

# Universalist Friends

The Journal Of The Quaker Universalist Fellowship

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Quaker Universalist Fellowship



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**The Quaker Universalist Fellowship** is an informal gathering of persons who cherish the spirit of universality that has always been intrinsic to the Quaker faith. We acknowledge and respect the diverse spiritual experience of those within our own meetings as well as of the human family worldwide; we are enriched by our conversation with all who search sincerely. Our mission includes publishing and providing speakers and opportunities for fellowship at regional and national Quaker gatherings.

**Universalist Friends** and a QUF pamphlet are published twice a year and are available free to on-line subscribers. These publications are available as web pages (HTML) for browsing, ebooks (PDF) for on-line reading, and pamphlets (booked PDF) for printing. Visit our website at <http://www.universalistfriends.org>. To enter a free on-line subscription you need only enter information into a simple form. You will then be able to access our newest material on-line, and we will notify you via e-mail when our next publications are posted.

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## Book Review

Silence And Witness: The Quaker Tradition  
By Michael L. Birkel (Orbis Books, 2004. \$16.00)

It is interesting to note that the first book published by Orbis Books (the press of the Maryknoll Fathers) in its "Traditions of Spirituality" series that is other than "high" church was chosen to be Quaker. The first sixteen volumes in this series portray traditions from the large, mostly well known and well established Christian faiths. Eleven of these came from Roman Catholic orders; of the other five, one each reflected the Anglican, Greek Rite, liturgical, Celtic and medieval English mystical traditions.

This is a clear explanation for the unfamiliar on how Quakerism interprets mystical insights with prophetic witness, how group worship in silence developed, and how collective discernment is used in decision making. Michael Birkel, who is a professor of religion at Earlham College, writes with a lovely quiet Quakerly patience which has no hint of patronizing his largely Catholic audience who may be learning about Quakers for the first time.

His citations from Quaker insights are germane, short, and excellent choices for illustrating his text. I highly recommend this discourse for both newcomers and experienced Friends. It increases one's own knowledge of Quakerism as well as being an excellent treatise to share with an interested friend.

Sally Rickerman

## From The Clerk

Dear Friends,

To have a universalist perspective is to be aware that something of value can be found in each of the diverse religious cultures which have arisen during humankind's long pilgrimage on this earth. While all religions are by no means alike, each seeks to preserve and pass along a noble and attractive vision of what the human person can become; each encourages an awareness that there is a spirit of goodness and truth which has need of us and to which we can resonate in our way of living, becoming liberated from bondage to our own egos.

It seems also universally true that the worst enemies of any particular faith are usually its own followers. While faith communities often have had an unfortunate tendency to regard people of other religions as enemies, in reality alien spiritual cultures rarely represent any particular threat to a healthy and vibrant religious community. What undermines them is the bad name they get, and the backlash that is caused, by the behavior of members of their own faith community.

What are we to make of a state of affairs when, in the name of religion, one side in an armed conflict mercilessly beheads captives on television, while the other side, also prone to flaunting its religion on its sleeve, tortures its prisoners in a worldwide private gulag? And where are the protests? Where are the voices of the people who voted for "morality"? Where are the learned voices of prophetic law?

We have been taught, correctly, that the human spirit cannot survive on bread alone. The attempt on the part of North Atlantic civilization to retreat into a world of pure reason and scientific empiricism has not led to virtue. In fact it has led to crimes more horrible than those committed by religious fanatics. As universalists it is our calling to advance a hopeful

and optimistic regard for the good things religious traditions have to offer. But it would also seem necessary, in the interest of our own coherence and integrity, to protest the misuses to which sacred traditions are all too often being put.

Dan Seeger, Clerk  
Quaker Universalist Fellowship Steering Committee

## From The Editor

The past two years have been a time of transition for the Fellowship. There have been a number of changes, but underlying most of them has been the transition from print to electronic publishing. It has been rewarding but not easy. Thanks to the imagination and skill of Jim and Susan Rose (not to mention their hard work) we have a refurbished web site and are moving steadily ahead with making our wealth of past publications as well as our current offerings accessible online. The “digital divide,” is a reality, however, and we are struggling to keep it from becoming a barrier, especially to older readers and to small meetings and worship groups.

