

# Quaker faith & practice

## Fifth edition

The book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

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### Chapter 24

## Our peace testimony

### 24.01

*The Peace Testimony is probably the best known and best loved of the Quaker testimonies. Its roots lie in the personal experience of the love and power of Christ which marked the founders of the Quaker movement. They were dominated by a vision of the world transformed by Christ who lives in the hearts of all. Friends sought to make the vision real by putting emphasis on Christian practice rather than primarily on any particular dogma or ideological system. There was a spontaneous and practical religion. They recognised the realities of evil and conflict, but it was contrary to the spirit of Christ to use war and violence as means to deal with them. The Peace Testimony has been a source of inspiration to Friends through the centuries, for it points to a way of life which embraces all human relationships. The following extracts trace the source of the Peace Testimony in the experience of the founders of the Quaker movement and illustrate its evolution over three hundred and fifty years in response to a changing world. As a Society we have been faithful throughout in maintaining a corporate witness against all war and violence. However, in our personal lives we have continually to wrestle with the difficulty of finding ways to reconcile our faith with practical ways of living it out in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that we have not always all reached the same conclusions when dealing with the daunting complexities and moral dilemmas of society and its government. In the closing years of the twentieth century, we as Friends faced a bewildering array of social and international challenges, which have widened the relevance of the Peace Testimony from the issue of peace and war between states to the problems of tensions and conflicts in all their forms. Thus we are brought closer to the witness of*

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## Reading *Qf&p*

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*early Friends, who did not draw a hard and fast distinction between the various Quaker testimonies, but saw them as a seamless expression of the universal spirit of Christ that dwells in the hearts of all.*

- 24.01 I told [the Commonwealth Commissioners] I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars... I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strife were.

George Fox, 1651

## The corporate testimony

- 24.02 Whoever can reconcile this, 'Resist not evil', with 'Resist violence by force', again, 'Give also thy other cheek', with 'Strike again'; also 'Love thine enemies', with 'Spoil them, make a prey of them, pursue them with fire and the sword', or, 'Pray for those that persecute you, and those that calumniate you', with 'Persecute them by fines, imprisonments and death itself', whoever, I say, can find a means to reconcile these things may be supposed also to have found a way to reconcile God with the Devil, Christ with Antichrist, Light with Darkness, and good with evil. But if this be impossible, as indeed it is impossible, so will also the other be impossible, and men do but deceive both themselves and others, while they boldly adventure to establish such absurd and impossible things.

Robert Barclay, 1678

- 24.03 A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it... It is as great presumption to send our passions upon God's errands, as it is to palliate them with God's name... We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by love and information. And yet we could hurt no man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: for if men did once see we love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel.

William Penn, 1693

*The early statements of the Society's corporate witness set out the basic principles of the peace testimony and served to distinguish Quakers from those suspected of plotting to overthrow the established authorities.*

- 24.04 Our principle is, and our practices have always been, to seek peace, and ensue it, and to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God, seeking the good and welfare, and doing that which tends to the peace of all. All bloody principles and

practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world. That spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil, and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ which leads us into all Truth will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

And as for the kingdoms of this world, we cannot covet them, much less can we fight for them, but we do earnestly desire and wait, that by the word of God's power and its effectual operation in the hearts of men the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, that he might rule and reign in men by his spirit and truth, that thereby all people, out of all different judgments and professions might be brought into love and unity with God and one with another, and that they might all come to witness the prophet's words, who said, 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'. (Is 2:4; Mic 4:3)

Declaration to Charles II, 1660

*Margaret Fell's earlier expression of these ideas may be found at [19.46](#)*

*After the first wave of enthusiasm had spent itself, the Society of Friends settled and became organised. Henceforth there was greater emphasis on specific Quaker testimonies which distinguished Friends from the rest of the community. The peace testimony gradually became institutionalised, reflecting the preoccupations of succeeding generations and their perceptions of world affairs. It found expression in more formal and reasoned statements as well as in the vivid personal witness of Friends. The formal statements reflected different experiences of war and violence through the centuries, but the kernel of faith remained unchanged.*

*For further passages from the seventeenth century see [19.45–19.47](#)*

24.05 *Issued by Yearly Meeting in London 1744, during the War of the Austrian Succession:*

We entreat all who profess themselves members of our Society to be faithful to that ancient testimony, borne by us ever since we were a people, against bearing arms and fighting, that by a conduct agreeable to our profession we may demonstrate ourselves to be real followers of the Messiah, the

peaceable Saviour, of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end.

24.06 *Issued by Yearly Meeting in London 1804, 1805, during the Napoleonic Wars:*

Most, if not all, people admit the transcendent excellency of peace. All who adopt the petition, 'Thy kingdom come', pray for its universal establishment. Some people then must begin to fulfil the evangelical promise, and cease to learn war any more. Now, friends, seeing these things cannot be controverted, how do we long that your whole conversation be as becometh the Gospel; and that while any of us are professing to scruple war, they may not in some parts of their conduct be inconsistent with that profession! ... Friends, it is an awful thing to stand forth to the nation as the advocates of inviolable peace; and our testimony loses its efficacy in proportion to the want of consistency in any... And we can serve our country in no way more availingly, nor more acceptably to him who holds its prosperity at his disposal, than by contributing, all that in us lies, to increase the number of meek, humble, and self-denying Christians.

Guard against placing your dependence on fleets and armies; be peaceable yourselves, in words and actions, and pray to the Father of the Universe that he would breathe the spirit of reconciliation into the hearts of his erring and contending creatures.

24.07 *Issued by Yearly Meeting in London 1900, during the South African War:*

We believe that the Spirit of Christ will ultimately redeem national as well as individual life. We believe further that, as all church history shows, the human means will be the faithful witness borne by Christ's disciples. It has been well said: 'It seems to be the will of Him, who is infinite in wisdom, that light upon great subjects should first arise and be gradually spread through the faithfulness of individuals in acting up to their own convictions.' This was the secret of the power of the early Church. The blood of the Christians proved a fruitful seed. In like manner the staunchness of early Friends and others to their conscientious convictions in the seventeenth century won the battle of religious freedom for England. We covet a like faithful witness against war from Christians today.

24.08 *Issued by London Yearly Meeting 1915, during the First World War:*

Meeting at a time when the nations of Europe are engaged in a war of unparalleled magnitude, we have been led to recall



the basis of the peace testimony of our religious Society. It is not enough to be satisfied with a barren negative witness, a mere proclamation of non-resistance. We must search for a positive, vital, constructive message. Such a message, a message of supreme love, we find in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We find it in the doctrine of the indwelling Christ, that re-discovery of the early Friends, leading as it does to a recognition of the brotherhood of all men. Of this doctrine our testimony as to war and peace is a necessary outcome, and if we understand the doctrine aright, and follow it in its wide implications, we shall find that it calls to the peaceable spirit and the rule of love in all the broad and manifold relations of life.

Thus while love, joy, peace, gentleness and holiness are the teaching of the life and death of our Lord, it is to these that we are also impelled by the indwelling of the Divine in men. As this spirit grows within us, we shall realise increasingly what it is to live in the virtue of that life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars.

