

faith (nia statement)

statement of nia for the Monthly Meeting

nia is the 5th day of Kwanzaa and is an arabic loan word to the swahili language meaning 'purpose'. in drafting this message, friends wish to make plain our purpose in opening the Monthly Meeting and to invite Friends to join us in doing so as they are led.

we wish it to be plain that the primary ministry and concern of the Monthly Meeting is the spiritual rights and community care of young people who have heeded the call of spirit, however it may have come to them. we minute that part of these rights lie in spiritual accompaniment for births, commitments, and life transitions as they arise.

language is a deep and sacred gift delivered unto us by the inward Guide. we hold the Truth testimony as a commandment to honor the sacredness of this gift and the responsibility to Truth in all our communication

we joyfully honor the contributions of the internet to to our social and spiritual lives and recognize that it has brought changes to our communication styles as well to preserve clarity in digital communication, we reserve capital letters for the Most High and the Business to which we are Called by Spirit that we may live in keeping with the manner of Friends in our digital personages as well as communicate matters with appropriate weight.

Friends have discerned that racial and ethnic unity is necessary to decolonise faith and practice among Friends and within the religious society of friends at-large. 'the minorities didn't agree so we kicked them off the island' is not a way to do Business, yet has been repeatedly taken as custom by Friends.

we decline the term 'member' as it has come to be used in ways not in keeping with the unity we seek. Convincement is a opening of Spirit in oneself; membership in a body is but an affirmation of a Call heeded.

it has opened before us that heeding the call to walk in service of peace is a hallmark of Convincement, recognized or not. supporting others on this path is the divinely assigned work of Friends, with no honor to creed, origin, documentation, or division (Q 6:159).

in recognizing that no group is a monolith nor an island, we joyfully invite any who finds that our *nia* speaks to their condition into community with us--we are glad that spirit has led you to find us (Q 4:171).

we reject the idea that all work of Friends is *now* in service of peace, and recognize the wisdom of francis jeanson in reflecting upon the role of Friends 'if you succeed in keeping yourself unsullied, it is because others dirty themselves in your place.' recognizing our own positions in global unrest demands that we reflect upon the true meaning of violence and that which provokes it. what does the peace testimony demand of our relationships with money, property, and material resources? what are we called to leave behind if we are to have peaceful relations with neighbors near and far?

with regards to the endless and necessary work of american friends (peace and abolition): friends have discerned that in order to build the beloved and united community revealed by the Word (Q 6:159 ; Q 49:13), the issue of integration must be addressed in the manner of early friends.

early Friends recognized the full religious rights of women, however in practice was not so easily settled; what 17th century Englishwoman would feel that she could speak openly in meeting where her spouse or father were present?

thus for the early decades of the Religious Society of Friends, women's meetings were established in which women conducted business amongst themselves so that it **could be** brought to the business meeting in full and equal weight. this practice was later laid down in the 19th & 20th century.

when the future has arrived, there will be no need for ethnic separation between Friends because we will understand the unity underlying in the diverse liveries we wear in life that we may let our Light lead.

in the meantime and the present, friends have recognized the need for a reckoning with the role of quakers as a force of colonization and a decolonized approach to modern Friendship. many young people have found themselves called to peace or the work of it, yet as matters stand, many meetings are not ready to receive convinced or traveling Friends in the full spirit of the community to which the Light calls us. quakers are no different than other americans in that respect; sunday morning is as segregated for friends as it is for believers and secular spiritualists alike.

it has opened before us that there is a need for Friends who originate from outside the peninsular west and european islands to seek the guidance of Spirit in community with each other and to conduct right relations among ourselves as has been revealed by the Word many times before (Q 49:13; Epistle BBIPOC May 2025). the Monthly Meeting seeks to open this space.

the theology of friends was radical in its time for its acceptance of radical egalitarianism under the Most High.

with a long term view, globalization presents uncomfortable implications to this theology—**were quakers really commanded** to accept any one called into community as Friends? were we **really** expected to accommodate people so different into our ever-expanding society?

of course we were, but this is far easier said than done. to put this testimony into practice requires setting aside custom in favor of words and deeds which honor the inward Light of every body, including many customs which have served to preserve divisions made early in the life of our people.

to cross these lines is uncomfortable, as they have been weaponized as deliberate loci of control. and yet, this is the single most decolonial act there is: to turn away from the oppressor before you, to reach for the person next to you.