Directly related to this transition has been a shift from paid membership dues to dependence on contributions. Nevertheless, we have not abandoned our members, and we have faith that they will not abandon us. We have a standing — and growing — membership roster. To be placed on it, you may either send a contribution to our treasurer or register at our web site. The registration is free and only requires you to enter information into a form. You will be able to access our newest material on-line, and we will notify you via e-mail when our next publications are posted. You will receive special mailings, and your comments and submissions are always welcome. We also have a list of paying subscribers consisting of those who still need printed copies of our publications.

But, that center has since escaped  
Both our adversaries,  
And ourselves, the advocates —  
So nothing, now is left  
And all is gone.  
For in our struggle to impose  
Our certitudes on others  
And, without the very adding  
Of the *winning* essence —  
*That of Love!*  
That war is lost for all  
For now!

Sally Rickerman  
11/30/04

A father, a mother grieve for their only son, an Army  
Specialist.  
"He wanted to be an engineer," the father remembers.  
"He wanted to set up his own business when he got out.  
And I says, 'Amigo, I'm waiting for you to get out  
so we can put up our own business.'  
And all that, well, you know, is history."

The Major General carefully, caringly folds The American  
Flag, places the nation's ensign into the mother's hands

1/11/05

Maxwell Corydon Wheat, Jr. ©

Permission Given to Use Poem with Author Credit

## Wars?

The battle won  
But not the war,  
Bolsters the thought —  
No more! — No more!

With items incremental  
We have succeeded.  
But in the end  
The bloody scars  
Cut down so very deep  
That ever more, from wounds  
Which may still seep  
From hurts so freely made,  
When we sought to save  
That, which we felt  
Was the very center of our lives.

We have also had changes in leadership. As most readers know, last year Daniel Seeger became clerk of our steering committee. Richard Barnes, our clerk for some years, has taken on the duties of treasurer and secretary. George Amoss turned over the editorship of *Universalist Friends* to Bob McCoy, who was soon forced to resign by unexpected circumstances in his own life. I have continued as editor of pamphlets and am serving as interim editor of *Universalist Friends* for this issue. I also edited the panel of talks from Northern Yearly Meeting that appeared in issue number 40. Finally, Sally Rickerman continues to serve as Elder Emeritus and custodian of our institutional memory. We are grateful for her continuing contributions to the Quaker Universalist Fellowship.

Rhoda Gilman

## News Notes

### Quaker Universalist Listserve

Online Friends will remember that Rhoda Gilman operated a discussion group for Quaker Universalists. This was a labor of love on her part. It took a lot of manual work and sometimes there were days or weeks between mailings. We now have replaced it with a Yahoo Group listserv. This service allows you to control when you want to join, when you want to leave the group, and whether you want to receive individual emails or a daily digest or no mail at all.

To register for this service you need first to set up an account with Yahoo. This is free of charge and is a way to ensure that we do not all receive more spam messages. To set up your account go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/> and click on "New user: Sign up". The form requests your name, zip code and e-mail address, and asks you to create your own username and password.

Once a member of Yahoo, there are two ways for an individual to join the group. First you can send a blank e-mail to [quf-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:quf-subscribe@yahoo.com). A second way is to visit the site on the web: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/quf> where you will find an option to "Join This Group!" Submitting posts is done simply by e-mailing your message to [quf@yahoo.com](mailto:quf@yahoo.com). It will post almost immediately, which then allows for quite a spontaneous discussion.

Since its initiation, the QUF group has seen participation from Friends from Canada to Greece. We have had 135 messages on a variety of topics or "threads." Among the most popular were:

- Transcendental Quakerism (24)
- Nontheist Friends Listserv (18)
- Universalist? (13)
- Unitarian Universalist Seeking Guidance (11)
- Essence of Quakerism (10)
- Changing Universalism (8)

We hope that you will find this service easy to use and will join us in discussing Quakerism, Universalism, and almost any other topic you feel is lively among Quaker Universalists. To quote Lucretia Mott: "I hold that skepticism is a religious duty; men [and women] should question their theology, and doubt more in order that they might believe more."

Elaine Pagels to Lecture for Friends

The Quaker Universalist Fellowship, in cooperation with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, has arranged a one-day event which will feature a lecture by Elaine Pagels followed by lunch and discussion groups. It will be held on May 21, 2005 at Arch Street Meetinghouse in Philadelphia. Elaine Pagels is Harrington Spere Professor of Religion at Princeton University and a distinguished scholar of gnosticism. She is author of five books and the winner of national book awards.

