

GALLERY OF QUAKER SKEPTICS

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PEOPLE

AS QUAKERS STARTED:

Gerrard Winstanley 1609-1676
John Lilburne 1615-1657

EARLY QUAKERS:

Elizabeth Hooton c.1600-1672
Margaret Fell 1614-1702
Mary Dyer 1615-1660
Isaac Penington 1616-1679
George Fox 1624-1691
Thomas Lawson 1630-1691
Anne Conway 1631-1679
Benjamin Furley 1636-1714
William Penn 1644-1718

THE QUIETIST PERIOD:

Joshua Logan 1674-1751
John Bartram 1699-1777
John Woolman 1720-1772

BEFORE THE SEPARATION:

Thomas Paine 1737-1809
Samuel Wetherill 1736-1816
Job Scott 1751-1793
Abraham Shackleton 1752-1818
Hannah Barnard 1754-1825

THE SEPARATION AND REFORM:

Elias Hicks 1748-1830
Paul Cuffe 1759-1817
Isaac Hopper 1771-1852
Luke Howard 1772-1864

John Griscomb 1774-1852
Benjamin Ferris 1780-1867
Bernard Barton 1784-1849
Lucretia Mott 1793-1880
John G. Whittier 1807-1892
Maria Mitchell 1818-1889
Susan B. Anthony 1820-1906

MODERN LIBERAL QUAKERISM:

David Duncan c.1825-1871
Joel Bean 1825-1914
William James Potter 1829-1893
Hannah Bean 1830-1909
Joseph B. Forster 1831-1883
Alfred W. Bennett 1833-1902
George S. Brady 1833-1913
Joseph Rowntree 1836-1925
Isaac Sharpless 1848-1920
William Littleboy c.1852-1936
John W. Graham 1859-1832
Jesse Holmes 1863-1942
Rufus Jones 1863-1948
Arthur S. Eddington 1882-1934
Henry Cadbury 1883-1974

RECENT QUAKER NONTHEISTS:

Arthur Morgan 1878-1975
Morris Mitchell 1895-1976
John Linton c.1918-
Kingdon Swayne c.1920-
Eric Johnson ? - c.1995
Alice Lynd ? -
Staughton Lynd 1929-

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INTRODUCTION

The 52 people in this collection were Quakers who stood against the thinking of their times. Because of them and others like them, it is now possible to nonChristian, nontheist, and other skeptical views in some portions of the Religious Society of Friends.

These people were advocates of learning, toleration, and reform. They tended to be suspicious of creeds, eldering, and disownment. They emphasized the individual's responsibility for religious views and the need for interpreting the views of others. They sought to mend their own lives and the world. They were moved by silent, unprogrammed worship in the setting of a Quaker meeting.

Many of these people and their opinions are largely unknown today. It can be inspiring to learn of their lives.

The information presented here came from many sources but two were used repeatedly: *The Quakers* by Hugh Barbour and J. William Frost (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1988) and *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meetings* edited by Hugh Barbour, et al. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995). Other sources are given at the end of the paper.

If you have information on these and other F/friends who might be included, please send it to oscresson@juno.com.

The people are listed in order of their date of birth. They are grouped under the headings: As Quakers Started; Early Quakers; The Quietist Period; Before the Separation; The Separation and Reform; Modern Liberal Quakerism; and Recent Quaker Nontheists.

AS QUAKERS STARTED:

Gerrard Winstanley, 1609-1676. A utopian and rationalist, he was a founder of the Diggers in 1649; they farmed on public land, struggling to improve the condition of poor people. Their aims were, "that we may work in righteousness, and lay the foundation of making the earth a common treasury for all, both rich and poor, that everyone that is born in the land may be fed by the earth his mother that brought him forth, according to the reason that rules in the creation." Some say he became a Friend late in life but this is disputed.

John Lilburne, 1615-1657. A founder of the Levellers in 1648; they advocated religious toleration, private property, free trade, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, a separation of powers, a written constitution, and opposition to military conscription. He spent many years in prison and became a Friend late in life.

EARLY QUAKERS:

Elizabeth Hooton, c.1600-1672. Led a dissident Baptist group called by the name "Friends" that George Fox joined in 1646. First woman Quaker traveling minister. Frequently imprisoned. Preached in New England for religious freedom and was repeatedly whipped in 1663-1665.

Margaret Askew Fell, 1614-1702. In the first generation of Friends, her home served as a base for the community. Advocate of toleration. Helped establish the rights of women and the tradition of caring for others within and without the Society. Helped organize Friends meetings and bring together parties in disagreement. She encouraged Quakers to accept color in their lives; in 1700 she wrote, "Christ Jesus bids us consider the lilies how they grow, in more royalty than Solomon. But contrary to this, we must look at no colours, nor make anything that is changeable colours as the hills are, nor sell them, nor wear them; but we must be all in one dress and one colour; this is a silly poor Gospel. It is more fit for us, to be covered with God's Eternal Spirit, and clothed with his Eternal Light, which leads us and guides us into Righteousness." In 1669 she married George Fox.

Mary Dyer, 1615-1660. Willing to die for religious freedom which she did on Boston Common in 1660.

Isaac Penington, 1616-1679. Eloquent advocate of toleration and universalism. Had large library and was an acquaintance of John Locke. He wrote: "That, through which men are saved, is the dispensation of truth in their age. The measure of light which God gives forth in every age, that is the means and proper way of salvation in that age; and whatever men get or profess of the knowledge of truth declared in former ages, yet making use of that to withstand the present dispensation of truth in their age, they cannot thereby be saved, but may thereby be hardened against that which should save them." In 1681 he wrote, "And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning, and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master... For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him... walking sweetly and harmoniously together in the midst of different practices."

George Fox, 1624-1691. A founder of the Religious Society of Friends (RSoF) in the 1640s and thereafter. Religion is an individual experience; relation to God can be direct, not requiring mediation. Ultimate authority is individual experience confirmed by ones community. Universalist in the sense that there is Light in everyone and all may be

saved, if not that any religions may accompany good lives. Bible and other writings must be interpreted by each of us; caution with regard to creeds. Look for Quakerism in ones life rather than words (particulars rather than generalities); live it at all times; apply through testimonies. He helped established Quaker practices such as the manner of worship and the organization of meetings. Fox could be patient with those struggling to find their way, telling William Penn to wear his ceremonial sword “as long as thou canst.” He and Margaret Fell were married in 1669.