it is true that bigotry is not reserved to whiteness, just as it is true that anti-blackness has poisoned nearly every well in the empire on which the sun has set.

the *nia* of 'sankofa' sends us to ask who we are to each other when the colonizer and his-host are not standing between us? what actions will set the tone for our continuing relationships? what has been left behind that we may bring forth to the present?

the inward Spirit sends us to ask how we are to meet each other as cousins, as neighbors, and as Friends moving in with the guidance of Light?

the prophetic voice sends us to ask what will we do as ancestors, to architect the world future generations will inhabit? what will we take with us and what will we respectfully leave behind?

giving honor to the Most High, we affirm the Word as it has been revealed in the old

Testament, the Psalms, and the Gospel. we name with joy the complete Message delivered by the Prophet, peace be upon him. The Book (al-khitab) is whole and sufficient guidance, and we recognize that our journeys in the 'new' west may call upon us to interpret this Message as we become a new and gathered people in an old land.

we affirm the message conveyed by rufus jones (1863-1948) that believers are the only book in which the Most High has written the Gospel of Issa ibn Maryam (Jesus of Nazareth), peace be upon him.

in keeping with the manner of Friends, we affirm the ability of every body to access the prophetic voice and to the recitation of what has already been revealed. we invite friends and attenders to proceed in doing so as way opens.

we open this Monthly Meeting in service of cultivating the shoots rooted by the spiritual mothers of our people, who spoke truth to power and sowed the seeds for our future.

just as the divine spark is present in all, we hold all Friends present in equal standing for the Business of meeting and Ministry. IF the Spirit has led thee to be with us then we shall receive thy presence with divine welcome.

friends of the Monthly Meeting take our faith from what has been opened in us, and our practice from the continuing revelation of Friends to GO as Spirit sends thee.

Stewardship

Stewardship

25.01

The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age. John Woolman, 1772

Our planet is seriously ill and we can feel the pain. We have been reminded of the many ways in which the future health of the earth is under threat as a result of our selfishness, ignorance and greed. Our earth needs attention, respect, love, care and prayer. In comfortable Britain we are largely insulated from the effects of the environmental crisis. It is the poor of the world who suffer first.

25.02

As a Religious Society of Friends we see the stewardship of God's creation as a major concern. The environmental crisis is at root a spiritual and religious crisis; we are called to look again at the real purpose of being on this earth, which is to till it and keep it so as to reveal the glory of God for generations to come.

It is a stony road ahead but our faith will uphold us; the power to act is God's power which is mediated through each of us as we give and receive support one from another. We can all listen if we will to the sounds of the earth, tuning into it with joy.

London Yearly Meeting, 1988

25.03

My children were having a hard time. Really bad – I mean drugs, sex gone wrong, quite unable to fit in anywhere for the time being. Yet now they have come through it... I felt desperate with guilt... but as time passed I came to see that what had happened was not entirely our fault, as parents. It was also that they were inheritors of social guilt and social pain. Our children are the first generation to grow up facing the possibility of the end of our species. Perhaps it is partly the planet crying out in us? Perhaps the violated earth needs to cry and feel desperation in us?

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1982

25.04

All species and the Earth itself have interdependent roles within Creation. Humankind is not *the* species, to whom all others are subservient, but one among many. All parts, all issues, are inextricably intertwined. Indeed the web of creation could be described as of three-ply thread: wherever we touch it we affect justice and peace and the health of all everywhere. So all our testimonies, all our Quaker work, all our Quaker lives are part of one process, of striving towards a flourishing, just and peaceful Creation – the Kingdom of God.

Audrey Urry, 1994

25.05

I was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted in an inward life wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator and learns to exercise true justice and goodness not only toward all men but also toward the brute creation; that as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being, on the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world; that as by his breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal and sensitive creatures, to say we love God ... and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature ... was a contradiction in itself.

John Woolman, 1772

25.06

If it is right that we should show love and compassion for people, surely it is right that we should extend our love and compassion to animals, who can feel fear and experience pain in much the same way as humans. They may not be able to speak, but we can certainly see fear in their eyes and demeanour. I feel that being a vegetarian is a natural progression from being a pacifist and a Quaker.