30-year-old Army Private First Class  
Tuba City, Arizona.  
". . . young, a single mother and capable."  
Her boy, 4 — her girl, 3.  
Woman proud of her Hopi heritage —  
All lidded down inside casket  
carefully, caringly covered with The American Flag

20-year-old Marine Corps Corporal  
La Harpe, Illinois.  
High school football, basketball player,  
lifeguard at health club pool,  
lifts weights,  
going to be a physical trainer.  
Joins Marine Corps Reserve  
to pay for studies at Southern Illinois University —  
All lidded down inside casket  
carefully, caringly covered with The American Flag

21-year-old Marine Corps Corporal  
Gallatin, Tennessee.  
Nurses dying mother with his humor,  
dresses in clown costume for nieces' birthdays.  
History buff, reads fat books about generals,  
presidents, the Revolutionary War —  
All lidded down inside casket  
carefully, caringly covered with The American Flag

24-year-old Coast Guard Petty Officer  
Northport, New York.  
Wife, three months pregnant.  
Wants to be a policeman like his father.  
". . . the kind of person that you fall in love with  
the minute that you meet him," a friend says —  
All lidded down inside casket  
carefully, caringly covered with The American Flag

## American Mourning Poem

American Service Men and Women Dead - 1355

"Coming Home"

"Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised."

George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
State of the Union Address  
January 28, 2003

In catacombs of military transports  
destined for Dover Air Force Base,  
loves, beliefs, ideals, plans:  
Hancock Community College,  
University of Miami,  
New York Police Academy,  
weddings, children,  
barbeques, baseball, bass fishing —  
All lidded down inside caskets  
carefully, caringly covered with The American Flag

25-year-old Marine Corps Corporal  
St. George, Maine.  
Sailor, rock climber, stargazer.  
On dance floor, "... like a magnet."  
Loves lobsters, mussels —  
All lidded down inside casket  
carefully, caringly covered with The American Flag

Since the 1979 publication of Pagels' book, *The Gnostic Gospels*, which was based on the 1945 discovery of ancient scrolls at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, Friends have been fascinated with the similarity of the gnostic teachings to the practice by early Friends of what they believed was the true and original form of Christianity. Many Friends have attended Pagels' lectures, read her other books, or followed her on radio or TV. The result has been a widespread desire to have the author speak before a Quaker audience on her findings. It was felt that her message would help Friends better understand the uniqueness of the message of George Fox and other 17th-century Quakers. To arrange this event several Friends formed a Working Group under the Standing Committee of Worship and Care of PYM. Grants have been received from both the Chace and Bequests Funds of PYM and from the QUF to support this event.

A sample of Pagels' understandings is conveyed by the following three quotations. In her book *Beyond Belief* she says:

Since Christians often adopt Irenaeus' view of controversy, many still insist that only their church, . . . actually remains faithful to Jesus' teaching. Furthermore, since Christian tradition teaches that Jesus fully revealed God two thousand years ago, innovators from Francis of Assisi to Martin Luther, from George Fox to John Wesley to contemporary feminist and liberation theologians, often have disguised innovation — even from themselves — by claiming that they are not introducing anything new but only clarifying what Jesus actually meant all along.

The second quotation is from her *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, when talking about Valentinus' understanding of going beyond the elementary steps of faith, baptism and moral reform to spiritual illumination:

Other gnostics claimed to know the secret teachings of Jesus himself — teaching only hinted at, they said, in the New Testament gospels but revealed more fully in such secret writings as *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* and *The Dialogue of the Saviour*.

Such writings, suppressed and lost for nearly sixteen hundred years, remained, until recently, virtually unknown. . . . What the discovery certainly does offer, however, is extraordinary insights into the early Christian movement. For the first time, we can read firsthand works later condemned and destroyed by the bishops as heretical. Now for the first time the “heretics” can speak to us in their own words. For church leaders of the second century . . . had attacked the gnostic Christians, condemned their teachings, and attempted to drive them out of the churches.

And from *The Gnostic Gospels*:

Gnostic accounts often mention how the recipients respond to Christ’s presence with intense emotions — terror, awe, distress, and joy. Yet those gnostic writers do not dismiss visions as fantasies or hallucinations. They respect — even revere — such experiences, through which spiritual intuition discloses insight into the nature of reality.

