

## **Report of the Red Book Revision Working Group to the NFN AGM, 19/1/23**

The Group, appointed at the 2022 AGM, held several Zoom meetings during the year, finally resulting in the agreed statement below which was sent to the Steering Group for endorsement, then forwarded to Michael Booth for the BYM Revision Group.

We recognise that the statement is only a beginning, and the Network will no doubt continue to engage with the Revision Group over the coming months and years. As a small working group with a fluctuating membership we feel we have taken the matter as far as we are able, and ask the AGM and Steering Group to consider how best the Network can continue this important work.

*Steven Goldblatt*

*Chris Thomas*

*Gisela Creed*

*David Boulton*

## **From the Nontheist Friends Network to the Book of Discipline Revision Group**

As members of the Nontheist Friends Network we welcome this opportunity to express our warm support for the work of the Book of Discipline Revision Group, and our thanks to all those who have taken on this demanding but inspirational task.

You have kindly afforded us the opportunity to express our thoughts and hopes for the revision process and its outcome. You will appreciate that we are simply a network of Friends who self-identify as nontheists with a wide range of views – at least as wide as the spectrum of theist opinions! We are neither a pressure group nor a campaigning body. What unites us as a network is the shared vision of an open Society of Friends, confidently embracing a radical diversity of understandings, theistic, nontheistic and the spaces in between.

We are much encouraged to read in your statement of general principles that you do not see your job as “to set YM theology on, for example, Christian and non-Christian beliefs, but to *describe the range*”; that you “*want to be inclusive*” and “*take care not to exclude unintentionally*”; and that you “*want to hold all things with love and respect, especially in points of difference*”.

We see these principles as reflecting a significant change in the Religious Society of Friends, appropriate and necessary if we are not only to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but are seen to “have a purpose firm and dare to make it known”. It is clearly the case that we are no longer an exclusively Christian church but an inclusive religious Society, a society of active seekers rather than satisfied finders. We no longer have a fixed understanding or shared experience of “things that are eternal”, but we live experimentally. ***A revised Red Book should be explicit in acknowledging the extent to which we have changed over the last two or three decades.***

We acknowledge that diversity can present problems when we seek to spell out our common purpose and shared convictions. For many Friends a religious vocabulary (“God”, “the divine”, “worship”, our inheritance from two thousand years of Christian tradition) will continue to be their “first language”, but for some of us it is problematic. It will not be easy to navigate our way through this point of difference, but we are encouraged by your statement that “We acknowledge the tension between clear and poetic language and want to use both appropriately”.

Our hope, then, is that the revised book will make it clear that nontheist Friends have a place in the Society as one of the bright colours that make the Quaker rainbow. Individual nontheist Friends may have more detailed proposals for your consideration, but as a Network we are content to offer you the above statement.