Thomas Lawson, 1630-1691. One of the few early Friends with a university education. He started Friends schools in 1659 and c. 1687, and was a well known botanist.

Anne Finch Conway, 1631-1679. Her home was an intellectual center where she entertained many of the leading Quakers, philosophers, and scientists of the time. She wrote a book, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, that espoused neoPlatonism and vitalism. Through her friend, Francis Mercury van Helmont, also a Quaker, she was associated with the hermetic traditions of the cabala.

Benjamin Furley, 1636-1714. Lived in Holland; loved books and had a large library; visiting Friends often stayed with him. He strongly supported advocates of toleration such as William Penn, John Locke, and Algernon Sidney. Locke lived with him while in exile. He was acquainted with many of the philosophers of the Enlightenment. In 1662 he translated *The Light Upon the Candlestick*, a pamphlet adopted by Quakers that was based on the views of Margaret Fell and Baruch Spinoza, among others.

William Penn, 1644-1718. Advocate of toleration and freedom of religion although in his 1701 Charter of Privileges for Pennsylvania, Jews could not hold office and atheists could not be citizens (interestingly, one draft of this Charter has editorial suggestions in the hand of John Locke). Penn loved nature and was actively involved with the collection and study of the plants of Pennsylvania, and he was a member of the newly formed association of scientists in London. In 1693 he wrote, “The world is certainly a great and stately volume of natural things; and may be not improperly styled the hieroglyphics of a better: but alas! how very few leaves of it do we seriously turn over!...It were happy if we studied Nature more in natural things; and acted according to Nature; whose rules are few, plain and most reasonable. Let us begin where she begins, go to her pace, and close always where she ends, and we cannot miss of being good Naturalists.”

OTHERS OF THIS TIME: Between 1658 and 1673 there were “free spirits” who were against authority of the elders in RSoF (e.g. Lilburne, Perrot, Wilkinson, and Story.) John Locke (1632-1704) was an advocate of civil rights and rationalism; he knew Penington, Furley, and Penn and admired Quakers. Weekly meetings of scientists in London began in 1645, leading to the founding of the Royal Society in London for Promoting Knowledge in 1662; several Quakers were involved. This organization helped establish the practice and philosophy of science; they divided the religious and scientific realms to avoid persecution.

THE QUIETIST PERIOD:

Joshua Logan, 1674-1751, Had large library; supported and engaged in scientific study. William Penn's agent; conservative in his religious and political views. Friend of Benjamin Franklin and John Bartram.

John Bartram, 1699-1777. Naturalist with a mystical feeling for the presence of God in nature; published books on his observations of nature in 1751 and 1767. Supporter of rationalism. Friend of Benjamin Franklin. In 1758 he was disowned by Darby Meeting for his opinion that Jesus was not divine, but he continued to worship at that meeting and was buried there. In 1761 he carved above the door of his greenhouse a quote from Alexander Pope: "Slave to no sect, who takes no private road, but looks through Nature up to Nature's God." He wrote in a letter, "It is through the telescope I see God in his glory." He carved into a stone in the wall of his study: "It is God alone, Almyty Lord, the Holy One by Me ador'd. John Bartram 1770" He wrote to Benjamin Rush, "I hope a more diligent search will lead you into the knowledge of more certain truths than all the pretended revelations of our mystery mongers and their inspirations." Bartram was frequently accused of being a deist. His sons Moses, John, and James were founding members of the Free Quakers.

John Woolman, 1720-1772. Advocate of reform in RSoF (make our lives consistent with our principles) and in society in general (slavery, war, taxes, wealth, animal rights...) For him, religion had to be apparent in how he lived. Emphatically not a nontheist, he was a universalist. In 1762 he wrote, "There is a Principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names: it is, however, pure, and proceeds from God. It is deep, and inward, confined to no forms of religion, nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nations soever, they become brethren."

BEFORE THE SEPARATION:

Samuel Wetherill, 1736-1816. A founding member of a branch of the RSoF called the Free Quakers (1781-1836), he wrote many of their tracts. These Friends were disowned for abandoning the peace testimony during the Revolutionary War, but they cast the issue in more general terms. They supported freedom of conscience and saw themselves as upholding the original Friends' traditions: "We have no new doctrine to teach, nor any design of promoting schisms in religion. We wish only to be freed from every species of ecclesiastical tyranny, and mean to pay a due regard to the principles of our forefathers...and hope, thereby, to preserve decency and to secure equal liberty to all. We have no designs to form creeds or confessions of faith, but [hope] to leave every man to think and judge for himself...and to answer for his faith and opinions to...the sole Judge and sovereign Lord of conscience." Their Discipline forbade all forms of disownment.

Thomas Paine, 1737-1809. Born a Quaker and buried in Quaker cemetery but not a member of Friends meetings, a passionate advocate for freedom of conscience and

human rights; in 1776 he published *Common Sense* which caused a sensation; in 1791-2 he published *Rights of Man* and in 1794 *The Age of Reason*. In this book he attacked religious institutions but supported religion that helps people live ethical lives. He was a deist and a universalist, advocating freedom of religion and separation of church and state. A stern critic of Quakers, in 1777 he wrote, “The common phrase with these people is, 'Our principles are peace.' To which may be replied, and your practices are the reverse; for never did the conduct of men oppose their own doctrine more notoriously than the present race of the Quakers. They have artfully changed themselves into a different sort of people to what they used to be, and yet have the address to persuade each other that they are not altered; like antiquated virgins, they see not the havoc deformity has made upon them, but pleasantly mistaking wrinkles for dimples, conceive themselves yet lovely and wonder at the stupid world for not admiring them.”

Job Scott, 1751-1793. Leader of the Rhode Island New Lights, supporter of reform in the RSoF. Saw all outward signs (Bible, creeds, reason, and learning) as hindrance to experience of the inward Christ born anew in every Christian. His “Journal” published in 1797 brought opposition from evangelicals.

Abraham Shackleton, 1752-1818. Leader of the Irish New Lights who objected to emphasis on legalistic Discipline, Scriptural doctrine, and disownment instead of the experience of the Inner Light; a protoHicksite disowned in 1801.

Hannah Barnard, 1754-1825. She emphasized the indwelling Christ, questioned the interpretation of events in the Bible, was more concerned with ethics than theology, and put reason above orthodoxy. She supported the French Revolution and insisted that masters and servants sit together during her visits. In 1802 she was silenced as a minister and later disowned by Friends. She said, “Nothing is revealed truth to me, as doctrine until it is sealed as such in my mind, through the illumination of...the word of God, the divine light, and intelligence, to which the Scriptures...bear plentiful testimony.” She wrote, “under the present state of the Society I can with humble reverent thankfulness rejoice in the consideration that I was made the Instrument of bringing their Darkness to light.”