24.09 *Issued by London Yearly Meeting 1943, during the Second World War:*

All thoughtful men and women are torn at heart by the present situation. The savage momentum of war drags us all in its wake. We desire a righteous peace. Yet to attain peace it is claimed that, as Chungking, Rotterdam and Coventry were devastated, so the Eder and Moehne dams must needs be destroyed and whole districts of Hamburg obliterated. The people of Milan and Turin demonstrate for peace but the bombing continues. War is hardening our hearts. To preserve our sanity, we become apathetic. In such an atmosphere no true peace can be framed; yet before us we see months of increasing terror. Can those who pay heed to moral laws, can those who follow Christ submit to the plea that the only way is that demanded by military necessity?

True peace involves freedom from tyranny and a generous tolerance; conditions that are denied over a large part of Europe and are not fulfilled in other parts of the world. But true peace cannot be dictated, it can only be built in co-operation between all peoples. None of us, no nation, no citizen, is free from some responsibility for this situation with its conflicting difficulties.

To the world in its confusion Christ came. Through him we know that God dwells with men and that by turning from evil and living in his spirit we may be led into his way of peace. That way of peace is not to be found in any policy of 'unconditional surrender' by whomsoever demanded. It

requires that men and nations should recognise their common brotherhood, using the weapons of integrity, reason, patience and love, never acquiescing in the ways of the oppressor, always ready to suffer with the oppressed. In every country there is a longing for freedom from domination and war which men are striving to express. Now is the time to issue an open invitation to co-operate in creative peacemaking, to declare our willingness to make sacrifices of national prestige, wealth and standards of living for the common good of men.

24.10 *Public statement of the Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1987, at a time when many Friends were making submissions to a committee established by their government to review defence policy:*

We totally oppose all wars, all preparation for war, all use of weapons and coercion by force, and all military alliances: no end could ever justify such means.

We equally and actively oppose all that leads to violence among people and nations, and violence to other species and to our planet.

Refusal to fight with weapons is not surrender. We are not passive when threatened by the greedy, the cruel, the tyrant, the unjust.

We will struggle to remove the causes of impasse and confrontation by every means of nonviolent resistance available.

We urge all New Zealanders to have the courage to face up to the mess humans are making of our world and to have the faith and diligence to cleanse it and restore the order intended by God.

We must start with our own hearts and minds. Wars will stop only when each of us is convinced that war is never the way.

The places to begin acquiring the skills and maturity and generosity to avoid or to resolve conflicts are in our own homes, our personal relationships, our schools, our workplaces, and wherever decisions are made.

We must relinquish the desire to own other people, to have power over them, and to force our views on to them. We must own up to our own negative side and not look for scapegoats to blame, punish, or exclude. We must resist the urge towards waste and the accumulation of possessions.

Conflicts are inevitable and must not be repressed or ignored but worked through painfully and carefully. We must develop

the skills of being sensitive to oppression and grievances, sharing power in decision-making, creating consensus, and making reparation.

In speaking out, we acknowledge that we ourselves are as limited and as erring as anyone else. When put to the test, we each may fall short.

We do not have a blueprint for peace that spells out every stepping stone towards the goal that we share. In any particular situation, a variety of personal decisions could be made with integrity.

We may disagree with the views and actions of the politician or the soldier who opts for a military solution, but we still respect and cherish the person.

What we call for in this statement is a commitment to make the building of peace a priority and to make opposition to war absolute.

What we advocate is not uniquely Quaker but human and, we believe, the will of God. Our stand does not belong to Friends alone – it is yours by birthright.

We challenge all New Zealanders to stand up and be counted on what is no less than the affirmation of life and the destiny of humankind.

Together, let us reject the clamour of fear and listen to the whisperings of hope.

- 24.11 The peace testimony is about deeds not creeds; not a form of words but a way of living. It is the cumulative lived witness of generations of Quakers... The peace testimony is not about being nice to people and living so that everyone likes us. It will remain a stumbling block and will itself cause conflict and disagreement. The peace testimony is a tough demand that we should not automatically accept the categories, definitions and priorities of the world. We look to the Spirit, rather than to prescriptive hypothetical statements. The peace testimony, today, is seen in what we do, severally and together, with our lives. We pray for the involvement of the Spirit with us, that we may work for a more just world. We need to train to wage peace.

London Yearly Meeting, 1993

## Personal witness

- 24.12 The emphasis on personal action, which in the case of war

means abstention, inevitably raises the problem of where one draws the line. In the total wars of the first half of this century, Quakers accepted non-combatant service with the armed forces, served in an independent but uniformed Friends Ambulance Unit, relieved the sufferings of civilian war victims, did alternative civilian service of 'national importance' at home, went to prison for refusing any service which might assist the war effort, even fire-watching. Some refused to pay taxes. There are no formal rules laid down for Quaker conduct in such circumstances, other than to follow the Light of Christ.

Wolf Mendl, 1974

- 24.13 We had been talking for an hour and a half with a clergyman neighbour, and afterwards I sat by the fire and thought. He had maintained that war has not as yet been grown out of, and that God still uses it as a means of training His children. As I thought over this, old thoughts and memories awoke from sleep. I remembered the familiar words about William Penn's sword – 'Wear it as long as thou canst': and it seemed clear to me that if William Penn had given it up from self-interest or cowardice, or for any reason short of the 'witness of God in his own soul', he would have been wrong. And then the thought extended itself from the life of one man to the life of mankind, and I remembered a sentence in the Epistle to Diognetus: 'What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world'. Then I seemed to see that war cannot rightly come to an end from self-interest or cowardice or any worldly reason but only because men and women, by one and one, without waiting for the others, have become loyal to the spirit of Christ.

Marion C Fox, 1914

## Conscientious objection to compulsory military service

24.14

*Compulsory military service was introduced during the two World Wars and Friends, among others, appeared before tribunals to justify their stand as conscientious objectors.*

- 24.14 I was asked to be at the Tribunal in Manchester by 11 am on Tuesday, i.e. yesterday. I was there with Joyce and my witness well before time but they spent so long over the men in front of me that my case did not appear until immediately after lunch. Despite the gruelling time they had given the applicants in the morning, they gave me a very kind hearing. I felt very excited and worked up so when the chairman asked me the leading question, Why do you object to civil defence, I

asked to be allowed to sit for a few moments in quietness while I gathered myself. When I felt ready I told them simply what I had experienced of the love of Jesus and how I felt that I was called to answer to the spiritual suffering in the world. They listened very quietly and only asked me how I intended to put into practice what I had learned and then, how my plans for going to China were progressing and then they seemed satisfied. I felt very young and childlike in talking to them. Their decision was to register me unconditionally on the register of COs. All over in about 20 minutes.

Looking back and realising how very easily things might have gone the other way the only explanation which both Joyce and I can see is that it is a miracle of God, helped by the prayers and loving thoughts of my friends.

I do not feel that I have yet grasped the whole significance of what has happened but I do see that it has placed an even greater responsibility upon me to follow what I really feel to be God's calling for it is in that trust that the community has freed me.