This approach to the teachings of Jesus has been both refreshing and stimulating to a number of Friends, who have had difficulty with some of the pronouncements of the “Christian” churches, which sometimes seem as if they are promoting the mythology of Christ.

Attendance at the event is limited to those who have preregistered and purchased tickets. Since space in Arch Street Meetinghouse is limited to 900 people, registration is restricted to those who have a direct association with the Society of Friends

Thus we have many more distinct alternatives for the experiencing of joy than were available to our forefathers even a hundred years ago and certainly more than in George Fox’s time some three hundred fifty years in the past. From my reading I gather that in pre-modern times nearly everyone in Western societies — and probably throughout the world — regularly attended some form of religious service involving extensive and impressive ceremony. Now, apparently in reaction to our materialist orientation, probably not more than ten percent of people in Europe attend religious services on a regular basis, and there may not be more than twice that many in the United States. The rest presumably find “meaning” enough by participating in what we conceive of as secular activities of sport and art, importantly including various activities with family and friends.

Why, then, do we attend Meeting more or less regularly and profess to be members or attenders of the Society of Friends? In some sense it is for the fulfillment that comes from the socialization within a select community, but essentially it is for the purpose of experiencing a heightened sense of *meaning* which manifests itself within the group meditation characteristic of Quakers. Although this traditionally is referred to as experiencing “that of God within us,” I suggest that it could be more truly thought of as that of God within us and *among* us, for it is within the group that it is most fully experienced. Personally I prefer to think of it as an awareness of being intrinsic to the whole of reality which in its most full expression may well transcend other modes of experiencing *meaning* in life. Perhaps this also characterizes true prayer, which need not be consciously directed to God as a distinct entity. As Anna Bartram, a long-deceased member of Willistown Meeting once stated: “Prayer is any heartfelt wish.”

*Alfred Roberts is a Friend from southern New Jersey whose Quaker ancestry goes back many generations. Now retired from the practice of psychiatry, he lives in the upper Brandywine valley and is a member of Willistown Friends Meeting.*

attest, it is a very real experience which affirms the validity of our lives beyond that which we can experience through simple reason or blind faith. The interpretation of this awareness conceives of it as something that is beyond reason — an experience that transcends rational understanding.

Our problem is that we humans, unlike other animal species, are in a sense addicted to rational thinking and reductionist analysis. These are the basis of our “success” in creating an almost totally artificial environment within which we exist as in a cocoon protected from the vicissitudes of nature. In the process, our habitual dependence upon “reason” has led us to neglect a more valid source of truth. That source is our ultimate identity within the *matrix* of an essentially infinite relationship. Thus we, individually and collectively, are one with the whole of all that is.

I propose that it is this identity which is manifested to us in all that we experience in life to be joyful and fulfilling. In its purest form it may be experienced as religious enlightenment such as that which we seek in Quaker meetings. Doubtless the same may be derived in varying degrees from all other forms of religious activity. Buddhist meditation, for instance, has much in common with Quaker worship, and they may be fundamentally identical.

The modern dilemma is that our culture, in its obsession with objectifying the world, has divided the sense of wholeness into modalities of fulfillment that are largely separate one from another. Thus we have many forms of music produced separately and never in the same program or by the same musicians. Stage and cinematic performance may or may not have music as a major aspect of its presentation. Dance, in the ballroom or on stage, happens as a separate event. Fine art has its own, often-specialized museums. Sports also must be included among our joy-inducing behaviors, and they have multiple forms of expression including private activities and, most notably, professional teams supported at outrageous cost.

or with Quaker organizations until after April 1. The fee for the program is \$10. The first 180 requests for the buffet luncheon will be honored; prepaid box lunches can be ordered for \$10; brown-baggers are welcome to eat on site.

Registration must be accompanied by the name, address, phone number, and e-mail address (if any) of each ticket holder, along with the name of the Friends meeting attended. Tickets will be mailed with printed copies of the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary, which Elaine Pagels wishes all those attending to have read.