OTHER PEOPLE OF THE TIME: Other Quakers disowned by the Yearly Meeting in Britain for unitarian views were William Rathbone (before 1805), and Thomas Foster (in 1812). Scientist and Unitarian Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), driven from England to the U. S. because of his views, was buried in a Quaker cemetery for lack of any other that would have him.

THE SEPARATION AND REFORM:

Elias Hicks, 1748-1830. He believed in God known inwardly. He traveled widely, encouraging others to resist attempts to change the beliefs of Friends and to erect a hierarchy of elders. He wrote, “There is scarcely anything so baneful to the present and future happiness and welfare of mankind, as a submission to traditional and popular opinion, I have therefore been led to see the necessity of investigating for myself all

customs and doctrines...either verbally or historically communicated...and not to sit down satisfied with any thing but the plain, clear, demonstrative testimony of the spirit and word of life and light in my heart and conscience.” (quoted in Forbush, 1956) Hicks emphasized the inward action of the Spirit rather than human effort or learning, but he saw a place for reason. He turned to “the light in our own consciences,...the reason of things,...the precepts and example of our Lord Jesus Christ, (and) the golden rule.” (from Forbush, 1956)

Paul Cuffe, 1759-1817. Ship captain and entrepreneur; he had close commercial and personal ties with the New Lights in Rhode Island and other Quakers in Philadelphia, New York, and England. He was given responsibilities at the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meeting levels of the RSoF. Paul Cuffe lived as a black person in white society; stood for rights of minorities; supported colonization of American blacks in their own country in Africa and voting rights in America. Son of black father and native-American mother; his wife was native-American. His was a “voice from within the veil.”

Isaac Hopper, 1771-1852. Bookseller; supported abolition and prison reform. After schism of 1828 he had to move from Philadelphia to New York City, but in 1841 he was disowned by New York Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings for being too radical; he continued to attend meeting there.

Luke Howard, 1772-1864. Chemist and meteorologist. He was conservative theologically but one of the first voices calling for a new Quaker aesthetic. In 1835 he wrote, “Beauty, then, is in that which is great, in that which is true, in that which is noble, in that which is good, and pleasing to the good--in that which God, when he had found it, pronounced good and blessed it!...We perceive it in created objects, only in proportion as they accord with a sense of truth and fitness, and harmony within: which sense we derive from God himself, and hold it in his image.”

John Griscomb, 1774-1852. Self-taught chemist, geologist, and educator. Worked on issues of mental health, poverty, and delinquency. In geology supported natural processes instead of creation. Friend of reformers in many fields.

Benjamin Ferris, 1780-1867. Advocate in Delaware for “the spirit of free inquiry”; editor of *The Berean* with James Gibbons. He rejected creedal doctrine, claimed Inner Light sufficient for salvation of any person, emphasized historical relativism, grounded religion on facts and evidence rather than mystery and emotion. In 1821-1823 he published a debate with an evangelical minister, *Letters of Paul and Amicus*. Conflict over this in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) contributed to the schism in 1827. He was the first Clerk of the Hicksite PYM.

Bernard Barton, 1784-1849. Poet and bank clerk. He lived at a time when participation in the arts was not approved by many Friends. He wrote,

Ungrateful man! to error prone;
Why thus thy Maker's goodness wrong?
And deem a Luxury alone,
His great and noble gift of song.

Hast thou not known, or felt, or heard,
How oft the poet's heav'n-born art,
Feeling and thought afresh have stirr'd,
To touch, and purify the heart?

Barton was also taken to task for displaying portraits and other paintings in his home. In reply he wrote, "My limited leisure and my failing bodily strength do not allow of my being the pedestrian I was. I often do not walk out of the streets for weeks together; but my love of nature, of earth, and sky, and water; of trees, fields, and lanes; and my still deeper love of the human face divine, is as intense as ever. As a poet, the use of these is as needful to me as my food. I can seldom get out to see the actual and the real; but a vivid transcript of these, combined with some little effort of memory and fancy, makes my little study full of life, peoples its silent walls with nature's cherished charms, and lights up human faces round me--dumb, yet eloquent in their human semblance."

Lucretia Coffin Mott, 1793-1880. Emphasized reform over differences in doctrine. Worked for rights of woman and blacks. Found God within people rather than externally. Refused to be controlled by her meeting but also refused to leave it. Was not disowned but it was considered; she did not receive permission to travel in the ministry after 1843 but did so anyway. A founding member of the Free Religious Association in 1867, when she told them, "I believe that such proving all things, such trying all things, and holding fast only to that which is good, is the great religious duty of our age. . . . Our own conscience and the Divine Spirits's teaching are always harmonious and this Divine illumination is as freely given to man as his reason, or as are many of his natural powers." She also said, "Truth speaks the same language in every age of the world and is equally valuable to us." Her Hicksite, unitarian, and transcendentalist views were considered heresy by many and in 1840 Elizabeth Fry refused to shake her hand because of them. In 1849 she said, "I confess to you, my friends, that I am a worshipper after the way called heresy, a believer after the manner many deem infidel. While at the same time my faith is firm in the blessed, the eternal doctrine preached by Jesus and by every child of God since the creation of the world, especially the great truth that God is the teacher of his people himself; the doctrine that Jesus most emphatically taught, that the kingdom is with man, that there is his sacred and divine temple." She liked to quote William Penn: "Men are to be judged by their likeness to Christ, rather than their notions of Christ."

John Greenleaf Whittier, 1807-1892. Poet, abolitionist, Christian; an example for later generations of liberals in the RSoF. He urged the acceptance of new thought with these lines from *The Meeting*:

I know how well the fathers taught,
What work the later schoolmen wrought;
I reverence old-time faith and men,
But God is near us now as then...
And still the measure of our needs
Outgrows the cramping bounds of creeds;
The manna gathered yesterday
Already savors of decay....

And from *Miriam*:

And I made answer: 'Truth is one;
And in all lands beneath the sun,
Whoso hath eyes to see may see
The tokens of its unity.
No scroll of creed its fulness wraps,
We trace it not by school-boy maps,
Free as the sun and air it is
Of latitudes and boundaries.
In Vedic verse, in dull Koran,
Are messages of good to man....'