Eric Baker, 1941

- 24.15 I have sometimes been asked what were my reasons for deciding on that refusal to register for war duties that sent me to Holloway Jail 22 years ago. I can only answer that my reason told me that I was a fool, that I was risking my job and my career, that an isolated example could do no good, that it was a futile gesture since even if I did register my three small children would exempt me. But reason was fighting a losing battle. I had wrestled in prayer and I knew beyond all doubt that I *must* refuse to register, that those who believed that war was the wrong way to fight evil must stand out against it however much they stood alone, and that I and mine must take the consequences. The 'and mine' made it more difficult, but I question whether children ever really suffer loss in the long run through having parents who are willing to stand by principles; many a soldier had to leave his family and thought it his duty to do so. When you have to make a vital decision about behaviour, you cannot sit on the fence. To decide to do nothing is still a decision, and it means that you remain on the station platform or the airstrip when the train or plane has left.

Kathleen Lonsdale, 1964

- 24.16 On my third or fourth attendance at the Sunday service with Friends, an American young Quaker who was on the staff of the American Friends Service Committee working in Tokyo came to talk about his own experiences of having been a conscientious objector during World War II and about the

ideas of CO in relation to Quaker beliefs. It really was an epoch-making shock to me to know such a thing as CO existing in this world. I had never heard nor dreamed anything like that even though I had been brought up in a devout Christian family. This person had lived 'love your enemy' in the US at the same time that I had been caught up with the mad notions of nationalism and of winning the 'Holy War' in Japan...

Quaker worship gave me time and space to dissolve my hard shell of self-centredness to be sensitive to discern things with fairness and unaffected by prejudice. I felt the need to be faithful to truth instead of relying on existing judgment. The idea of conscientious objection based on the philosophy of non-violence struck me and was proved to me to be fair, reasonable and Christian. I concluded that it must be the way to take for me and for Japan who had heart-rending experiences of defeat in war and of two nuclear disasters. This became my conviction and I was glad when I realised Japan had declared itself by its new constitution to be a unique CO nation, stating clearly in article 9 of the constitution that it would abolish fighting forces for ever.

One day in Tokyo Local Court, I had an opportunity to make a statement to witness why I felt it necessary to resist tax-payment for military expenditures, saying, 'With military power we cannot protect our life nor keep our human dignity. Even if I should be killed, my way of living or dying to show my sympathy and forgiveness to my opponents, to point to the love of God shown by Jesus Christ on the cross and by his resurrection, will have a better chance to invite others to turn to walk rightly so that we humankind may live together peacefully.'

Susumu Ishitani, 1989

## Conscientious objection to taxation for military purposes

24.17 *From time to time the British crown asked the governing bodies of the colonies to support its military ventures in America by levying taxes towards its wars. This proved to be a problem for the Quaker members of the Pennsylvania Assembly as well as for individual Friends. Some Friends in both England and America paid such taxes but John Woolman became uneasy, so he wrote in his journal:*

Yet there was in the deeps of my mind a scruple which I never could get over... I all along believed that there were some upright-hearted men who paid such taxes, but could not see



that their example was a sufficient reason for me to do so, while I believed that the spirit of Truth required of me as an individual to suffer patiently the distress of goods rather than pay actively.

1755

See [14.08](#)

- 24.18 The action of withholding the military proportion of our taxes arose for us from our corporately held testimony that 'the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world'. This testimony may at times lead to resisting the demands of the state, when a higher law (i.e. God's inner law) makes its first claim on us. We also need to be conscious that, if we offend against accepted law, we may have to take the consequences of our action.

Arthur and Ursula Windsor, 1992

- 24.19 *In March 1982 Meeting for Sufferings considered the request by some London Yearly Meeting employees that the part of their income tax attributable to military purposes should be diverted to non-military uses. Tax was withheld from October 1982 until, in June 1985, the Appeal Court ruled that the action was unlawful. Meeting for Sufferings then decided to pay the tax withheld since the law had been tested as far as possible. At the same time it made a submission to the European Commission of Human Rights on the grounds of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; in July 1986 the Commission ruled the case inadmissible. Yearly Meeting returned to the matter in 1987 (see 29.10). The following letter to the Inland Revenue in 1991 records some of the dilemmas of Meeting for Sufferings in seeking to further the concern:*

The Religious Society of Friends has, since its beginnings in the seventeenth century, borne witness against war and armed conflict as contrary to the spirit and teachings of Christ. We have sought to build institutions and relationships which make for peace and to resist military activity. The horrific nature of modern armaments makes our witness particularly urgent. The Gulf War involved the substantial use of expensive modern weapons and technology, demonstrating that today it is the conscription of our money rather than our bodies which makes war possible.

For many years members of the Religious Society of Friends have been exercised about how we might be true to our

historic peace testimony while still obeying the laws of our country. You will know that we have appealed through the courts and ultimately to the European Commission of Human Rights for recognition of the right of conscientious objection to paying taxes for military purposes...

Since losing the appeal we have paid in full the income tax collected from our employees. In recent months we have considered whether we can continue to do this, but after very careful consideration have decided that for the time being we must do so. The acceptance of the rule of law is part of our witness, ... for a just and peaceful world cannot come about without this. However we do wish to make it clear that we object to the way in which the PAYE system involves us in a process of collecting money, used in part to pay for military activity and war preparations, which takes away from the individual taxpayer the right to express their own conscientious objection. This involvement is incompatible with our work for peace.

24.20 On my last appearance in court [for withholding war tax], having already sent in my defence on grounds of conscience, backed by the Genocide Act, Geneva Convention, etc, I felt I wanted to make a more general statement about the fact that we have not used the United Nations as we should to settle disputes, or given sufficient support to it and its ... agencies. So I wrote a statement, gave copies to my faithful supporting Friends and other pacifists and handed a copy to the Judge, asking if I might read it. He listened attentively to what I read, as his comments afterwards showed, though of course his verdict was the usual refusal. It seems important to me to get the understanding of judges so that they will give serious consideration to our point of view and might eventually influence a change in the law, though they always say that is not their business.

Joan Hewitt, 1992

*See also 29.10*

## The dilemmas of the pacifist stand

24.21 I speak not against any magistrates or peoples defending themselves against foreign invasions; or making use of the sword to suppress the violent and evil-doers within their borders – for this the present estate of things may and doth require, and a great blessing will attend the sword where it is borne uprightly to that end and its use will be honourable ... but yet there is a better state, which the Lord hath already brought some into, and which nations are to expect and to

travel towards. There is to be a time when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more'. When the power of the Gospel spreads over the whole earth, thus shall it be throughout the earth, and, where the power of the Spirit takes hold of and overcomes any heart at present, thus will it be at present with that heart. This blessed state, which shall be brought forth [in society] at large in God's season, must begin in particulars [that is, in individuals].

Isaac Penington, 1661

- 24.22 Because of their personal experience and convictions, [early] Friends did not deny the reality of evil and of conflict. Nor did they equate conflict with evil. They were well aware of the suffering which a non-violent witness could bring in an imperfect world. This is in contrast to those who identify peace with the absence of conflict and value that above all things. It is the latter who have given modern pacifism its bad name and have led their critics to refer to them contemptuously as 'passivists'. The failure to take evil and conflict into account as elements in our human condition and an obsession with the need for peace and harmony have led pacifists badly astray... Christian pacifists [are] not exempt from the temptation to sacrifice others for the sake of peace.

