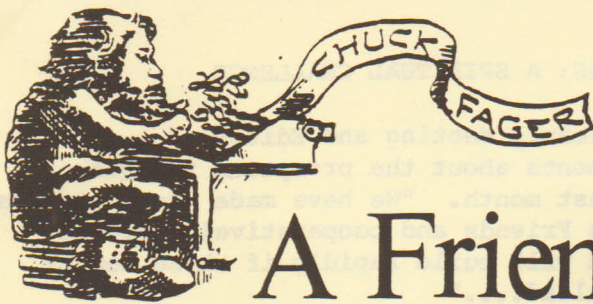




A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Six

Ninth Month 1981

Dear Friend,

(Note: If this is the first issue of A Friendly Letter you have received, I hope you will look over the description of its purpose and history on the inside flap, and consider becoming a subscriber.)

This past summer I attended all three major conferences of Quakers: Friends General Conference in Berea, Kentucky; Friends United Meeting in Richmond, Indiana; and the Evangelical Friends Alliance in Canton, Ohio. Like most others, I went to worship, renew old acquaintances and have fun, as well as hoping to pick up a few new subscribers. But I also wanted to better understand the various branches of Friends, in hopes of promoting broader contact and communication among them if way opened.

This month's letter reports and reflects on a remarkable talk I heard at the EFA conference in Canton. Its topic was Friends' identity and future, and a major theme was the prospects for bring American Quakers closer together in the years ahead.

I wish more Friends of my Liberal background had heard this talk. But in fact, there were scarcely half a dozen Friends who attended all three of these gatherings. Of course, conference-going is expensive and time-consuming; yet I think there is a need for Friends to visit groups outside their main tradition. It would be especially valuable for more FGC and EFA Friends to visit each other's conferences—not only pastors and leading Friends, but ordinary Quakers as well.

Intervisitation has been a crucial thread knitting together the scattered outposts of Quakerdom ever since George Fox's time. It seems to me this practice is as needed today as it was then, and maybe more so. Perhaps more so because our vaunted instant communications today as often convey stereotypes as accurate images, and without taking the time to get to know and stay in touch with Quakers of other backgrounds and outlooks, we too easily succumb to broadcast stereotypes of what *those people* are said to be like. The results of this process have been uniformly unfortunate.

To be sure, there are real differences among us, as this issue points out. But as it also indicates, the way in which we deal with them has been decisive for us.

This issue is primarily concerned with attitudes and developments among Evangelical Friends, but I hope it will be of interest to all varieties of Quakers. And as before, I welcome the comments of readers on this effort.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

Jack Willcuts, Superintendent of Northwest Yearly Meeting and Editor of *The Evangelical Friend*, made some remarkable comments about the prospects for Quaker ecumenism at the EFA Conference in Canton Ohio last month. "We have made great strides," he said, "in learning to listen to one another as Friends and cooperatively serving each other in love. The momentum is building and will build rapidly if those led by the Spirit are released to minister, and yes, to lead...."

Willcuts acknowledged that this process was developing in the midst of great diversity among American Quakers. But he stated that in his view "there is only one issue really dividing Friends. It is the acceptance or rejection of the lordship of Christ....All our various testimonies, concerns, differences, organizational or cultural diversities can be bridged. But the faithful, obedient proclamation and service in the power and righteousness of Christ who leads His Church is nonnegotiable Truth."

Reflecting on these statements by a major Evangelical Quaker spokesman, it occurred to me that there is something more to be said about this key difference, namely that what is at stake is not only the issue but also *the spirit in which the issue is to be dealt with*. As I read Quaker history, the spirit in which differences are dealt with has had as much to do with their impact on the society as a community as the issues themselves, and often more.

An Example: Edward Mott

Jack Willcuts displayed one approach to dealing with our differences. In contrast, let me cite another example, also from Northwest yearly Meeting. Edward Mott, who was a leading minister and teacher in that body for many years earlier in this century, strongly and bitterly opposed any moves toward ecumenical contacts or fellowship among what were then much more fragmented groups of Friends. In his memoir, *Sixty Years of Gospel Ministry*, published in the late 1940s, he insisted, as he had for decades, that such efforts "cannot have the blessing of the Lord upon them." In fact, he insisted that "The attempt to fellowship and work with unbelievers(*which is what he considered other Friends to be--Ed.*) spells death. Any conclusion to the contrary is ruinous to all concerned." He vehemently denounced the efforts to reunite Orthodox and Hicksite Yearly Meetings, which were then nearing success in New England and Philadelphia. He described with considerable relish his address to an "All-Friends Conference" in Oskaloosa, Iowa in 1929, the intention of which he had earlier said was "to thwart the very purpose for which the conference was held, the promotion of fellowship among the groups." He was also a fervent and relentless opponent of the American Friends Service Committee, for having undertaken work for peace and justice on other than an exclusively evangelistic basis, and particularly for its role in setting up the Oskaloosa meeting.