Maria Mitchell, 1818-1889. Astronomer; professor of astronomy at Vassar College; first person to find a comet with a telescope; first woman elected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Philosophical Society, and American Academy of Arts and Sciences; founder and president of the American Association for the Advancement of Women. Described as brusque, yet tender with children; fiercely dedicated to intellectual and moral truth. Born and raised a Quaker, she resigned from the RSoF at the age of 24 because "her mind was not settled on religious subjects". She wrote in her diary, "It seems to me that if anything would make me an infidel, it would be the threats lavished against unbelief." Later she became a Unitarian and was acquainted with the Boston transcendentalists. In her diary in 1866 she wrote, "Why cannot a man act himself, be himself, and think for himself? It seems to me that naturalness alone is power; that a borrowed word is weaker than our own weakness, however small we may be. If I reach a girl's heart or head, I know I must reach it through my own, and not from bigger hearts and heads than mine." And two years later: "(Resolved)...If possible, connect myself with liberal Christian institutions, believing as I do that happiness and growth in this life are best promoted by them and that what is good in this life is good in any life." She saw no conflict between religion and science and defended Charles Darwin's theory of evolution: "I heard Mr. Adams at the Universalist Church...I was most surprised at his fear of Tyndall, Huxley and Spencer. Can the study of *truth* do harm? Does not every true scientist seek only to know the truth? And in our deep ignorance of what is truth, shall we dread the searching after it? I hold the simple student of nature in holy reverence and...I cannot bear to have these sincere workers held up in the least degree to reproach. And let us have *truth* even if the truth be the awful denial of the good God. We must face the light and not bury our heads in the Earth." (Diary, 1883) In this search for truth Maria Mitchell saw hope: "There will come with the greater love of science greater love to one another. Living more nearly to Nature is living farther from the world and from its follies, but nearer to the world's people; it is to be of them, with them, and for them, and especially for their improvement. We cannot see how impartially Nature gives of her riches to all, without loving all, and helping all; and if we cannot learn through Nature's laws the certainty of spiritual truths, we can at least learn to promote spiritual growth while we are together, and live in a trusting hope of greater growth in the future." (Wright, 1949, p. 237) At her funeral a colleague said, "There was no false note in Maria Mitchell's thinking or utterance....There were no concealments, what she said she meant, and what she thought she said...This genuineness explains also a marked feature of her religious experience. She would not use the language of faith often because it did not seem to her that she had clearly grasped the truths which came

through faith. It would be a grave error to infer from this that she was not a *religious* woman in a true sense. She was always a seeker for *truth*...earnestly, honestly, she sought to fathom the mysteries of being and of destiny that press in on all, but she would not allow herself to say one word beyond what she felt she really *knew*.” (Albers, 2001)

Susan Brownell Anthony, 1820-1906. Active supporter of rights for women, abolition of slavery, and temperance. She was raised a Quaker and considered herself one even after the family moved to the Unitarians after their meeting failed to support Anthony’s position on abolition. Elizabeth Cady Stanton called her an agnostic. She refused to express her opinion on religious subjects because she could only succeed if worked on one reform at a time. She supported tolerance and said “every religion or none should have an equal right on the platform” of the National Women’s Rights Convention in 1854. In 1886 she pleaded with a women’s organization, “These are the principles I want to maintain – that our platform may be kept as broad as the universe, that upon it may stand the representatives of all creeds and of no creeds – Jew and Christian, Protestant and Catholic, Gentile and Mormon, believer and atheist.” On another occasion she said, “I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do, because I notice it always coincides with their own desires....What you should say to outsiders is that a Christian has neither more nor less rights in our association than an atheist. When our platform becomes too narrow for people of all creeds and of no creeds, I myself can not stand upon it.” She wrote to Stanton, “You say ‘women must be emancipated from their superstitions before enfranchisement will be of any benefit,’ and I say just the reverse, that women must be enfranchised before they can be emancipated from their superstitions.” In 1896 she wrote, “At any rate, I propose to peg away in accordance with my own sense of wisdom rather than Solomon’s. All those old fellows were very good in their time, but their wisdom needs to be newly interpreted in order to apply to people of today.” Anthony said to a group of Quakers in 1885, “I don’t know what religion is. I only know what work is, and that is all I can speak on, this side of Jordan.” When asked in an interview in 1896 “Do you pray?”, she answered, “I pray every single second of my life; not on my knees, but with my work. My prayer is to lift women to equality with men. Work and worship are one with me.” In 1897 she wrote, “(I)t does not matter whether it is Calvinism, Unitarianism, Spiritualism, Christian Science, or Theosophy, they are all speculations. So I think you and I had better hang on to this mundane sphere and keep tugging away to make conditions better for the next generation of women.”

OTHER EVENTS OF THIS TIME: During the 1840s Progressive and Congregational Friends Meetings split off from Genesee, New York, and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings. They called for a religion of humanity, were active supporters of many liberal social reforms, and placed power in local meetings rather than meetings of ministers and elders.

MODERN LIBERAL QUAKERISM:

David Duncan, c.1825-1871. A merchant and manufacturer in Manchester, England, a former Presbyterian who had trained for the ministry. He married Sarah Ann Duncan and became a Friend in 1852. He was a republican, a social radical, a free thinker, and an aggressive writer and debater. Duncan began to doubt Quakers views of God and the

Bible and associated the Light Within with intellectual freedom. He developed a following at the Friends Institute, a library and social center in Manchester, and the publication of his *Essays and Reviews* in 1861 brought the attention of the Elders. In it he wrote, "If the principle were more generally admitted that Christianity is a life rather than a formula, theology would give place to religion...and that peculiarly bitter spirit which actuates religionists would no longer be associated with the profession of religion." He was disowned and died suddenly of smallpox in 1871. Sarah Ann Duncan and about 14 others resigned from the meeting. These dissidents had a modern view of Quaker membership: "They believed that formal agreement upon dogma was not necessary in a church, and urged an ideal of complete intellectual freedom among church members united only by good will and amity." (Isichei, 1970, pp. 30-31) Duncan was apparently known to Quaker liberals later in the century but he escapes note in many Quaker histories. "The forgotten Friends of Manchester, who welcomed liberal views in the 1860s, instead of the 1890s, deserve to be rescued from oblivion – they followed what they believed to be the truth in the face of what amounted to persecution, with remarkable courage, tenacity, and openness of mind." (Isichei, 1970, p. 32)

Joel Bean, 1825-1914, and **Hannah Elliott Shipley Bean**, 1830-1909. The Beans were attached to older forms of Quaker worship instead of pastors and revivals. Founders of College Park Association in California in 1887, prototype for new meetings in unprogrammed worship, receptiveness to new thought, and less emphasis on the Discipline. They were disowned by Iowa Yearly Meeting (YM) in 1892. Joel's old home meeting in New Hampshire later took them into membership although they were now living in California.