Wolf Mendl, 1974

- 24.23 *Corder Catchpool (1883–1952) served in the Friends Ambulance Unit during the First World War, but on the introduction of conscription he returned to England to give his witness as a conscientious objector and was imprisoned for more than two years; later he worked for reconciliation, especially with Germany. He told the Court Martial which sentenced him at Dovercourt on 28 March 1918:*

There is hardly a moment when my thoughts are not with the men in France, eager to help the wounded by immediate human touch with their sufferings. This I was privileged to do during nineteen months spent at the Front with the Friends Ambulance Unit from October 1914 to May 1916, when it was still possible to give voluntary service. At times the impulse to return to this work becomes almost irresistible. May God steady me, and keep me faithful to a call I have heard above the roar of the guns. By the feverish activity of my hands, I might help to save a fraction of the present human wreckage. That would be for me no sacrifice. It costs far more to spend mind and spirit, if need be, in the silence of a prison cell, in passionate witness for the great truths of Peace. That is the call I hear. I believe that only spiritual influence will avail to free the world at last from war, to free the soldiers' little ones and confused struggling humanity itself from all that men and

women are suffering now. I honour those who, in loyalty to conscience, have gone out to fight. In a crisis like the present it would be unbecoming to elaborate the reasons which have led me to a course so different. Today a man must act. I believe, with the strength of my whole being, that standing here I am enlisted in active service as a soldier of Jesus Christ, who bids every man be true to the sense of duty that is laid upon his soul.

- 24.24 Now, in the war, I do not think that any of us could doubt the colossal quality of the evil represented by Nazi philosophy. And I do not think that, in political terms, it was possible to contemplate coming to any sort of political compromise with it... Speaking personally as a Christian pacifist, I had a far deeper sense of spiritual unity with those of my friends in the fighting services who, detesting war as deeply as I did, yet felt that there was no other way in which they could share in the agony of the world, than I had with those pacifists who talked as if the suffering of the world could be turned off like a water tap if only politicians would talk sensibly together. Where men have sinned as grievously and as long as we have done in our social and international relations with one another, there can be no easy end to the consequences... We could not engage in warlike activity in the hope of relieving the suffering of the Jews or of other oppressed peoples in Europe and Asia. We had, somehow, to try to participate in their suffering and to express the conviction that it is ultimately the power of suffering in love that redeems men from the power of evil.

Roger Wilson, 1949

- 24.25 Conscientious objection is not a total repudiation of force; it is a refusal to surrender moral responsibility for one's action.

Kenneth C Barnes, 1987

- 24.26 Friends are not naïve enough to believe that such an appeal 'to that of God' in a dictator or in a nation which for psychological or other reasons is in an aggressive mood will necessarily be successful in converting the tyrant or preventing aggression. Christ was crucified; Gandhi was assassinated. Yet they did not fail. Nor did they leave behind them the hatred, devastation and bitterness that war, successful or unsuccessful, does leave. What can be claimed, moreover, is that this method of opposing evil is one of which no person, no group, no nation need be ashamed, as we may and should be ashamed of the inhumanities of war that are perpetrated in our name and with our support.

Kathleen Lonsdale, 1953

# Practical expressions of our peace testimony

## Public protest

24.27

*As Friends we have never been satisfied that corporate statements and personal witness are enough. We have always sought to give a practical expression to our faith. Action has taken various forms and has included public protest, the relief of suffering, reconstruction and the removal of the causes of war through mediation, reconciliation, disarmament, building the institutions of peace, promoting social justice, and getting at the roots of conflict and violence in our personal behaviour.*

24.27 I do not wish to deny that on April 4th, the anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, I was inside the Faslane Submarine Base, and that I was there as a deliberate act. However, I pled guilty to the charges because had I done otherwise I would have been guilty of far greater crimes against my conscience and against humanity.

If I may, I would like to outline very briefly the reasons for so acting, not so much as mitigation of guilt, but rather as a declaration of intent, for as long as those bases remain, I must continue to act as my conscience guides.

My charge is that I entered a protected area without authority or permission. My claim is that I had authority – the authority of my Christian conviction that a gospel of love cannot be defended by the threatened annihilation of millions of innocent people. It can never be morally right to use these ghastly weapons at any time, whether first, or as unthinkable retaliation after we ourselves are doomed.

I acted also with the authority of the nameless millions dying of starvation now because we choose to spend £11.5 billion on Trident whilst a child dies every 15 seconds.

I am further authorised by my 13-year-old Vietnamese god-daughter whose guardian I am. She was adopted and brought to Scotland to take her away from the unspeakable horror of the Vietnam war. If all that I have done is to bring her closer to the nuclear holocaust, I stand convicted by her of the most cynical inhumanity.

I am charged under an Act giving control and disposal of land to the Queen, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, the Commons assembled in Parliament and eventually the Secretary of State. I believe the world is God's creation. This beautiful,

delicate world in all its infinite wonder is threatened with extinction. That to me is blasphemy.

And so, out of love, love of my god-daughter, love of my world, I had to act. If I see that base at Faslane as morally wrong and against my deepest convictions – as wrong as the gas chambers of Auschwitz, as wrong as the deliberate starvation of children – then by keeping silent, I condone what goes on there.

On April 4th, I made a choice. I chose to create the dream of another way. My only crime is not working hard enough, or long enough, or soon enough towards the fulfilment of the dream. If my actions were a crime, then I am guilty.

Helen Steven, 1984

24.28 *The following is the testimony of a Friend who participated in the vigil, inspired and sustained by women, against the cruise missile base at Greenham Common in the 1980s.*

I stood at the fence one night in September, feet rooted to the muddy ground, hands deep in my pockets, watching through the wire that flat ravaged land that is now never dark, never quiet, imagining through the fence a field of bracken and scrub, a field of flowers, a field of corn, a field of children playing. Red police car, blue lights flashing, 'What are you doing, then, love? Not cutting the fence are you?' 'No, just praying at it.' A soldier with a dog walks up and down inside, suspicious, watching me watching him. 'Good evening.' 'Good evening.' I wait, not knowing what I'm waiting for. The kingdoms of the Lord? A hundred yards to my left, women cut the wire, roll away the stone, and walk through into the tomb. No angels greet them; no resurrection yet.

Yet still women witness to that possibility, the possibility that something may be accomplished which in our own strength we cannot do. Women waiting, watching, just being there, behaving as if peace were possible, living our dream of the future now. 'Why do you come here? Why do you keep coming?' – a soldier near Emerald camp on an earlier visit – 'It's no use, there's nothing you can do, what do you women think you can do by coming here? The missiles are here, you won't change anything, why do you come?' We come to watch, we come to witness, we come with our hands full of ribbon and wool, flowers and photos of loved ones, hands full of poems and statements and prayers, hands full of hope and the knowledge that such hope is impossible to rational minds. I come to be with the women who live here, the dykes, the dropouts, the mothers and grandmothers, angels with countenances like lightning, I come to talk with the police, the



soldiers, men who might be gardeners standing by the tomb; I come to meet the Christ in them.