Send application, checks, and questions to:

Sally Rickerman  
121 Watson Mill Road  
Landenberg, PA 19350  
(610) 274-8856  
sshrr@earthlink.net

Updated directions may be found at: [www.pym.org/pagellecture](http://www.pym.org/pagellecture)

For further information about Elaine Pagels and her spiritual journey see her interview on PBS's *Religion and Ethics* of 10/10/03 at [www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week706/profile.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week706/profile.html)

## QUF And QUG

We often receive questions about the Quaker Universalist Group, our sibling organization in the United Kingdom, and *Universalist Friends* is sometimes confused with their journal, the *Universalist*. Both organizations grew out of the same movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which was a reaction against pressure from some Friends to define Quakerism as limited to Christianity. After the founder of QUG, John Linton, was invited to lecture in the United States, Friends who agreed with him that Quakerism from its very beginnings was universal felt moved to

organize here, and the QUF was created on this side of the Atlantic in 1983.

From that time the two organizations have worked closely together, although each has maintained a distinctive character. For many years the sharing of publications across borders was facilitated by the reprinting and sale of QUG pamphlets through the QUF. In the mid-90s that arrangement ended, but the QUG continues to maintain a representative in the United States through whom American Friends can pay membership dues in U.S. dollars. Until his death last year that representative was Jack Mongar.

Quaker universalists in this country who want to receive the *Universalist* may now send their membership checks (\$25 per year) to:

Edward D. James  
17 Marquette Drive  
Cody, Wyoming 82414-8801

Unlike the QUF, the QUG does not include pamphlets as a benefit of membership, nor does it publish the *Universalist* or its recent pamphlets on the web. Four of its early pamphlets are, however, available in downloadable form on its web site at: [www.qug.org.uk](http://www.qug.org.uk)

The current issue (No. 72, October 2004) of the *Universalist* contains six brief essays on various topics, a poem, book reviews, and letters to the editor. There is also a report on the results of a questionnaire included in the previous issue. Readers were asked to list books or authors they would recommend for someone new to Quaker universalism. Among the top ten listings was *The Quaker Universalist Reader*, which was published by the QUF in 1986.

events on earth and beyond. Every one of the trillions of atoms that make up our bodies was created in the formation and explosions of suns predating our sun by ten and more billions of years, and no single event in the present, no matter how insignificant, is without some infinitely extended effect within and ultimately throughout the universe.

In view of these facts, it could be maintained that nature as a concept could be substituted for that of God. This would, however, be a reification of the term beyond its valid meaning as that which is intrinsic to — not separate from — the whole of reality. It seems that our concept of God is based on the pervasive belief, formed from everyday experience, that every effect must be the result of causes evolving from the ultimate cause, which we call God. The enigma as to the cause of God then remains forever without answer.

Conventional religion, for the most part, ignores the reality of *natural evolution*, which, in the light of accumulating evidence, can no longer be considered a theory but is essentially an indisputable fact — naysayers notwithstanding. Humans evolved in parallel with every other living species and can claim no natural priority or special right to existence. As a species our ultimate fate, along with all other life on earth, must end in the heat of our exploding sun or the impact of a wayward meteor, if not in the folly of our poisoning of the earth and its atmosphere. There is precedence in the fact that there are many times more species of plants and animals that have evolved and become extinct than exist in the present. It would be presumptuous of us to assume that we humans should somehow be exempt from a similar fate.

As do all other religious groups within their own understanding, we Quakers experience in our gathered meetings as well as in other aspects of our lives, an awareness which transcends the mundane aspects of what we think of as objective reality. From Quaker beginnings in the mid-17th century this has been referred to as “that of God within.” As many of us can

as within all of society, including the world's nations, we can join this universal quest. This I think will be experienced through full acceptance (beyond just *tolerance*) of those whom we find are radically different from ourselves in terms of their fundamental beliefs and value orientations. Within our meeting as well as within the whole of humanity we must know that the source of *truth* is complex and multifaceted. Each of us is able to apprehend, often only dimly, some small portion of those facets. I think that with patience, forbearance, and mutual caring we can inspire one another to experience a broadened sense of this fulfilling reality, and that in turn we may extend our awareness through involvement in the world beyond the meetinghouse.

#### A Quaker Perspective On Nature And Meaning

In all cultures and throughout history religious expression has been characterized by a pervasive anthropocentrism. It is as though humankind with its omnipotent God or Gods is of ultimate significance, and the rest of life on earth and a possible infinity of universes beyond our ken are incidental if not irrelevant to human existence. It may be claimed that we need a myth which we call "the truth" in order to give *meaning* to the fact of our existence which is otherwise, as proclaimed by Macbeth, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." But I believe we can have *meaning* in the face of what we experience as reality without resorting to a god which, even in its most erudite conception, is ultimately perceived in human image.