William James Potter, 1829-1893. A teacher, minister, and founder of the Free Religion Association and the World's Parliament of Religion. He was an ardent reformer who worked for abolition, universal suffrage, temperance, rights for workers and the poor, and many other causes. He was born and raised a Quaker but at the age of 20 wrote in his journal: "A great deal of Quaker theology grows more and more mysterious to me, the more I think about it...I am perfectly sick of everything in the shape of a religious creed." At 27 William Potter left the RSoF and became a Unitarian minister, but he retained a belief in an Inner Light within every person identified with Truth and revealed in one's own conscience. In 1886 he wrote, "The hope of the world lies in breaking up that kind of consistency which means simply dogmatic adherence to old traditions and doctrines, notwithstanding the enlarged knowledge that man is gaining; for such consistency is but another name for superstition, bigotry, ignorance, mental darkness, mental sloth and decay." At 38 he left the Unitarians because he could not convince them to accept non-Christians. He then founded the Free Religion Association. It supported "the self-assertion of human reason, in opposition to the claims of a merely traditional authority, whether put forth in the name of political or ecclesiastical power. From this assertion of the supremacy of the human intellect follows the practice of mental liberty, or of free inquiry, in the whole domain of human thought, and the claim in civil and personal liberty in the domain of government." (1878) Potter was in some senses a pantheist; he wrote of "the identity and oneness of Deity with the living law and energies of the universe itself." (1885) At the end of his life he helped organize the World's Parliament of Religions. After its first session in 1893 he wrote, "Though the Parliament

stated nothing by resolutions, yet by general assent it seemed to be assumed, and individually was again and again declared, that the common foundation on which the various faiths stood there together was the recognition of Supreme Being, without any anxiety to make or require definition of the supreme existence and attributes, a recognition of human brotherhood, and an expressed purpose to search for all truth and to toil unceasingly for human welfare.”

Joseph Binyon Forster, 1831-1883. A sugar refiner and disciple of the empirical philosopher John Stuart Mill. He was editor of the newspaper, *Manchester Friend*, from 1871 to 1873 and became leader of the dissidents in Manchester after the death of David Duncan in 1871. In 1867 Joseph B. Forster wrote, “...every law which fixes a limit to free thought, exists in violation of the very first of all doctrines held by the Early Quakers, - the doctrine of the ‘Inner Light’. In 1873 the dissident Friends described themselves thus: “There is no organization of any kind; there are neither officers, nor any of the religious ‘orders’ to be found in other Christian societies; hence no name has been adopted.” Their group was never large: about 30 attended meeting for worship in a hall near the meetinghouse. The later history of this group is not known with certainty. Some of Duncan’s followers refused to leave the RSoF, such as Charles Thompson (1819-1903), John B. Edmondson (1831-1887), and Mary Jane Hodgson, an artist and poet who wrote, “There is no question but that the Society is narrowing itself to a creed...it is impossible for me to express to thee what a cruel thing I feel this to be...Oh, that our preachers would leave off harping on doctrinal head matters and speak to the heart & soul.” (quoted in Kennedy, 2001, p. 81)

Alfred William Bennett, 1833-1902. Botanist, photographer, bookseller, publisher of the journal, *The Friend*, and of many beautiful books. He was an advocate of photography and the arts in a time when many Quakers considered them improper. In 1867 he wrote, “Call it by what name you will, mysticism, spiritualism, transcendentalism, it will scarcely be going beyond what history warrants to affirm that every writer or thinker who has taken deep hold of the hearts, not of the intellects, of mankind, has been a teacher of the doctrine of the ‘Divine Principle in man’, of the ‘enthusiasm...of humanity’. An illustration of the same truth will be furnished by every poet who has touched the deepest sympathies of the heart, whether he write in prose or verse....He that dishonoureth the creature dishonoureth the Creator.”

George Stewardson Brady, 1833-1913. Scientist, member of the Royal Society in London, supporter of Charles Darwin. Brady published opinion pieces in the dissident *Manchester Friend*. In 1873 he wrote, “(U)nless this Society shows in coming years more capacity to discern the signs of the times than it has recently shown, unless it can be brought to see that religious belief...must advance with...advancing knowledge, it will inevitably fall back, even further than it has already fallen, from its old position in the advanced guard of religious freedom.” Thomas Kennedy wrote about him: “Brady’s *Essay on the Exercise of the Intellect in Matters of Religious Belief* (1868) was a plea for free thought, for the legitimacy of biblical criticism and for the need to reconcile modern scientific principles with traditional religious beliefs.” (2001, p. 92)

Joseph Rowntree, 1836-1925. Chocolate manufacturer and reformer of RSoF and society in general, he established the Rowntree Charitable Trust which continues to support socially useful projects. He was the father of leading Quaker liberal, John Wilhelm Rowntree (1868-1905). Joseph Rowntree helped craft the London YM response to the Richmond Declaration of 1887, when he wrote, “(T)he general welfare of the Society of Friends the world over will not be advanced by one Yearly Meeting following exactly in the footsteps of another, but by each being faithful to its own convictions and experience. This may not result in a rigid uniformity of either thought or action, but it is likely to lead to something far better – to a true and living unity.”

Isaac Sharpless, 1848-1920. Early leader of liberal movement in Philadelphia YM (Orthodox); president of Haverford College; wrote on geometry, astronomy, natural philosophy, and history of RSoF.

