

## Some quotations from earlier Friends

### **Lucretia Mott** (1793–1880)

“Men [sic] are too superstitious, too prone to believe what is presented to them by their church and creed; they ought to follow Jesus more in his non-conformity. . . . I hold that skepticism is a religious duty; men [sic] should question their theology and doubt more in order that they might believe more.”

### **Isaac Pennington** (1616-1679)

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, and that he walks in his rank, in his own order, in his proper way and place of subjection to that; and this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk.

*The Works of Isaac Pennington: A Minister of the Gospel in the Society of Friends: Including His Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 1681/1995

### **Gerard Winstanley** (1609–c.1660)

The Spirit Reason, which I call God . . . is that spiritual power, that guides all men's reasoning in right order, and to a right end: for the Spirit Reason doth not preserve one creature and destroy another . . . but it hath a regard to the whole creation; and knits every creature together into a oneness, making every creature to be an upholder of his fellow.

David Boulton, *Militant Seedbeds of Early Quakerism*. Landenberg, PA: Quaker Universalist Fellowship, 2005. <http://www.universalistfriends.org/boulton.html>.

**Hannah Barnard** (1754–1825) of New York questioned the interpretation of events in the Bible and put reason above orthodoxy and ethics over theology.

“[N]othing is revealed truth to me, as doctrine, until it is sealed as such on the mind, through the illumination of that uncreated word of God, or divine light, and intelligence, to which the Scriptures, as well as the writings of many other enlightened authors, of different ages, bear plentiful testimony. . . . I therefore do not attach the idea or title of divine infallibility to any society as such, or to any book, or books, in the world; but to the great source of eternal truth only.”

### **John Bartram** (1699–1777)

A farmer and perhaps the best known botanist in the American colonies, Bartram had a mystical feeling for the presence of God in nature and supported the rational study of nature. In 1758 he was disowned by Darby Meeting for saying Jesus was not divine, but he continued to worship at that meeting and was

buried there. In 1761 he carved a quotation from Alexander Pope over the door of his greenhouse: “Slave to no sect, who takes no private road, but looks through Nature up to Nature’s God.” In 1743 he wrote, “When we are upon the topic of astrology, magic and mystic divinity, I am apt to be a little troublesome, by inquiring into the foundation and reasonableness of these notions” In a letter to Benjamin Rush he wrote, “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.”

David Scofield Wilson, *In the Presence of Nature* (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), p. 92; John Bartram to Peter Collinson, June 11, 1743, in William Darlington and Peter Collinson, Eds., *Memorials of John Bartram and Humphrey Marshall* (New York: Hafner, 1967), p. 164; John Bartram to Benjamin Rush, December 5, 1767, in Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Natures of John and William Bartram* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 62.

### **Maria Mitchell** (1818-1889)

She wrote in her diary (and all the following quotes are from the privacy of her diary), “It seems to me that if anything would make me an infidel, it would be the threats lavished against unbelief.” Later, she wrote, “Why cannot a man [sic] 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.”

### **Susan B. Anthony** (1820–1906)

“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.” In a speech in 1896 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.”

### **Henry Cadbury** (1883-1974)

Some people suppose a certain religious faith – like belief in God, in future life, in the role of Jesus – is essential. Experience shows devotion, sincerity, even saintliness can go along with more than one type of theological position. This is much like what Oliver Tomkins said at Oxford in ’52 speaking on behalf of the World Council. “You Friends are a standing perplexity to other Christians, you enjoy the spirit of Christian life without the forms . . . that we have supposed essential.”

Unpublished manuscript (notes for a talk at Doylestown Monthly Meeting), 1962, p. 4, *Cadbury Papers*, Quaker Collection, Haverford College Library.