



THE ONE TO WATCH THIS SUMMER: Indiana Yearly Meeting--It's a cauldron of discontent. One meeting is leaving; "realignment" agitation continues; some are campaigning to pack the board of Earlham College and fire its liberal president; a fight over FCNL may break out; membership is still slipping, budget woes are deepening. **The big question:** How much longer can it go on like this?

A Friendly Letter

ISSUE NUMBER 133

Selected for Who's Who In Religion

SIXTH MONTH, 1992

Dear Friend,

Only rarely during the last eleven years could I have told you in one month what the topic of the next month's issue would be. In part that's due to the unpredictability of the journalistic enterprise. But in this case it was also a measure of a desire to be responsive to leadings, to the Spirit which "blows like the wind, and you hear the sound of it but you don't know where it comes from or where it's going." (John 3:8)

In the past month, the clear leading has come that it is time for a break. Thus, once this issue goes to press, I am taking a sabbatical from *A Friendly Letter*.

Reflecting on this leading, I find several factors at work: For one thing, in recent years I have felt increasing internal pressure to do some other kinds of writing, particularly fiction; yet in the past eighteen months or so, there has been less and less time for other projects of any magnitude.

Another pressure, of a mundane but inescapable sort, is money. The *Letter* has always paid its way (but not mine), and I'm feeling the middle-aged person's anxiety over the fiscal future: kids and college; retirement; a cushion against illness; even a few creaturely desires. With a bit of luck, perhaps writing could help meet some of these demands. Anyway, I need to try; and Friends of a certain age should understand.

More broadly, there is the question of the place and value of this *Letter* among Friends. I believe it filled a vacuum when it began, and overall it still seems serviceable. There's certainly no dearth of news and issues. Hardly; if anything, the Quaker "beat" is busier and more intense now than when I started.

But the *Letter* has also been controversial; some have suggested that it is more part of the problem among Friends than part of the solution. That judgment seems doubtful, but I acknowledge that I lack any sense of perspective on it; a monthly deadline leaves little room for such detached consideration. One thing I have noticed, though, and reported on here, is that most American Quaker groups of much weight seem to be undergoing a time of transition this year:

FUM, FGC, AFSC, FWCC, and others. While *A Friendly Letter* doesn't compare with such big fish, it does swim in the same pond; and perhaps I'm feeling the same invisible current. After all, Quakers of my sort are naturally suspicious of religious institutions. We think most truly Spirit-driven undertakings should be temporary, and laid down when their time is finished.

But perhaps that's too highfalutin; maybe, after doing this 133 times, I just need a rest, or a change.

If all this sounds somewhat vague, it is. So here are a few specifics: I will report back to you before the end of this year as to future plans: *A Friendly Letter* may then resume publication as before; or there might be some changes in it; or I might lay it down. If it is to be the latter, I'll make arrangements then for the fulfillment of uncompleted subscriptions; there should be no difficulties in that department. In the meantime, as of press time, 6/6/1992, no further subscriptions or renewals will be accepted.

As has been true all along, I welcome your comments and thoughts on the future of *A Friendly Letter* during this time of sabbatical reflection. I think of it as having a thousand-person clearness committee.

If this should turn out to be *A Friendly Letter's* final issue, let me take this opportunity to offer my warmest thanks to all of my readers. Your loyalty has made it possible; your feedback and elderring has made it better; and your abundant Quaker spiritual life has made it a continually enriching challenge. Keep minding that Light! I salute you, Friends.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager
Chuck Fager

PS. All **back issues**, plus an updated **Index** and the **books** published by Kimo Press, are still available. A list of these items is included inside.

Among Friends, discernment is meant to be a collective process. Whether it be personal leadings or corporate policy, our impressions of the Light--so Friends have always believed--should be tested by and in the Light of others. Such testing is not foolproof, but its record is pretty good, and in any event it is part of the spiritual discipline of Quakerism.

Such examination is particularly called for in the case of what are presented as direct revelations by God for others. And in this troubled season, one such communication was recently delivered with utter self-assurance and to considerable effect. I'm referring to the message given by Hugh Spaulding, a pastor in North Carolina Yearly Meeting, on the final morning of the Retreat for Clearness held by Friends United Meeting (FUM) in Richmond, Indiana in Third Month.

GETTING THE FULL TEXT

This message was summarized in our last issue, from memory. Since then, Spaulding has reduced his message to writing. Because it purported to announce divine commands for the world's largest Quaker association, the full text merits careful friendly examination. Is it what it claims to be? And if not, why not? Some of my thoughts will be offered following the text. Here it is:

GOD'S MESSAGE FOR FRIENDS UNITED MEETING

"God....does not lie." (Titus 1:2)

There is an old adage that says if you tell a lie often enough and long enough some people will believe it.

There are two lies that have been proclaimed in the Society of Friends for over 175 years. Those two lies have poisoned the Society of Friends and greatly weakened its power.

Robert Barclay wrote in his Apology:

"The inward calling of God by his light in the heart is necessary for membership in the Church catholic..."