It appears to me that there does *not* need to be an entity which creates and is the ultimate force motivating humanity and the rest of nature. All entities within the universe(s?), including humans, are expressions of the whole of nature, which is pervasive within time and space. We live within a *matrix* of relationship such that no event is independent of all other

## Reflections From A Quaker Meeting

By Alfred Roberts

### The Authentic Self Within The Meeting

Finding truly resonant relationships with others is, I believe, the ultimate motive for living. Some might protest that communion with God transcends all human relationship. But is such communion valid or even possible independent of human involvement? Certainly most religiously inclined people worship within groups. Quakers especially value the support of fellow members within the coherence of the Meeting, and it is the group as a whole, not a minister or priest as the guiding authority, that determines the nature of the Meeting. This group coherence is the source of the value of the Meeting to its members. — But there is a problem.

Individuals hold broadly different concepts of what to them is "the truth," particularly in regard to religious understanding. These very personal truths can conflict with the truths experienced by others, and in order to avoid conflict, we tend to keep our discussions on a superficial level, often not revealing our more deeply felt beliefs. Such differences then remain as unresolved impediments to the very relationships that make coming together in the Meeting a fulfilling thing.

From a lifetime of experience, I can say that it is unreasonable to expect others to understand, much less to accept as their own, one's personal convictions as to the nature and meaning of life. It is important that we recognize that each person must view life from his or her own perspective and interpret it in the light of that perspective. The range of views

will vary from nearly (but never entirely) the same as one's own to differences that are seemingly incompatible.

In most Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant, and in synagogues, mosques, and probably most far-Eastern temples, religion is presented largely by a pastor, priest, rabbi, or monk and is based on a fixed authority. This leaves small room for idiosyncratic expression. In general among Quakers the essential authority is "the Inner Light" or "that of God within," in relation to which we develop our personal values. These differ broadly from person to person, so it would be unreasonable to expect close unanimity of belief. In fact, is it not these very differences among us that create the richness of experience we draw from participation in the Meeting? It should not be simply a matter of tolerating "outrageous" beliefs but of recognizing the validity of those beliefs to the persons who hold them and the possibility that from an ultimate perspective they may be more valid than our own.

The differences among us should be a source of strength, wherein each can learn from the other, recognizing that no one of us has access to the whole "truth." By full and earnest involvement with others, such that each of us is free to share that which gives meaning to our life, our Meeting will thrive as a source of inspiration in a world that is desperately in need of *meaning* in its ultimate sense.

## Diversity And Conflict

We of the human world live in terms of disparate concepts and beliefs which are derived from the fundamental values and moral imperatives of our cultures. Human history involves the expression of those values and imperatives. Ideally it is accomplished through creative adjustment in harmony with others, but too often it results in destructive struggles characterized by distrust and hate festering over generations or culminating in the chaos of war and annihilation. In spite of

our intellectual understanding of the nature of social reality, we continue to make the mistakes of the past based on the belief that our way is the *right and only way*. Thus those who disagree must be persuaded to change their thinking. Otherwise they are a threat to our conviction that ours is truly the one correct way.

Historically Quakers have been no exception to this predilection for discord. The "great separation" of 1827 was, I believe, the most egregious example of dissonance among Quakers, and it was not resolved until a century and a quarter later. The hotly contended disagreement probably had multiple causes, but ostensibly it had to do with Elias Hicks' contention that the message from "that of God within" took precedence over biblical scripture. Within our present understanding, the disagreement seems to have been based simply upon differences in emphasis and was poor justification for the enmity that resulted in separate but parallel roads being taken by the two groups and a weakening of Quaker influence within the world at large.

At present, Quakerism as practiced in meetings associated with Friends General Conference and generally with Friends United Meetings is characterized by openness to a relatively broad spectrum of orientations as to the nature of religious truth and spiritual expression. I would say that it varies from an almost literal interpretation of the Bible as the essential source of inspiration to what might be called a humanitarian form of atheism, with much diversity in between. Nevertheless, in spite (or *because*) of our disparate approaches, we function as a vital and spiritually creative group, presumably to the satisfaction of those who continue to attend our meetings.

It then occurs to me that the meeting may be seen as a microcosm of all of society where there are many disparate orientations to life, where no one "way" can be *known* to be the "best way," but all are oriented toward a universal search for "meaning" in its ultimate sense. Within the meeting as well