A member of the Quaker Women's Group, 1986

## Relief of suffering

24.29

*Since the early 1800s British Friends have assisted the victims of war and famine. In 1871 the Friends War Victims Relief Committee was formed to help those whose homes and livelihood had been devastated in the Franco-Prussian war. This committee adopted as its badge the black and red Quaker star which is now a symbol used by Britain Yearly Meeting.*

24.29 On occasions of public calamity Friends' post must be the care of the poor and the relief of distress.

William Allen, 1812

24.30 Most relief work begins with some obvious need. But almost always there is, behind the physical need, something much less concrete, a damaged or lonely or hopeless or hungry spirit, and relief work which does not penetrate to this level, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, and make some contribution to healing is a job only partially done... Inspired relief workers cease to be external agents; like Woolman they have a sense of being 'mixed' in with suffering mankind: unselfconsciously they become part of the chaos, the misery and the perplexity in which they move, and yet they neither accept nor are degraded by the situation. Because of their certainty of the will of God for them they are not frightened to find themselves in the centre of the world's evil, and because of their experience of the love of God, they have the patience and the understanding to speak to the condition of their fellows. They do not go about looking for a job to do. They are drawn by their divinely-rooted imagination to the service of God and their fellows in a way that the Lord wills. A relief organisation, then, ought to be a corporate body capable of both commonsense and imaginative action, combined with a natural ability to convey to others a sense of inner peace and stability, surviving outward chaos and yet not divorced from it.

Roger Wilson, 1949

24.31 *Through the organisation of international work camps and social projects, Friends have sought to combine their ministry of relief with their ministry of reconciliation:*

There are no barriers of race, national feeling, custom, climate or culture which cannot be broken down by the method of Woolman and St Francis – the method of self-identification with the need of the poorest, even in distant lands, by means of hard manual work done at his side for his benefit. It remains to apply this method, and this idealism, to the international situation in Europe today... The influence of such work will no doubt be entirely negligible as regards the international situation, as the influence of Woolman seemed to be in his own lifetime... But failure does not matter. All that matters is that the right way should be tried; and if the Christian religion means anything at all, the right way is the way of self-identification with the poorest, the way of appeal to the friendliness in others by means of active and practical friendliness in ourselves, the way of unostentatious service... The original international fellowship of Christianity was founded in this way, as barriers of every kind – language, nationality, race, sex, class – were broken down through the literal following of the command for this august sacrament of menial service, as instituted by Christ at his last supper with his disciples.

John S Hoyland, 1936

## Reconciliation and mediation

- 24.32 Reconciliation, in the biblical sense, is not about ideologies or beliefs but about people, their relationship and response to God, and their relationship and response to each other. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and he calls each of us to a ministry or vocation of reconciliation.

Sydney Bailey, 1980

- 24.33 All forms of non-violent resistance are certainly much better than appeasement, which has come to mean the avoidance of violence by a surrender to injustice at the expense of the sufferings of others and not of one's self, by the giving away of something that is not ours to give. This meaning of appeasement, the buying of peace for ourselves temporarily by pandering to international blackmail, has rightly come to be despised and to be regarded as an encouragement to aggressors and despots. It should be distinguished sharply from the admission, which personal or international integrity might sometimes demand, that we have made a mistake or have ourselves done wrong, and are ready to make open amends or to reverse our policy. No considerations of national or international prestige should prevent the correction of error when it is realised. This is a *sine qua non* in the search for truth, and is evidence of strength and not of weakness of

personal or of national character, even when it means temporary humiliation.

Kathleen Lonsdale, 1953

- 24.34 *The following extracts are taken from an address in 1958 entitled 'Christians in a divided world' by Margarethe Lachmund, a German Friend who had intimate knowledge of conditions in both East and West Germany. In discussing the problem of Communism for Christians, she could truly state 'I therefore do not speak on this subject theoretically, but from insight gained through personal experience and personal contact with people and conditions on both sides':*

Is Christianity capable of contributing to the overcoming of tensions and showing a way to their solution? I am convinced that we can find a clear, positive answer by investigating how Christ himself met the tensions of his time; for him tensions which separate people simply do not exist. Jesus knows no fear, nothing holds him apart from other people. His fearlessness, however, flows from his communion with God. But this communion with God can be achieved by all men. Thus he sees in the other man only his brother, his neighbour. Next to the love of God, the commandment 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' is for Jesus the most essential of all commandments.

Such a concept does not mean that opposite views are abolished... On the contrary, they [remain distinct and] must not be veiled – that would be untruthful. The courage for clarity and the strength to stand up for truth are repeatedly demanded of us. However, the secret lies in the way in which truth is spoken. If it is spoken with contempt, bitterness or hatred, it results in bitterness; if, however, truth is spoken in love, the door to the other's heart can slowly open so that the truth can perhaps have some effect...

We can help to ease the tensions and live within them in the right way if we fulfil simultaneously Christ's two commandments – the commandment to love and the commandment to speak truth. A synthesis of these two must be found. Out of fear, we may betray truth; out of bitterness or self-righteousness we may betray love. A desire for peace without truthfulness is worthless and does not bring about peace; without love truth has no effect because it is not heard.

- 24.35 *Adam Curle was the first professor in the School (later Department) of Peace Studies, established in 1973 largely through Quaker initiative, in the University of Bradford.*

I have often been asked how we handle the fact that peacemaking involves having a relationship, often a close relationship, with people who are committed to violent solutions to their problems. Do we tell them we disapprove of what they are doing or urge them to repent and desist? And if we don't, how do we square this with our principles? For my part I reply that I would never presume to criticise people caught up in a situation I do not share with them for the way in which they are responding to that situation. How could I, for example, preach to the oppressed of Latin America or Southern Africa? Nevertheless, I explain that I do not believe in the use of violence as either effective or moral; my job is to try to help people who can see no alternative to violence to find a substitute...

I am as much concerned with the human condition in general as with specific conflicts, which often represent only the tip of a pyramid of violence and anguish... I am concerned with all the pain and confusion that impede our unfolding and fulfilment. Often, of course, circumstances force us to focus on extreme examples of unpeacefulness. However, if we were to limit our attention to these, we would be neglecting the soil out of which they grow and would continue to grow until the soil were purified. In this sense the social worker, the teacher, the wise legislator, or the good neighbour is just as much a peacemaker as the woman or man unravelling some lethal international imbroglio.

1981

- 24.36 I do not know whether Quakers have special aptitudes or skills as mediators, but they tend to sympathise with both sides in an international dispute, as both are usually victims of past mistakes. Because Quakers believe that there is that of God in all people to which others may respond, they not only hope for the best but they expect the best, believing that bad situations are likely to get better with the input of a little honest goodwill. And because they consider that force nearly always creates more problems than it solves, Quakers feel impelled to do what is possible by reason and persuasion to resolve conflicts involving or threatening armed force.

Sydney Bailey, 1984

- 24.37 *Sue Williams and her husband, Steve, were Quaker Peace & Service Representatives in Belfast, where they worked for reconciliation in a divided community.*

Establishing pacifist credentials has taken us collectively a long time, and entailed quite some suffering. How can a group without hierarchy or creed demonstrate that it will not

participate in war and 'fighting with outward weapons'? Only when individuals, one after another, across time and space, live out their convictions, so that choices made in different situations still seem to come together as a pattern. Amazingly, we are now widely known as people who will not fight in wars. Not only this, we are almost as widely known for having intervened in wars to try to alleviate suffering on all sides...