"However, to be a member of a particular church of Christ, not only is this inward work indispensably necessary, but also profession of belief in Jesus Christ and in the holy truths delivered by his Spirit in the scriptures. And the testimony of the Spirit as recorded in the scriptures answers the testimony of the same Spirit in the heart, just as face answers face in a looking-glass. Hence it follows that the inward work of holiness and the forsaking of iniquity are necessary in every respect for becoming a member of the Church of Christ. The outward profession is necessary for membership in a particular gathered church, but not for membership in the Church catholic. But this does not do away with the absolute necessity for believing the outward testimony where God has afforded the opportunity of knowing it." (Barclay's Apology in Modern English, edited by Dean Freiday, pp. 175, 176.)

The two lies that have poisoned the Society of Friends for over 175 years are these:

One, that you can be a Quaker without believing in Jesus Christ.

Two, that you can be a Quaker without believing in the holy truths delivered by his Spirit in the scriptures.

These two lies have poisoned nearly every yearly meeting in the Society of Friends. These two lies are a major part of the problem that has weakened the power of the Society of Friends including Friends United Meeting.

It is not a matter of interpretation. It is a matter of believing in two lies. The only

solution is to break the power of those two lies that have weakened us.

We have to stand up as a Society to those two lies and say to them in the name of Jesus you no longer have power over us.

These two lies did not originate with God, for God does not lie. So we have to recognize that the source of these two lies are(sic) not from God. We have to confess our sins, repent of our sins and put our sins under the power of the blood of Jesus Christ.

This is the only way that Friends United Meeting can move forward in the power of the Lord. As a part of the Society of Friends we have permitted these two lies to be proclaimed among us. We must as a Society repent of that sin. Repentance means that not only are we sorry about that sin but we must be committed to not committing that sin any longer.

Now that God has announced this truth to us, we as members of Friends United Meeting are obligated to be obedient to God. We cannot disobey God and expect him to bless us.

Although some will feel uncomfortable with this and some will even experience pain we must be obedient to the authentic voice of God. Will you do it? Will you do it? Will you do it?

In the name of Jesus do you believe it? In the name of Jesus do you believe it? In the name of Jesus do you believe it?

(Richmond, Indiana, 3/15/1992.)

* * * * *

No. In the name of Jesus, I do not believe it.

As prophecy, this message rings false to me. Why? Three main reasons: It does not fit my understanding of Robert Barclay and foundational Quakerism; it does not fit my understanding of Christ and the Bible; and it does not fit my

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experience among actual Friends today.

(Before going further, two caveats: *First*, my conclusions about this "oracle" imply no judgments about Hugh Spaulding as an individual. From all reports, he is a sincere Christian and a person of good character. My presumption is that in this case he is simply mistaken; he has misinterpreted some thought or notion as a divine revelation. Most of us, perhaps all, have thus "outrun our Guide" at times; I certainly have. But this is one important reason leadings need to be tested and examined: Friends make mistakes. *Second*, while these comments are the result of extensive study, observation, worship and prayer, they are no more than that. I believe they are congruent with the words of God; they make no claim to be God's Word.)

ANOTHER LOOK AT BARCLAY

First, about Barclay. Like the Bible, his great work *The Apology* can be quoted by different people in radically different ways. Yet there is no mistaking that Barclay was convinced, as was Fox and the other founding Friends, that God's light and salvation was available to all persons. As he said--on the page just prior to that cited by Spaulding--the true church was made up of those,

"regardless of what nation, kindred, tongue or people they may be, who have become obedient to the holy light and testimony of God in their hearts....There may be members of this catholic Church not only among all the several sorts of Christians, but also among pagans, Turks [Muslims], and Jews. They are men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart. They may be blind in their understanding of some things...yet they are upright in their hearts before the LordIn this respect, the Church has existed in all generations."(Freiday, p. 173)

Why such seemingly different-sounding passages so close together? My sense is that there is an ambiguity in Barclay's work that Friends have not resolved: If Christ's Light is indeed universally accessible and sufficient, even for those who have

heard of Christianity and rejected it(as have Jews, Muslims and many pagans), then do we really need to insist on doctrinal correctness?

As Barclay says in another place, using a medical analogy, *"...many have been cured by medical remedies without knowing how the medicine was prepared or what the ingredients were, and often without knowing who made it."* (P. 114) He also makes plain in many places that while one must believe the truths about Christ when they have been witnessed to you, the only effective witness is an *inward* one, which must never be confused with or reduced to the outward proclamations of self-appointed human evangelists.

A CATHOLIC QUAKERISM?

This Christian universalist outlook is, I believe, the overwhelming tendency of Barclay's magnum opus. But where does that leave Friends Meetings today? What if someone seeks membership whose life, as best the Meeting can discern, exhibits the saving work of Christ's universal light, but whose notions are, for whatever reason, somewhere else? Many meetings have chosen to accept such persons, opting for the invisible "catholic"(i.e., universal) church over an exclusive, doctrinally based sect, properly so, in my view. Such a choice may sometimes be mistaken; but in my judgment it is not false to Barclay and the religious witness of early Friends. It is **not** a lie.

