangular window on one side. Pass silently through it, brushing the clean white curtain that frames the view from the sparsely-furnished parlor. Coming into the parlor from the hallway is an older woman carrying a Bible. She is wearing the long dark skirts, full sleeves, severe high collar and close white cap that mark her as a Quaker of the strict Wilburite variety. Yet while it is plain, her dress is formal, carefully pressed; she looks as if she is ready to go out.

Still, the woman does not go out; instead, she sits down in a plain wooden chair. Folding her hands, she rests them on the worn leather cover of the book in her lap. Eyes closing, she sinks deep into prayer.

Her name is Mary Knoll, and it is First Day morning, meeting time for Friends. A few blocks away, in fact, Salem's small Conservative meeting is gathering in its

spartan meetinghouse. Mary Knoll is attending meeting also--indeed, she is present in what to her is the last and only truly faithful meeting for worship after the manner of Friends in the entire world. Right there, in her living room, entirely alone.

How Mary Knoll came to this solitary condition is a long and dreary story of "realignment" run amok: Ohio's Wilburite Friends split from the Gurneyites, then split among themselves several times, until a final fracture left only the Knolls upholding their brand of true orthodoxy. When Mary Knoll's husband died in 1892, there was none left but her.

Most of the splinter groups have since been laid down, with many members lost to Friends, though some straggled back to the Salem Meeting. But visits to Mary Knoll's parlor would have found her keeping her vigil, summer and winter, for almost ten long years.

Finally, though, on one such morning (the actual date is uncertain), she came into the parlor, perhaps hesitated, perhaps prayed, then kept going, out the door, down the few blocks, and back into the Salem Meetinghouse, sitting quietly down on the women's side, and bringing her version of "realignment" to an end.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Since Canada is officially a bilingual country, it is no surprise that the answering machine at Canadian YM's Ottawa office features Secretary Anne Thomas identifying the body in both English and French.

But what impact does this policy have on worship? How, Friend Thomas was recently asked, does one conduct a bilingual unprogrammed meeting for worship? No problem, she insisted: "We simply have half an hour of silence in English, and *un demi-heure en français*."

Once a thrifty Quaker farmer asked a lumberyard owner, "How much are thy roofing nails, Friend?"

"Nineteen cents a pound," was the answer.

The Friend then observed, "They sell the same nails for seventeen cents a pound down at the elevator."

Owner: "Then why didn't you buy them there?"

Farmer: "They didn't have any."

Owner: "Heck, I'd sell them to you for a dime if I was out!"

--Adapted from a story collected by Patricia Kent Gilmore