Beyond the general notion of pacifism, the situation here has lent a special urgency to our reputation for harmlessness. By this I mean that, as a Friend, I am not only unwilling to serve as a soldier, but unwilling to take up arms in my private capacity. This may not sound like much, but it puts me in a special relationship to political leaders here: they believe that I will not kill them. And they don't believe that of everyone they meet. More to the point, they accept that I don't want them dead, even when I disagree with them. And this too is something they cannot take for granted. It is surprisingly freeing for all of us. I'm sure they don't want to kill me, either. So I feel free to agree with them sometimes, disagree sometimes, without worrying about who else I agree or disagree with in the process, and taking for granted that neither of us wishes to kill the other.

1988

- 24.38 Mediation is not an easy task. It requires of us an exceptional willingness to listen, to lay aside self, and to enter into the minds of those in dispute. We must not try to find acceptance for our own solution to the conflict, but rather act as the ground in which, with our help, others can work out their answers. A few people are natural mediators; most of us can learn the skills if we feel called to that service.

Friends' opposition to all forms of violence imposes on them the responsibility to seek alternative responses to conflict and injustice. Mediation is one method which can be offered or suggested.

Sue Bowers, 1991

## Disarmament

- 24.39 *During the American War of Independence, the Quaker whaling community on the island of Nantucket suffered heavily from both sides for their neutrality. William Rotch, one of their leaders, had in a disused warehouse a consignment of bayonets which had been taken from muskets which he had accepted twelve years earlier in quittance of a debt, and sold as fowling pieces. In 1776 the bayonets were demanded from him by the Americans.*

The time was now come to endeavour to support our testimony against war, or abandon it, as this very instrument was a severe test. I could not hesitate which to choose, and therefore denied the applicant. My reason for not furnishing them was demanded, to which I readily answered, 'As this instrument is purposely made and used for the destruction of mankind, I can put no weapon into a man's hand to destroy another, that I cannot use myself in the same way.' The person left me much dissatisfied. Others came, and received the same denial. It made a great noise in the country, and my life was threatened. I would gladly have beaten them into 'pruning hooks', but I took an early opportunity of throwing them into the sea.

A short time after I was called before a committee appointed by the court then held at Watertown near Boston, and questioned amongst other things respecting my bayonets.

I gave a full account of my proceedings, and closed it with saying, 'I sunk them in the bottom of the sea, I did it from principle. I have ever been glad that I had done it, and if I am wrong I am to be pitied.' The chairman of the committee Major Hawley (a worthy character) then addressed the committee and said, 'I believe Mr Rotch has given us a candid account, and every man has a right to act consistently with his religious principles, but I am sorry that we could not have the bayonets, for we want them very much.' The Major was desirous of knowing more of our principles on which I informed him as far as he enquired. One of the committee in a pert manner observed, 'Then your principles are passive obedience and non-resistance.' I replied, 'No, my friend, our principles are active obedience or passive suffering.'

- 24.40 Our conviction is that Christianity has this to say to the world: 'Your reliance upon armaments is both wrong and futile. Armaments are the weapons of organised violence and outrage. Their use is a denial of the true laws of good living. They involve the perpetuation of strife. They stand in the way of the true fellowship of men. They impoverish the peoples. They tempt men to evil, and they breed suspicion and fear and the tragic results thereof. They are therefore not legitimate weapons in the Christian armoury, nor are they sources of security.'

You cannot foster harmony by the apparatus of discord, nor cherish goodwill by the equipment of hate. But it is by harmony and goodwill that human security can be obtained. Armaments aim at a security in isolation; but such would at best be utterly precarious and is, as a matter of fact, illusory. The only true safety is the safety of all, and unless your



weapon of defence achieves this work, or works towards this, it is a source of antagonism and therefore of increased peril.

All Friends Conference, 1920

- 24.41 We in Great Britain have decided to make hydrogen bombs. If a major war breaks out the temptation to use them will be very great. We are warned by our scientists that their use will involve not only the most terrible suffering now, but unknown consequences for succeeding generations who will pay the penalty for our sin. We believe that no one has the right to use these weapons in his defence or to ask another person to use them on his behalf. To rely on the possession of nuclear weapons as a deterrent is faithless; to use them is a sin.

Meeting for Sufferings, 1955

- 24.42 We are, I trust, steadfast in emphasising hope not fear as the driving force for disarmament. I doubt whether it is even a successful tactic, to motivate people by playing on their fear of death and destruction in a nuclear war; fear can as well engender paralysis as frenzied activity. But even if it were successful, that would not make it right. Quaker approaches to disarmament have largely avoided the temptation to appeal to fear. It is important that we continue to resist that temptation. To place the emphasis instead on hope, and the positive achievements we associate with disarmament, does not mean embracing a shallow optimism. It means relating our hopes for disarmament, our hopefulness, to the Christian understanding of hope, which is something much more profound.

Nicholas A Sims, 1985

## Building the institutions of peace and social justice

- 24.43 We have to ask ourselves at the outset whether the Society of Friends, or indeed any branch of the Christian church, has any call to concern itself with the sordid realities of international affairs ... There are politicians who would answer with a contemptuous 'No', in the mistaken belief that morals are totally irrelevant to politics. In this they grossly belittle the nature of their political calling which loses all validity if it abandons the attempt to translate moral principles into practical action. The Christians who tell us that politics are irrelevant to morals are on surer ground, since Christian hope is not founded upon political peace; if it were it could never have survived the 2,000 years of wrong which it has had to endure since it was first proclaimed. We cannot but regret the

tribulation, the nakedness, the peril and the sword, but we cannot forget that 'in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us', and that the Christian message is to be proclaimed in all circumstances, even when hell itself seems to have broken loose. Such was the experience of Rendel Harris when, after his ship had been torpedoed in the Mediterranean, he landed with others at Alexandria in a state of 'Apostolic one-stage-from-nudity', to be met at the Customs House with the irrelevant, political question, 'Have you anything to declare?'; he felt that the only possible answer in the circumstances was, 'We declare unto you glad tidings'. All too often, the question put to us by politics cannot be answered in any other way.

J Duncan Wood, 1962

- 24.44 *In An essay towards the present and future peace of Europe, by the establishment of a European diet, parliament or estates, published in 1693, William Penn envisaged constitutional arrangements for a United States of Europe.*

Now if the sovereign princes of Europe, who represent that society or independent state of men that was previous to the obligations of society, would for the same reason that engaged men first into society, viz, love of peace and order, agree to meet by their stated deputies in a general diet, estates, or parliament, and there establish rules of justice for sovereign princes to observe one to another; and thus to meet yearly, or once in two or three years at farthest, or as they shall see cause, and to be styled, the Sovereign or Imperial Diet, Parliament or State of Europe; before which sovereign assembly should be brought all differences depending between one sovereign and another that cannot be made up by private embassies before the sessions begin: and that if any of the sovereignties that constitute these imperial states shall refuse to submit their claim or pretensions to them, or to abide and perform the judgment thereof, and seek their remedy by arms, or delay their compliance beyond the time prefixed in their resolutions, all the other sovereignties, united as one strength, shall compel the submission and performance of the sentence, with damages to the suffering party.