William Littleboy, c.1852-1936. He and his wife Margaret were among the first staff at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Center. Littleboy advocated for Quakers who do not have mystical experiences, ethical living as basis for religion, and extension of RSoF to a multitude of skeptics. He was concerned about the emphasis on Quaker mysticism in William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1902. That year he wrote to Rufus Jones urging consideration be given to Quakers who do not have mystical experiences, and in 1916 he published the pamphlet, *The Appeal of Quakerism to the Non-Mystic*. In it he wrote, “Can I who never consciously heard the inward voice, who am not of those to whom it is given to see visions and dream dreams – *dare* I believe that a real and intimate relationship exists between God and my own dull and earth-clogged soul?...We know that to some choice souls god’s messages come in ways which are super-normal, and it is natural that we should look with longing eyes on these; yet such cases are the exception, not the rule....Let us then take ourselves at our best. We *are* capable of thought and care for others. We *do* at times abase ourselves that others may be exalted. On occasion we succeed in loving our enemies and doing good to those who despitefully use us. For those who are nearest to us we would suffer – perhaps even give our life, because we love them so....But indeed all life is, or may become, sacramental to one who will have it so....I think that our enquiry leads irresistibly to the conclusion that the Quaker message, if adequately set forth, will meet a very wide response....To the great non-mystic majority [the Quaker’s] appeal should come with special power, for he can speak to them, as none other can whose gospel is less universal”. This influenced the young Henry Cadbury who said in 1957, “I am sure that over the years [William Littleboy’s] perceptive presentation of the matter has brought real relief to many of us.”

John William Graham, 1859-1932. Teacher and advocate of modernization in the RSoF. In 1888 he lobbied against acceptance by London YM of the Richmond Declaration: “(W)e *must* exert ourselves if the battle for truth and progress is not to be lost. It is terrible to think that the sublime carelessness of dogma, and most potent insistence on spiritual *life* that Early Friends exhibited should be lost, just at the time when a creedless Fellowship for a higher life is so much the one thing needful for the age.” (quoted in Kennedy, 2001, p. 114) Regarding art, in 1920 Graham wrote, “This Quaker denial of the beauty of colour was pointed out to me thirty-five years ago by John Ruskin as the cause of the decay of the Society. ‘Your early Friends,’ he said, ‘would

have carried all before them if they had not been false to that which is obeyed by the whole of the animal creation, the love of colour.’ Allowing for exaggeration there is much in it, especially if we extend "colour," metaphorically, to cover music, dancing, and the theatre.”

Jesse Herman Holmes, 1863-1942. A humanist and passionate advocate for Quakerism free of creeds. He was one of the founders of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), clerk of Progressive Friends Meeting at Longwood, chairman of the National Federation of Religious Liberals, for many years professor of philosophy at Swarthmore College, and a political candidate for the Socialist Party. In 1928 he published “To the Scientifically Minded” and engaged in a national campaign to attract scientists to the RSoF. In this article he wrote, “It is a Society of *Friends*. Friends claim no authority but owe each other friendliness...Our unity consists, therefore, in having a common purpose, not a common creed...God is...the name of certain common experiences of mankind by which they are bound together into unity.” He did not see religion as establishing truth, as he wrote in 1912: “The accurate formulating of our ends and of the tested ways of attaining them is the function of philosophy and the sciences. The more difficult task of holding ourselves to the higher loyalties is that of religion. Not the discovery of truth but the patient using of it for the more abundant life is its task.” In 1931 he wrote, “It has not been, and should never be, that knowledge of truth as revealed to the scientist, is out of place in our galleries. Certainly that vision of what should be which in all ages is the heart of religion, must be based on what is now, or our temple will lack foundation and be no more than a castle in the air. The spirit of the Society of Friends is closely allied to the spirit of the genuine scientists. It involves that intimate relation between ourselves and our world which makes any final statement of it in a formula impossible...I believe a very large and increasing number of the scientists of the world are in unity with the essential Quaker point of view.”

Rufus Matthew Jones, 1863-1948. Worked to return RSoF to its roots and eliminate more recent dogma. Advocate of unity among Friends, communicating effectively with everyone; successful administrator, diplomat, and scholar. Saw God in the world and not in creeds and stood for a broad definition of Quakerism. Mystic and theist. A founder of the AFSC.

Arthur Stanley Eddington, 1882-1934. An astronomer who felt that scientists and Quakers had something important in common. In 1930 he wrote, “I think that the spirit of seeking is still the prevailing one in our faith, which for that reason is not embodied in any creed or formula...The finding of one generation will not serve the next. It tarnishes rapidly except it be preserved with an ever-renewed spirit of seeking...I think it may be said that Quakerism in dispensing with creeds holds out a hand to the scientist...The spirit of seeking which animates us refuses to regard any kind of creed as its goal...Rejection of a creed is not inconsistent with being possessed by a living belief. We have no creed in science, but we are not lukewarm in our beliefs...If our so-called facts are changing shadows, they are shadows cast by the light of constant truth.”

Henry Joel Cadbury, 1883-1974. Advocate for Quakerism without mysticism, ethical living as ones religion, spontaneous response to passing situations, beliefs as collateral

effects rather than sources of action, both/and instead of either/or. Worked his entire life for unity among Friends, urging a broadly inclusive definition of Quakerism. Historian of RSoF; humorist. He was the brother-in-law of Quaker mystic, Rufus Jones. Famous for hiding his beliefs while helping you find yours. On a few occasions he hinted that he was an agnostic, e.g. in 1936 he said, "I can describe myself as no ardent theist or atheist." In the same talk he also said, "My own religion is mainly neither emotional nor rational but expresses itself habitually or occasionally in action...If you know John Woolman's Journal you will know what I mean by a religious personality in action...The amazing revelation which he gives is that of a sensitive conscience feeling its course in a series of soul-searching problems – public problems that he felt must be personally decided. Such forms of religion do not often get recorded, but they are none the less real and important...And what is the real test or evidence of religion that I can offer in myself?...It is whether in all our contacts...you can conclude that not consciously nor for display I represent the manner of reaction that befits a religious personality in action." In 1959 he suggested that often we preach what we practice instead of the other way around: "Ever since its earliest days Quakerism has been something appreciated by the adherent rather than deliberately advertised. For that reason it has not depended on definition and formulation. These have followed *ex post facto*. They are not blueprints of a course of development to be recommended. They are analysis of the deposits of experience." In 1962 he put it simply: "I have been willing that life should be spontaneous response to passing situations or problems – rather than a plan or pattern."

OTHER EVENTS OF THIS TIME: Edward Trusted Bennett (1831-1908) was the last Quaker disowned for heresy by the Yearly Meeting in Britain (in 1873). An step was the publication in London in 1884 of *A Reasonable Faith: Short Essays for the Times by Three 'Friends'* by Francis Frith (1822-1898), William Pollard (1828-1893), and William Edward Turner (1836-1911). Edward Grubb (1854-1939) and John Wilhelm Rowntree (1868-1905) were other early advocates of Quaker liberalism in Britain. The conference of Friends in Manchester in 1895 was a clear declaration of their views. Important events in United States were the first Summer School (on the British model) at Haverford College in 1900, the founding of Friends General Conference in 1900, AFSC in 1917, Pendle Hill in 1930, Wider Quaker Fellowship in 1936, and Friends World Committee for Consultation in 1937.