Vera Haley, 1988

25.07

As to our own planet which God has given us for a dwelling place, we must be mindful that it is given in stewardship. The power over nature that scientific knowledge has put into our hands, if used in lust or greed, fear or hatred, can bring us to utter destruction. If we choose life we may now feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick on a world scale, thus creating new conditions for spiritual advancement so often till now prevented by want. Many of our resources – of oil, of coal and of uranium – are limited. If by condoning waste and luxury we overspend the allowance God has given us, our children's children will be cheated of their inheritance. Limited too is the annual bounty of nature. The material foundation of our life is the tilling of the earth and the growing of food... We must conserve the goodness of the soil and not exploit it.

We must guard, too, the abundance and variety of untamed nature, and not forget the spiritual resources available to us in the continued existence of unoccupied lands. Modern civilisation perpetually threatens our awareness of the true nature of our being which in the presence of the wild we can more easily retain or at length recapture. Year by year silence and solitude are growing more needful, yet harder to obtain, and contacts, by this means, with the mind of the Creator more tenuous. To conserve nature is thus again a contribution to the fuller life of mankind.

Norfolk, Cambs & Hunts Quarterly Meeting, 1957

This is a marvellous world, full of beauty and splendour; it is also an unrelenting and savage world, and we are not the only living things prone to dominate if given the chance. In our fumbling, chaotic way, we do also make gardens, irrigate the desert, fly to the moon and compose symphonies. Some of us are trying to save species other than ourselves...

25.08 We have no reason to be either arrogant or complacent: one look at the stars or through a microscope is sufficient to quell such notions. But we have to accept our position in the world with as much grace, responsibility and fortitude as we can muster, and try to grow up to our mission of love in this tangle of prospects and torments.

Pamela Umbima, 1992

25.09 I want to list ten controlling principles for the outward expression of simplicity. They should not be viewed as laws but as one attempt to flesh out the meaning of simplicity into twentieth-century life. First, buy things for their usefulness rather than their status. Second, reject anything that is producing an addiction in you. Third, develop a habit of giving things away. De-accumulate. Fourth, refuse to be propagandised by the custodians of modern gadgetry. Fifth, learn to enjoy things without owning them. Sixth, develop a deeper appreciation for the creation. Seventh, look with a healthy scepticism at all 'buy now, pay later' schemes. Eighth, obey Jesus' injunction about plain, honest speech. Ninth, reject anything that will breed the oppression of others. Tenth, shun whatever would distract you from your main goal.

Richard J Foster, 1979

25.10 Our adoption of the [World Council of Churches'] concern for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation grows from our faith and cannot be separated from it. It challenges us to look again at our lifestyles and reassess our priorities and makes us realise the truth of Gandhi's words: 'Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.' The earth's resources must be conserved and shared more equitably and, as we are an integral part of creation, this is our responsibility.

London Yearly Meeting, 1989

25.11 As consumers, producers and investors, or as travellers, readers and campaigners we can be active in support of the Two Thirds World. Our use of energy connects us directly to the greenhouse effect and to world food supplies. Our bank interest rates link us to the debt burdens which are forcing many countries to destroy their environment to produce cash crops and foreign currency. Our ability to acquire knowledge gives us the chance to act as a mouthpiece on behalf of the environment and the poor who are suffering most from its destruction. Indeed we have the responsibility to use that knowledge wisely.

Ruth Tod, 1990

25.12

We live in a part of the world where the dominant motivation is material self-interest, justified by the concept of personal freedom. In these circumstances, the rich get richer and the poor, for the most part, become comparatively poorer. This offends our moral sensibility and, at the practical level, the process of material growth cannot in any event go on indefinitely. We must find some way in which we in the West can change our dominance in setting the style of the world's living from one motivated by self-interest into one in which material resources are made available according to need. We know a good deal about this kind of distribution in particular situations but have not yet any effective idea about how to embody compassion into the essential structure of our society. This demands both thought and personal commitment at the level of where we are, not taking refuge simply in telling those with political power what they should do. We must be aware in all humility that it is we who are sinning in accepting the elevation of self-interest and that it is we who must move towards another form of motivation. What are we doing to proclaim our joyful acceptance that our living standards are going to have to drop; what are we doing to join with other Christians and concerned fellow-citizens to proclaim the vulgarity of our affluent style of living; what are we doing to find ways of influencing the way in which our fellow-citizens think and act, be they our neighbours or elected and appointed representatives, to recognise the need for change?

London Yearly Meeting, 1975

25.13

That the sweat and tedious labour of the farmer, early and late, cold and hot, wet and dry, should be converted into the pleasure of a small number of men – that continued severity should be laid on nineteen parts of the land to feed the inordinate lusts and delicate appetites of the twentieth, is so far from the will of the great Governor of the world, ... [it] is wretched and blasphemous.