- 24.45 *In 1925, the following questions were included in a section of our book of discipline on the League of Nations as showing some of the tests by which Friends might judge the League and its actions. These questions still indicate the criteria by which the international organisations of today may be assessed:*

Has it promise of becoming a league of all nations? Does it reflect the aspirations towards human brotherhood that are growing up among men and women in all nations? Does it stand for justice and mercy? Is it relying upon intelligent public opinion and on the consent of its members, rather than on fear or on threats of coercion? Does its moral authority increase or diminish? Is it working for the welfare, material and spiritual, of men and women, and not in the interests of powerful groups or tyrannical authorities? Is it bringing the light of day into places of deceit and corruption? Is it helping to succour the needy, to release those who are in bonds, to give light to those who are in darkness? Is it fostering co-operation? Does it show by its deeds a recognition of the truth that all men, whatever their colour or creed or class may be, are children of one Father?

- 24.46 Though rejecting on principle the provisions for coercion incorporated in the charter [of the United Nations], we must support the present organisation, the only peaceful meeting place for West and East, in its positive work of negotiation and functional co-operation, knowing well how imperfect and provisional its machinery still is. As citizens in a democracy we must urge our Government to do everything for the improvement of that machinery, and we may well take the idea of a world federation as a guiding principle for such improvement.

It is most important to use and develop the provisions of the charter for peaceful change of the status quo, so that fair and just conditions are created, which the nations are prepared to uphold. It is true that this is more a matter of will than of machinery; our aim must be to strengthen both the good will of nations and international machinery.

Konrad Braun, 1950

- 24.47 *Extracts from a statement issued by the Quaker Council for European Affairs in 1987:*

Our vision of Europe is of a peaceful, compassionate, open and just society, using its moral influence to encourage other countries and peoples towards the same goals. It is of a community of peoples which acts towards individuals and other communities as we would have others act towards us. As Quakers we seek to be sensitive to that of God in others and in ourselves, whose needs have the same validity as our own. Hence the right sharing of the world's resources is central to our thinking...

[We envision] a non-threatening Europe, committed to the non-violent resolution of conflict. As Quakers we are

committed to peace, but we cannot eliminate conflict. It can be minimised by reducing tension, by not posing threats to others (not only military, but also economic and cultural threats) and by seeking to understand the attitudes of others. Where conflicts arise, we can seek a nonviolent resolution by working for reconciliation...

We look forward to an economy which is conservationist, balanced in respect of growth, and sensitive to the needs and situations of other countries, not selling arms to others. We have only one world, and our present wasteful consumption of non-renewable resources and damage to the biosphere must stop. This requires alternative economic strategies, which are driven by need, not greed. The European economy should take positive account of the economies of other countries and not exploit their weaknesses. The selling of arms exploits such a weakness, and is morally indefensible.

- 24.48 [Our] understanding of the nature of the development process has altered. We are now increasingly aware that the Western development model, in which many had such confidence, is based on rampant exploitation of both people and the physical environment, is not fulfilling the real needs of many of our own citizens, and threatens the survival chances of human beings in poorer countries. Not only is it an inappropriate and impossible model for others to follow, it is itself responsible for exacerbating many of the problems it purports to solve. It has become increasingly apparent to [us] that new understandings and a change of heart within our own nation are an essential prerequisite to international reforms which might serve the interests of the most vulnerable nations and people.

Quaker Peace & Service, 1988

- 24.49 People matter. In the end human rights are about people being treated and feeling like people who matter. We are reminded graphically of violations of human rights far away and near at hand. In ignorance or knowingly we all violate human rights. We are all involved in the exercise of power and the abuse of power.

The multitude and complexity of the problems of oppression and injustice often seem to overwhelm us. We can do something. Friends are already working in a variety of ways: through international bodies, through voluntary organisations and by personal witness. Those who can give something of their lives to human rights require our support and we can look for opportunities to help those in need around us.

At the international level we affirm our support of Friends World Committee for Consultation and other bodies in

ensuring that the standards and ideals of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights are attained, that the world does not slip backwards.

Above all we must take risks for God: look around us to the people who need help; listen to those who experience oppression; engage in the mutual process of liberation.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

## Right sharing of the world's resources

24.50 We have thought of the widespread exploitation of economically under-developed peoples, and of those industrial and other workers who are also exploited and heavily burdened. We must therefore work for a larger measure of liberty in political and economic life. For not only is this at the heart of the Christian message, but we have seen that peace stands on a precarious footing so long as there is unrelieved poverty and subjection. Subjection, poverty, injustice and war are closely allied. This situation demands sweeping political and economic changes; and we are convinced that the hope of freedom does not lie in violence, which is at its root immoral, but in such changes as may be brought about by fellowship and mutual service.

London Yearly Meeting, 1937

24.51 *After more than thirty years and a second world war, London Yearly Meeting in 1968 moved beyond statements, to a call for positive sacrificial action conceived as a corporate witness by Friends to prompt action by the country as a whole:*

The World Conference of Friends held in 1967 asked yearly meetings throughout the world to consider the right use of the world's resources.

We know that the world's resources are neither developed to the full nor used to the best advantage. The inequality in the distribution of goods and services between nations and between individuals within nations stares us in the face.

If we are to face these issues aright we are called to re-examine our whole way of life. At the personal level we must ask ourselves how we spend our time, and how we use the talents God has given us in earning a living, remembering that in spending we are asking others to use their resources in our service.

As members of the Society of Friends we must ask the same question about the resources of our Society: as members of a

nation and of the community of nations we must be alive to the fact that ours is among the richer countries of the world, yet devotes but a small fraction of the national income to help the less developed countries.

We commend to the further consideration of Friends ... the continuing need for personal service. We are concerned from this session to ask all Friends who feel able to do so to give a further one per cent of their income to helping the poorer nations.

24.52 *The 1% Fund, established by London Yearly Meeting in 1968, operated for just over twenty years. Even in the first flush of enthusiasm fewer than 1,500 persons or households supported it and by 1989 it had fewer than 500 subscribers. Though the proceeds it raised were put to good use in the developing world, the yearly meeting had failed to respond to the call to demonstrate to the government that the public would support more taxation for international aid.*

*Yet there were individual Friends who wished to make a sacrificial witness. After a lifetime of service to others, Douglas Smith, warden of Settle Meeting House, inherited a legacy which would have given him security and comfort in his old age. The following statement was left with his papers; at his request it was published in 1981 after his death:*

Much of our present affluence in Britain was built on the cheap labour, inadequate food, poor housing, poor medical and social services and almost non-existent education of the people of our former Empire. When they demanded their freedom, we cleared out, leaving them almost totally unfitted for stable self-government and without adequate capital to develop their own resources.

Every one of us in Britain, even the poorest, has reaped benefits of many kinds from the misery and poverty in our Empire. We are all deeply in debt. Governments, trade unions, politicians and churches have talked loud and long about justice and the brotherhood of mankind. We have handed over to them our personal responsibility to achieve these aims, but with tragic lack of success.