Another Voice, A New Spirit

Edward Mott articulated a spirit of disdainful hostility which dominated relations between Evangelical Friends and others for more than forty years. Many Liberal Friends, let me hasten to add, cordially returned this hostility. But by 1970, at the historic St. Louis Conference of Friends from all the groups, this spirit was being strongly challenged by key Evangelical leaders. At the conclusion of the 1970 conference, when it was clear that Friends were still divided over the issue of Christian identification, the late Everett Cattell, the Conference Chairman, President of Malone College, a strong Evangelical and contemporary of Mott, surveyed these differences and the process in which they had been discussed and concluded, "Let the conversation continue." To Liberal Friends, always a conversational bunch, such advice might not seem remarkable. But viewed against its historical context, Everett Cattell's statement was both courageous and radical.

The conversation has continued since 1970, in a variety of settings. The spirit

of most Quaker leaders today seems closer to Cattell and Jack Willcuts than Mott. It is in this spirit that I want to offer some brief reflections on the major difference Jack Willcuts cited, that of Christian commitment. I speak here as a Christian, but one identified with non-Evangelical Quakerism, which includes both Liberals and Conservative Friends.

Original Quakerism: A Two-sided Coin

The key to this division, it seems to me, lies in the fact that originally Quakerism was a double-edged phenomenon: it took primarily traditional Christian beliefs and expressed them in a distinctive new way of life. The peculiar and controversial customs of early Friends were built on this basis of what Fox called "primitive Christianity revived." The two aspects were not thought of as distinct, but rather as an overall attempt, in Fox's words, to "let your lives preach" an integral Gospel.

But over time, these two aspects became distinct, and in my view were essentially separated when the Society divided in the nineteenth century. One side insisted that Friends' distinctive religious way of life was most important, while the other stood for the Christian foundation as primary. Since then, both sides have been shaped by their primary emphases until they became all but unrecognizable to each other. "How can *they* call themselves *Quakers*?" is a question I have often heard from Quakers in both camps about the other. My answer to the question is that *both groups embody a partial expression of authentic Quakerism, however imperfect it seems to the other side.*

What has happened among Liberal, or "way of life" Quakers is that they began attracting people who found their religious way of life valuable even without, or occasionally in opposition to, the traditional Christian doctrines the other group considered essential. What was a Meeting to do when such persons applied for membership? Increasingly the answer has been an echo of Matthew 7:8, judging the tree by the fruits and giving practical commitment to their Quaker way of life more weight than doctrine.

There is no doubt this "way of life" approach has been sometimes carried too far. Yet the basic emphasis is one with which I am quite comfortable, even as a Christian. And I would argue further that it is a *validly Quaker* expression, no matter how often it has been taken to extremes.

Can We Live Together? No--and Yes

Can the "Christian roots" Quaker branch relate meaningfully to the mixed "way of life" group under such circumstances? Edward Mott, as we have seen, said unequivocally *NO*. To have *any* dealings would fatally dilute Christian faith. But Everett Cattell and Jack Willcuts have said *YES*, correctly so in my view. Cattell spoke of developing at least "a symbiotic approach, a realignment, a new way of living side by side but preserving our differences with greater integrity than at present." This careful formulation showed keen insight. Christian Quakers can and should learn from, work with, have fellowship and love for other Quakers, including non-Christian Friends, based on their common heritage differently expressed, *without* denying or diluting their Christian convictions, and without ignoring the differences among us.

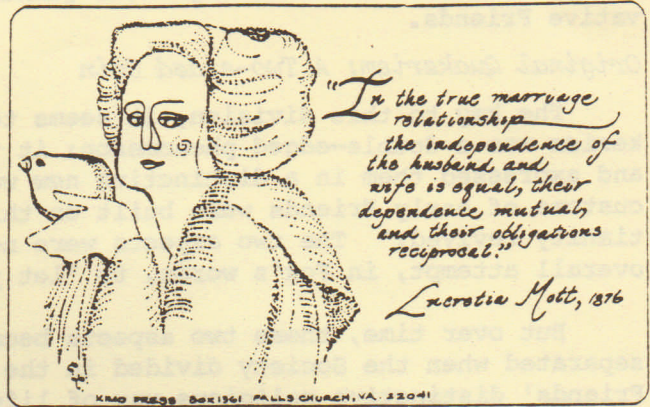
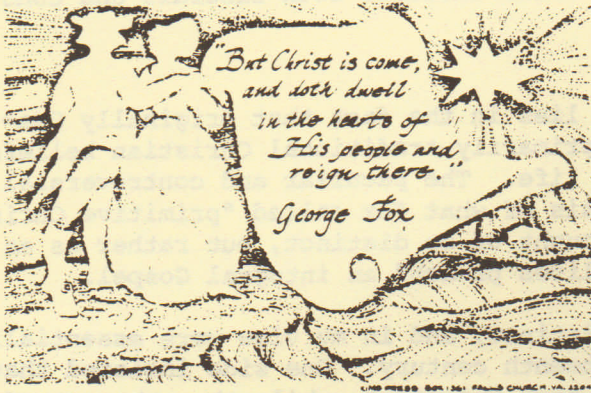
Other Friends also have much to learn from Evangelicals, so I hope the spirit of "listening" Jack Willcuts spoke of will continue to gain momentum among Friends. As it does, I believe the Holy Spirit will go to work among us with results we cannot now predict. As Jack Willcuts put it, "There is a plethora of pamphlets, books, research and displays on where Friends have been....But there are few Friends tour guides offering to take us into the 1980s and beyond!" A look at Quaker history over the last 150 years suggests to me that neither branch now has a clear idea of what a reintegrated Quakerism would look like. But together, I think we can find out. I also believe that Friends of both persuasions will like what they see.