William Penn, 1669

We are building towards the climax of crisis. The spiritual crisis is folding into the ecological crisis and the ecological crisis is folding into the economic crisis. As Christians, it seems to me, we are now required to critically assess the capital driven market economy and identify it as a false religion, a fabulously productive but ultimately destructive system bringing closure on God's goodness in creation and bringing a creeping atheism to the soul. To look this system straight in the eye and call it to account is a critical test of Biblical faith.

25.14

Challenging market economics with a Biblical sense of the goodness of God in creation is to join a spiritual struggle. Faith in God, solidarity with the suffering poor and all other forms of life demands that we take a stand and say, 'This destruction must stop.' We must be perfectly clear about the implications of undertaking this responsibility. It is more than just setting up household recycling bins, growing organic vegetables or riding a bike to work. It is more than a talking job. It is a renovation which will change everything: the way we do business, the way we eat, the way we travel, the houses we build, the products and services we can expect and the prices we pay for them, the way we feel about trees and the way we worship God.

Keith Helmuth, 1990

Our testimonies against war and inequality have been aimed at persuading people, and reminding ourselves, as to where their wealth lies: in the discovery of a common identity and a common cause with other human beings. Those testimonies apply in the same way to our treatment of our natural environment which, as Augustine said, is itself like a 'commonwealth', in which every creature in its own way serves the interests of the others. The difference now is that the commonwealth of people and the commonwealth of the earth have become inseparably interrelated and interdependent – have become in fact one new commonwealth of life. Our thinking about God and the world and the way we live in relation to them must now give recognition to that fact.

25.15

Rex Ambler, 1990

See also 20.27–20.36, 21.42, 23.40, 29.04–29.07 & 29.18

Discussion

Ujima is collective work and responsibility; as Friends what is ours?

FGC Haverford College 2024

Meeting with a concern for air conditioning

queries & vibes:

- why are we so unconcerned with everyone's comfort
- so much resort energy, not enough spirit
- why won't any one do quran stuff
- how do we steward the spirit in spaces we are in
- how come some of this stuff is so weird....
- ~~how come the young folx are in a corner?~~ how do we get young folx out of the corner?
- what are we doing to steward the spaces in which we live and work
- how are we using our resources and to what ends?
- what means is it in the common good to abolish?
- how do we take care of the spaces around us
- to what extent are we responsible for coconstructing them?

Truth

Truth

As we reflect on our experience, intimations emerge about the nature of God. In this we are helped by the experiences of others which enlighten our path. We remember Nayler in his suffering testifying to 'a spirit which delights to do no evil nor to revenge any wrong' and Barclay when he first went to Friends' meetings, feeling the evil weakening in him and the good being raised up. We recall those who have been upheld by love, or filled with joy, or called to commit their lives to service, or who have sensed a divine reality in the wonder of the world or in the depths of being or in the hardest challenges of life.

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts, which are the leadings of God.

[26.01](#)

Advices, 1964

After this I returned into Nottinghamshire again and went into the Vale of Beavor... And one morning, as I was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over me and a temptation beset me; but I sat still. And it was said, 'All things come by nature'; and the elements and stars came over me so that I was in a manner quite clouded with it. But inasmuch as I sat, still and silent, the people of the house perceived nothing. And as I sat still under it and let it alone, a living hope arose in me and a true voice, which said, 'There is a living God who made all things'. And immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, and life rose over it all, and my heart was glad, and I praised the living God.

[26.02](#)

George Fox, 1648

Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter.

[26.03](#)

George Fox, 1648

Caroline Fox (1819–1871) wrote in her journal at the age of 21, of 'the struggle through which a spark of true faith was lighted in my soul':

The first gleam of light, 'the first cold light of morning' which gave promise of day with its noontide glories, dawned on me one day at meeting, when I had been meditating on my state in great depression. I seemed to hear the words articulated in my spirit, 'Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.' Then I believed that God speaks to man by His Spirit. I strove to lead a more Christian life, in unison with what I knew to be right, and looked for brighter days, not forgetting the blessings that are granted to prayer.

[26.04](#)

1841

Emilia Fogelklou (1878–1972) here recalls her own experience at the age of 23. She had been put in charge of the religious instruction in a progressive school in Gothenburg at a time when she was oppressed by the failure of her search for the reality of God; she was filled with despair, almost to the point of suicide, and felt she was 'just a shell, a shell empty of life'. (She writes of herself in the third person.)