Now we must act; take new and revolutionary action at the level of our *personal* responsibility to give back to the world's poor the wealth of which we have robbed them and are still robbing them. Unless we take our Christian responsibility for closing the gap between our comfort and their misery, we shall blunder deeper and deeper into world-wide disasters – and probably to self-destruction.



For fifty years these injustices have weighed on my conscience. Then in 1979 I acquired considerable wealth, and immediately I was faced inescapably with the Christian challenge to repay as much as possible of the wealth which Britain had taken from the world's poor. I gave away almost all the money to charities and trusts working in the former British possessions. This brought me to the financial level of the old-age pensioner, but with no regret. The pension leaves us room for happiness, contentment and laughter. Compared with an Indian or African peasant, our pensioner is princely rich.

The personal responsibility which we hand over to governments, trade unions, committees and churches has failed to banish world poverty. I hope this statement will lead others to think deeply of their individual responsibility towards all the world's problems and to take action *now*, sacrificially – guided by the Christian spirit of deep caring.

*See also chapter 25* Unity of creation & [23.53–23.70](#) Work and economic affairs

## The personal roots of conflict and education for peace

24.53 It should be the goal of understanding to pierce first through the thin layer of superficial familiarity and then through the hard rock of differing customs, habits and beliefs to discover the real humanity that lies beneath. National, racial and religious differences have not destroyed our common humanity, but they have given it different faces which may tempt us to forget that all the things that really matter, life and death, birth and love, joy and sorrow, poetry and prayer, are common to us all. The sense of our common humanity is latent within us, but only occasionally do we appreciate it as a living reality, as when at times of great stress we are upheld by strangers of an alien creed and tongue. Then the inward eye is opened and we see humanity standing above all nations, more humble, more patient and far more enduring than all the kingdoms of this earth. This is the ultimate justification for our peace-making.

J Duncan Wood, 1962

24.54 Conflict is a part of life, a necessary result of the varying needs, aims and perspectives of individuals and communities. It is part of our daily experience, both directly and through television and other news media. The ethos of the home, school or workplace will provide some rules (spoken and

unspoken) for handling conflict situations. However, these often contradict each other and the pressures from friends and peer groups can work against the 'official' ways of handling conflict. Society educates young people at best haphazardly and at worst quite destructively as far as conflict is concerned. From an early age, people are led to think that conflicts should be settled by someone in authority: the parent, the teacher, the headteacher, the gangleader, the policeman, the judge, the boss, the president. If there is nobody to arbitrate, then the 'strongest' will 'win' and the 'weaker' will 'lose'. Traditionally, little encouragement has been given to young people to take responsibility for resolving conflicts, to look for 'win-win' solutions. Yet the way in which young people learn to respond to conflict will have a pervasive effect both on the quality of their personal lives and on the prospects for society as a whole. Affirming the personal value of each individual, encouraging mutual respect and consciously developing the skills and attitudes involved in creative conflict resolution must be regarded as an important educational priority.

Sue Bowers and Tom Leimdorfer, 1990

See also [20.67–20.75](#) Conflict & [23.84–23.85](#)

## Our vision

24.55 In place of a process which trusts technology and mistrusts humanity, we must learn and live out a process that builds trust between people and their institutions... From the earliest days of Friends, we have known that safety cannot be defended in our own strength, but only in God's... And we don't have to do it with tools of our own fashioning, ever more elaborate technological juggling acts, ever more devastatingly destructive bombs... [We can] learn to lay down carnal weapons, practising with weapons of the spirit: love, truthsaying, nonviolence, the good news of God's birth and rebirth among us, imagination, vision, and laughter.

No one ever said it would be easy, no one promised it wouldn't hurt. This way of life, this trusting one another and trusting God, is no impermeable shield, guaranteed to protect us by cutting us off, building barriers, keeping the bad things and the bad people out. It's messy, muddly and sometimes painful – but the other way, the search for some kind of mechanical invulnerability, for some kind of scientific guarantee against physical death, that way I am sure lies the death of the Spirit. We know the choice – we've known it all along – and we make it every day... 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life

and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live (Deut 30:19).'

Mary Lou Leavitt, 1987

- 24.56 *In 1920 the Society of Friends had its first World Conference, held in London as soon as possible after the First World War. In 1937, when the world was so plainly drifting toward a second and more terrible conflict, it was decided to hold another conference, this time in the United States. Rufus Jones was asked to preside over the meetings. He accepted, but the Conference loomed before him as an ordeal. He wrote to Violet Holdsworth:*

In regard to the World Conference, I sincerely hope for good results, but I have become a good deal disillusioned over 'big' conferences and large gatherings. I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place. But others see differently, and I respect their judgment.

1937

- 24.57 The follower of Jesus is to discover and then promote the Kingdom of God. That Kingdom has two tenses: it is already here, in each one of us; and it is still to come, when God's goodness becomes a universal norm. We are to live now 'as if' the Kingdom of God were already fulfilled.

Peace begins within ourselves. It is to be implemented within the family, in our meetings, in our work and leisure, in our own localities, and internationally. The task will never be done. Peace is a process to engage in, not a goal to be reached.

Sydney Bailey, 1993

- 24.58 Our consideration of international affairs has brought us into the presence of human tragedies, for which only the things of the spirit can offer consolation. They are the bricks of which the institutions of peace must be built, 'oft with bleeding hands and tears'... But tears do not always blind. We may shed them to wash the windows of the spirit that with a clearer vision and a surer sympathy we may take up again our unfinished task of declaring the glad tidings.

J Duncan Wood, 1962

- 24.59 Mothers for Peace was the brainchild of two 85-year-old Quakers, Lucy Behenna and Marion Mansergh. Taking to heart the message on a Quaker poster, 'World peace will come through the will of ordinary people like yourself', they put their life savings into a scheme to send groups of

peacemakers to visit the two superpowers – the USA and the Soviet Union. Mothers were chosen because they have a special affinity with one another and a common desire to secure a safe and peaceful world for their children. The first visits to the US and the Soviet Union occurred simultaneously in 1981. In April and May 1982 return visits were paid by American and Soviet mothers who toured Britain in three groups, meeting all together in London for the final three days.

Mothers for peace, 1983

*From this beginning the work has continued and extended, involving women from many countries and cultures. The organisation is now called 'Women to Women for peace'.*

- 24.60 The first Friends had an apocalyptic vision of the world transformed by Christ and they set about to make it come true. The present generation of Quakers shares this conviction of the power of the spirit, but it is doubtful whether it will transform the world in our lifetime, or in that of our children or children's children. For us it is not so important when the perfect world will be achieved or what it will be like. What matters is living our lives in the power of love and not worrying too much about the results. In doing this, the means become part of the end. Hence we lose the sense of helplessness and futility in the face of the world's crushing problems. We also lose the craving for success, always focusing on the goal to the exclusion of the way of getting there. We must literally not take too much thought for the morrow but throw ourselves whole-heartedly into the present. That is the beauty of the way of love; it cannot be planned and its end cannot be foretold.

Wolf Mendl, 1974

## Further Information

[quaker.org.uk](https://www.quaker.org.uk)

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**Peace testimony**  
**Introduction to Quakers and peace**  
**Working for peace**  
**Peace education**

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