RECENT QUAKER NONTHEISTS:

Arthur Morgan, 1878-1975. Engineer, educator, utopian. President of Antioch College 1920-1936, chairman and chief engineer of the Tennessee Valley Authority 1933-1938, a founder of Celo Community in 1935, a founder of the Fellowship of Intentional Communities in 1948. He was a Unitarian who became a Friend in 1940. On his 90th birthday in a talk to his meeting titled *Necessity*; he said, "What do I mean by right conduct? It is conduct which makes me approach the truth. What is truth? Truth is the expression of necessity...So, the only way I see for being free from necessity is to follow her eagerly and to hunt out her desires before she enforces them upon me. In that way she gives continually larger range to move about in...I have not seen evidence which has led me to know of any order of existence beyond that of matter-energy. I do not hold that

there is no such evidence, but I have seen none which impressed me, though I was desirous of being sensitive to any such....With the theist, searching for the cause behind the cause, I do not wish to dispute. I only confess that the idea he holds has not been revealed to me, though I have endeavored to search honestly....With weak insight, and deaf to celestial music, if any there be, I can only say in honesty I do not see angel wings or hear celestial music from other orders of being....There is no easy way to an optimum course of living....Objective critical study of necessity, motivated by caring much about life, and sustained by aspiration and critical imagination, gives hope of being productive....I have nearly run my course. I live in the future – the future of mankind, and of life. I do not look forward to personal immortality. I see the person I call *me* as not a separate unit of life. It is a thread in the fabric of life, a moment in the course of being. Day by day I live and have my joy, as part of mankind. Day by day I live and find my joy in the future. I feel great hope, but not certainty, for human life. The issue I would live by is this: Will the continuity of life have more value because I have lived? Bodily pleasures and personal ambitions are but incidental in comparison. What sets limits of prospect for fulfillment of great hope? It probably is, I believe, the degree of caring enough about life and the will to make the utmost contribution. What do I believe for my friends and fellow men? It is that they may share to the full this great hope. I wish it because I know of no greater wish for them.”

Morris Mitchell, 1895-1976. Founder of Macedonia Cooperative Community in 1937, director of Putney Graduate School, 1950-1964; founder of Friends World College and its president, 1964-1972. One person who knew him described him as an atheist, but further research is needed. In any case, Morris Mitchell was not attached to any one religious vocabulary. He wrote, “In our search for truth relevant to our times, we can, and doubtless will, continue to use traditional value words, but every word must assume revised meaning. For example, among Christians the ‘divinity of Christ,’ at first threatened by the growth of objective understanding, loses its uniqueness and its superstitious qualities and becomes in a superlative degree that gift for sympathetic love with which every human is endowed. Again, to listen for the ‘voice of God’ is to open one’s being, heart, and mind in earnest, ‘reverent’ search for the meaning of the unfolding of the powers of truth. And a localized, personalized god becomes those all-pervasive forces and motives that govern every electron of every galaxy.” (1967, p. 18) Mitchell explained, “World Education is, by definition, moral education. But it cannot be doctrinaire for the obvious reason that the world will never agree on doctrine. If Quakerism rested on dogma, then the name *Friends World Institute* would be a contradiction in terms. While Quakerism was Christian in origin, increasing numbers of Friends are humanist and hold a cosmic theology. Quakers do believe in the dignity, worth, and beauty, call it ‘divinity,’ of all people, and that conflicts should be resolved peaceably.” (1967, p. 229) In 1971 Bart Sobel wrote about him, "Mitchell is opposed to the role and practice of traditional religious institutions in society. He believes that worshipping a supreme being lessens the importance of every individual; people give up a part of themselves to an external power....Mitchell believes that individuals must assume responsibility for their own actions and welfare. He wants people to rid themselves of unquestioned obedience to a supernatural authority....He believes that 'there is that of God in every one of us.' Therefore, he feels that people must speak of the divinity of every man, woman, and child, so that they come to respect one another for the

infinite capacities which they possess....Mitchell sees World Education as one vehicle which will help bring about the change of emphasis from traditional religious practices to humanism....In an unconventional and unorthodox way, Mitchell is a deeply religious man....Mitchell has devoted his life to the principles in the philosophy of World Education. He not only sees these as educational principles, but also as a cornerstone of his philosophy of life. His devotion to these principles is intense and unswerving. To Mitchell, the philosophy of World Education is not only an educational theory, not only a philosophy of life, not only a vehicle to change culture, but also a philosophy of religion."

John Linton, c.1918- . In the original letter announcing the formation of the Quaker Universalist Group in 1977, he wrote, "This new group would be committed to the view that, however great one's reverence for the teachings and personality of Jesus, no faith can claim to be a unique revelation or to have a monopoly of truth. Because Christianity traditionally makes this claim, members of the group feel that they cannot limit themselves by calling themselves Christians. In their search for truth, and also in the interests of world peace and brotherhood, they are opposed to all divisive religious claims. They take the view that truth can be reached by more than one path. Yet because they believe in the Quaker way of life, and that Quakerism is universally valid and not dependent on Christianity, they have no wish to cut themselves off from the Society of Friends." In 1979 Linton published "Quakerism as Forerunner" in which he wrote, "It seems to me that the Society would be greatly strengthened by the influx of people who claim to be agnostic rather than Christian and yet who sincerely share the fundamental aspirations of Quakers. I shall therefore argue not merely that the Society should admit such people as a fringe element of 'second-class members' (which is what they feel at the present), but that it should widen its own basis and give up its claim to be a specifically Christian organization. I think this should be done not just as a matter of expediency, but in the pursuit of Truth, because I believe the Truth is wider than Christianity. And I like to think that Quakerism is about the search for Truth." In reaction to these views, there has been an effort to establish Christian universalism among Friends. This is universalist in that it holds everyone can be saved by Christ.