(A few copies of Jack Willcuts' lecture, *Friends? Who Are We?* are still available from Indiana Yearly Meeting, 1403 Briar Rd., Muncie IN 47304. Another fine resource is *Quakerism: A Study Guide*, by Leonard Kenworthy; \$5.50 from 2676 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn NY 11210.)

SOMETHING ELSE TO CONSIDER:

QUAKER CHRISTMAS POSTCARDS

QUAKER QUOTE POSTCARDS

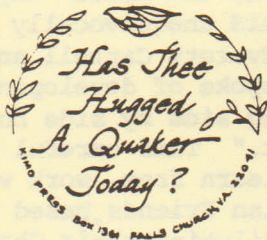


With postage rates going up (again!), postcards make more and more sense as an economical means of brief communication. And what better way to send a message than with these Quaker cards, with their lovely original illustrations and classic Quaker quotes. They come in three varieties: Two different Christmas postcards, the one with the George Fox quote, shown above left, and a "Peaceable Kingdom" card (not shown), based on the motif from Isaiah 11:06 made famous by the Quaker painter Edward Hicks. The third set is an assortment of classic Quaker quotes, like that of Lucretia Mott shown above right. Quotes from Fox, Penn, Nayler, Elizabeth Fry and others, 12 in all, are included.

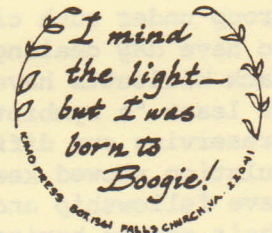
These large cards are just under 4" by 6", the legal maximum size. They are printed on card stock, and come in sets of 20 cards for \$3.00 postpaid.

And here's another idea, for Meetings, Churches and other groups: use these cards to raise funds. Orders of 10 sets or more are \$2.00 each, 33% off; 40 or more sets are \$1.50 each, 50% off, all shipped postpaid. First introduced at Quaker conferences this past summer, these cards sold rapidly to Friends of all varieties. Order a sample set and see if they can help you meet your budget.

AND QUAKER BUTTONS TOO!



In a lighter vein, these Quaker buttons were also very popular at conferences this summer. These large buttons are 2½" in size, black ink on various color backgrounds. The buttons are sold in sets of four for \$3.00 postpaid, in whatever combination you specify.



The same discounts apply for bulk orders of buttons as for postcards.

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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

In our last issue we mentioned that William Penn was arrested in London's Gracechurch Street for preaching the Quaker message in Eighth Month, 1670, and that this began a landmark case in English law. Penn came to trial on Ninth Month first, 1670. The trial was tumultuous, with Penn defying the court to send him to prison for peaceably speaking according to his conscience. The jury, greatly impressed, returned a verdict which declared Penn "guilty" only of speaking in Gracechurch Street, which was no crime. But at that time British juries were not free to reach independent verdicts, and the judge demanded they find Penn guilty of a punishable offense. With Penn's eloquent encouragement, the jury refused. The judge retaliated by fining and then locking up the jury in Newgate Prison. The jurors held fast, however, for almost two months behind bars. When they finally gained bail, they sued the judge for false imprisonment and won, thereby establishing the right of juries to a free verdict in English and American law.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

On the One Hand

Once an old-time English Friend was confronted by a young, fashionably-dressed fop on a narrow sidewalk. The fop looked scornfully at the Friend's plain clothing and sniffed, "I don't step aside for fools."

The Friend, plain but quick-witted, immediately moved out of his way and replied, "But I do."

But On the Other Hand

A stuffy Quaker sea captain grew very concerned about his first mate's frequent, loud profanity. Finally he said to the mate, "Here, wear my Quaker coat; let's see if that helps thee watch thy language."

After a week, the captain asked the mate if the coat had helped. "Well," said the mate, "It's true I haven't been swearing as much. But I have had many temptations to lie."

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If you are not yet a subscriber, I hope you will consider becoming one. If you already subscribe, please share this issue with a Friend.