Moreover, the same ambiguity runs through the words of Jesus and other figures in the Bible--as Barclay knew. *"Truly I perceive,"* says Peter, in a verse often cited by early Friends, *"that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."*(Acts 10:34-35) As for Jesus, the determining passage for me is Matthew 25:31-46, the famous image of the sheep and the goats: *"I was hungry and you fed me...."* Nowhere in this vision of judgment are the sheep commended for having held the correct doctrines, nor the goats condemned for lacking them. But

why not? Would Jesus, who presumably is to conduct this judgment, have overlooked such a key doctrinal test?

To be sure, there are other biblical passages where Jesus is said to speak exclusively; *"No man comes to the Father but by me."* (John 14:6) To me this confirms that the counterpoint of universalism and particularity goes back to the beginning of Christianity, and cannot be simply banished. That some may lean toward one side and some the other may make for internal conflict, but it is not a default on the tradition. It is **not** a lie.

Finally, the idea that the universalist expressions of Quakerism, found among most unprogrammed meetings today, are poisoning the Society simply does not accord with my experience. This sounds more like aggressive evangelical propaganda, of a sort that has been spread widely among some Friends of late. This is much more toxic to FUM than anything universalist Friends have said. My own contrary experience of universalist Friends was recently summed up very well by Liza Savory, Clerk of Summit Meeting in New Jersey, in London YM's *Quaker Monthly* (5/92):

REACHING A QUAKER SUMMIT

"...we in Summit Meeting are not perhaps the world's weightiest Friends. But we are working on it. We are a loving community in a tough world. We are alive and well and I believe the Spirit is working among us."

I've not yet visited Summit Meeting, but the same words could be spoken of my own meeting, and many others I have been in. Certainly we make mistakes, and outrun our Guide; we need grace and mercy every day. But notwithstanding our sins and shortcomings, our communities *are* real, and the Spirit *is* working among us. Our connection with Quakerism's past is authentic, and our part in its future, if we mind Christ's Light, will be fruitful.

And that is **not** a lie. But if it isn't, then the Spaulding "oracle" is not "God's message," to Friends United Meeting or any other Friends.

INSIDE: True Quaker Prophecy In Richmond?
An "Oracle" Examined;
PLUS A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Forwarding & Address Correction Requested

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

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

Trouble in Indiana over the nature of authentic Quakerism is, alas, nothing new. As revivalism and holiness theology swept through that Yearly Meeting after the Civil War, there remained a distinct and troublesome minority of dissenters, mostly older Friends who were devoted to the plain nonpastoral Quaker ways, and whose age and weight made them a persistently irritating presence.

Among these Quietist dissenters, one of the most obstinate was David Huddleston, a nurseryman and pillar of the Meeting in Dublin, a hamlet lying between Indianapolis and Richmond. For almost twenty years, between 1872 and 1890, he kept a handwritten journal, in which he commented in melancholy detail on the advance of programmed worship, including repeated rounds of hymn-singing, mourner's benches, and extended sermons by paid visiting ministers.

All these were great trials to Huddleston, who yearned for the lost deep silences and spontaneous ministry; of one new preacher he wrote acidly, "*He spoke loud and lengthy, & like an empty waggon(sic) made a good deal of noise.*" Hardest for him to bear was the new preachers' insistence on their version of Bible

doctrine, which rejected the older Quaker conviction of the primacy of the Inward Light of Christ. Huddleston was eldred more than once for speaking in defense of this ancient conviction, but he never wavered.

In Sixth Month, 1883, Huddleston shocked Dublin Meeting's holiness establishment by distributing copies of an address from the Orthodox Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, then a Quietist stronghold, which cited many early Friends in defense of their unprogrammed, silence-centered Quakerism. The next day two elders brought him a directive that he was to return the materials to Philadelphia, because "*they were too pernicious, unsound and unscriptural to be admitted. They also returned the copy they had been examining with quite a number of marks, showing the passages they had objected to as unsound, from Fox, Penn, Barclay & C, showing that it was not the writings of our forefathers but our modern views of the Scriptures that we were to be governed by.*"

Huddleston quietly defied the elders, and kept passing out the leaflets, though more discreetly, fully expecting to be disowned. But he wasn't; evidently the elders decided to outlast him. Which they did. But the conflict they thus hoped to end, outlasted them as well.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Any-Publicity-Is-Good-Publicity(we hope) Department: Earlier this year, a columnist in *The Des Moines Register* characterized the current political season thus: "*The presidential-nominating races have settled into a classic confrontation between the resistible force and the movable object. It's a lot like watching a street brawl between two gangs of Quakers.*"

That's easy for him to say; obviously he hasn't

been to many Quaker committee meetings....

* * * * *

"Doctor," pleaded the weighty elder, "*isn't there something thee can do to cure me of snoring?*"

"What's the problem?" asked the doctor. "*Does it disturb your wife?*"

"No," said the elder, "*it only embarrasses her. It's the rest of our Meeting that's disturbed.*"