Kingdon Swayne, c.1920- . In 1980 he published "Confessions of a Post-Christian Agnostic", and in 1984 and 1985 was appointed clerk of Philadelphia YM. This is a credit to both of them. He wrote, "My own religious life can perhaps be best understood as an effort to build moral stability and connectedness by creating a web of motivation and behavior that is internally consistent and emotionally satisfying. I describe myself as post-Christian because both my best behavior and its motivations owe much to Christian thinking, though I reject most of the traditional theology....If one rejects the authority [of Jesus] and most of the Christian tradition, where does one begin to build a belief system? I think I begin with the existentialist proposition that life without meaning or purpose is intolerable. Therefore one must define the meaning and purpose of one's own life. I believe this task is within my power and is my sole responsibility. I prefer to see myself not as finding and doing God's will but as striving for goodness on the basis of general principles that are derived from my own sense of the nature of the universe....If I had presented this paper to Worship and Ministry of Newtown Meeting 150 years ago, would this meeting still be in session, or would I have long since been sent home in disgrace;

branded a heretic? Can Worship and Ministry accept me in 1979? If you can, is this a confession of laxness on your part? Has the Religious Society of Friends lost any semblance of a core set of beliefs? Are we really comfortable with the notion that a sincere seeker may arrive at some bizarre interim conclusions on his or her road to true enlightenment, or that she or he may in fact never find the right road at all? Well I hope we are, because I would really like to stick around to see whether one day my enlightenment will come more to resemble that of George Fox or John Woolman. I would also like to stick around because the Quaker ambience does have meaning for me....I grew up in the Religious Society of Friends, and I feel comfortable with many aspects of it. I like its rebellion against orthodoxy, its commitments to service and non-violence, its disdain of 'hireling ministers,' its careful rationality, and above all its de-ritualized ritual....Writing this paper has been a richly rewarding experience. I have been forced to firm up and pull together a lot of ideas that have been floating disconnectedly through my mind. Now that I put it all together, the structure seems quite formidable....I am very much alive to the possibility that some new truth may come my way that will cause the whole structure to collapse. Then what fun it will be to build a new one!"

Fourteen years later, in 1994, Swayne wrote, "I have since concluded that 'agnostic' was the wrong word, for the troika of believer-agnostic-atheist really limits the issue to whether or not God exists. The true issue, I think, is how best to think about the ability of humans to experience inner lives that seem in some sense to be metaphysical – beyond the physical, the rational, and the emotional. I now speak of my metaphysics as 'nontheistic'." This is the earliest use of that term in a Quaker publication that I know of.

Eric Johnson, ? - c.1995. In 1991 he published "Why I am an Atheist" in which he states, "For me God does not exist. God is an invention of human minds to help them deal with the inexplicable....If you need God and believe in God, fine! But that doesn't cause God to exist....Though I have no faith in God, I *do* seek: how to make the world better, even how to make *me* better. But I think *faith* is irresponsible. We must *think* – to use our minds and our bodies to make the world better. Faith is a kind of short-circuit that can destroy the mind or weaken it. Faith means: "without evidence or reason." Five months later he published a letter explaining, "[The responses] have been so profound, witty, and intelligent that I hereby tell you that I have been lovingly and powerfully and nonviolently forced to modify my state of mind: I hereby declare that I am no longer an atheist; I have become an *agnostic*."

Alice Lynd, ? - , and **Staughton Lynd**, 1929- . Long time advocates for peace and human rights. Alice has been draft counselor, teacher, and director of day care and health centers. Staughton has been historian, teacher, labor lawyer, and community organizer, director of freedom schools in Mississippi in 1964, chairman of march on Washington in 1965. Staughton has described himself as an "agnostic or atheist" but I do not know how Alice would describe herself. In 1996 they published *Liberation Theology for Quakers*, the first paragraph of which is a fine declaration of faith from a nontheist perspective: "We are Quakers. We have faith that there is a potential for good in every person, and that this 'inner light' needs no mediation by priest or church. We believe in treating people as equals. We believe in nonviolence and forgiveness. We disavow retaliation or retribution. We try to practice direct speaking, speaking truth to power, and living consistently with our values. We follow a simple way of life and try to be responsible

stewards of the earth and its resources. We think these are Quaker beliefs.” Later on in the pamphlet they call for an emphasis on lives rather than doctrine: “We believe that there is Scriptural authority for an approach to Jesus’ teaching based on what people *do*, not on what they *think*. Jesus says that people who feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, and comfort the afflicted, will experience salvation even if during their lives they are unaware of Jesus and give no thought to him (Matthew 25:31-46). Saying ‘Lord, Lord’ is not the path to salvation, for the righteous will be known by their fruits not by their words (Matthew 7:20-21). The unbeliever who does good deeds – the Good Samaritan – will be preferred to the church member who passes by on the other side (Luke 10:30-37).” At the end of the pamphlet are these conclusions: “The following are things we think we have learned. We offer them as challenges and concerns. First, it seems to us that liberation theology teaches an important lesson for Friends concerned to practice reconciliation. Our goal must be a society of equals. Friends should be wary of mediation if it leaves in place the inequality between the rich and powerful, on the one hand, and the poor and oppressed, on the other....Second, if Friends are to address oppression and injustice, Friends need to encounter in a day-to-day manner the life situation of the poor and oppressed....Third, we believe that Friends must be willing to go to out-of-the-way places and stay there for long periods of time...Fourth, Friends need to be building community. Self-fulfillment is not a sufficient goal, for ourselves or for others....Finally, we urge Friends to trust their weight to the idea that the Kingdom of God is available here and now.” A nontheist can trust an idea expressed in theistic terms.

OTHER RECENT EVENTS: In 1996, publication of survey in which Ben Pink Dandelion asked 692 British Friends if they believed in God and 26% answered “No” or “Not sure.” In 1996 and continuing, *Nontheism Among Friends* workshops at FGC. In 2003 and continuing, NontheistFriends@topica.com e-mail listserv and Nontheists.Quaker.Org website. In 2004, course on Quaker nontheism at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Center. Many recent publications by Quaker humanists, nontheists, or nearly-nontheists including Stephen Allott, Robin Alpern, George Amoss Jr., John Banks, David Boulton, Os Cresson, Scott Crom, David E. Drake, Kenneth Ives, Harold Loukes, Philip Mayer, Thomas Miles, David Rush, T. Noel Stern, and more.

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OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO QUAKER NONTHEISTS:

Nontheism Among Friends, workshop usually given at the Friends General Conference Gathering;
see www.fgcquaker.org/gathering
NontheistFriends@topica.com: e-mail list serve for Quaker nontheists
<http://nontheists.quaker.org>: website for Quaker nontheists

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