26.05 But then one bright spring day – it was the 29th of May 1902 – while she sat preparing for her class under the trees in the backyard of Föreningsgatan 6, quietly, invisibly, there occurred the central event of her whole life. Without visions or the sound of speech or human mediation, in exceptionally wide-awake consciousness, she experienced the great releasing inward wonder. It was as if the 'empty shell' burst. All the weight and agony, all the feeling of unreality dropped away. She perceived living goodness, joy, light like a clear, irradiating, uplifting, enfolding, unequivocal reality from deep inside.

The first words which came to her – although they took a long time to come – were, 'This is the great Mercifulness. This is God. Nothing else is so *real* as this.' The child who had cried out in anguish and been silenced had now come inside the gates of Light. She had been delivered by a love that is greater than any human love. Struck dumb, amazed, she went quietly to her class, wondering that no one noticed that something had happened to her.

Rufus Jones described the experience which his friend John Wilhelm Rowntree had in 1894:

26.06 Just as he was entering young manhood and was beginning to feel the dawning sense of a great mission before him, he discovered that he was slowly losing his sight. He was told that before middle life he would become totally blind. Dazed and overwhelmed he staggered from the doctor's office to the street and stood there in silence. Suddenly he felt the love of God wrap him about as though a visible presence enfolded him, and a joy filled him, such as he had never known before. From that time ... he was a gloriously joyous and happy man. His physical limitations have all along been turned into inward profit. His long, hard battle with a stubborn disease which was attacking the very citadel of his powers – his sight, his hearing and his memory – has only made him more heroic and gentle.

Hilda Clark (1881–1955), a doctor, wrote in 1908 of her experience when her sister-in-law died in childbirth:

26.07 I am thinking of those lovely fine days when Cara sat with me for hours sewing her little things. I feel as if my whole life might be better and more use to others from those two days, but what an awful price it is to pay. Do you know, I actually felt that it was 'better' somehow than those awful hours with those two poor creatures in the maternity hospital, when one's heart felt like ice within one, because one realised the tragedy with one's brain, and not with one's heart. And if I ever have to hold such a cold hand and feel such a death stricken pulse, I think a little of the love I have for Cara will go out to the victim, whoever it may be ... No, justice is of the Spirit, not of the outside world – but our understanding is so wrapped up in outward things that we can only grow spiritually by applying spiritual things to material ones – therefore we must be just though Nature is not.

One thing I understand now is that one's intellect alone won't pull one through, and that the greatest service it can perform is to open a window for that thing we call the divine spirit. If one trusts to it alone it's like trusting to an artificial system of

ventilation – correct in theory but musty in practice. How I wish it were as easy to throw everything open to the spirit of God as it is to fresh air.

[26.08](#) About two years ago on an April morning I felt ill at ease and unhappy. Life was difficult and the burden of the war weighed upon me. I climbed the steep path at the entrance of one of our public parks and stood beneath some cherry trees that fringe the crest of the bank. A fresh wind blew dark clouds across the green-blue sky. The white blossom shone and glistened in the sunlight. As I stood relaxed and still, I had the illusion that I was enveloped in light. I had the feeling that the light and I were one. Time and space slipped from me. All awareness of details vanished. A sense of unity with the world entered into me. I was tranquillised and steadied by the beauty, the stability of Nature. I do not suppose that I learnt anything that was new to me during this experience. But I believe I was taught something and that something happened in me. I returned to my work tranquil, and strengthened in faith and hope by my experience.

Howard Collier, 1943

J Rowntree Gillett (1874–1940) was a banker who gave up his business in the First World War on pacifist grounds and devoted his life to religious and social services.

[26.09](#) Brought up in a house where Jesus Christ was loved and honoured, I can never remember a time when his claims on me were not more or less a living issue, and although on attaining manhood I wandered for many years in a maze of doubt and unrest, nevertheless that issue remained. Just thirteen years ago I became convinced that God was a living reality and had revealed himself to humanity in the character and personality of Jesus Christ. From that time I dedicated myself to him and have tried to lead men and women into a realisation of God's love and care for them.

c.1918

[26.10](#) I am by temperament a sceptic. But, at my feeblest, I am conscious of a power of choice, of a better and a worse. This 'ought' is my insignia of personality. Directly I admit that my life might be better than it is I have a sense of failure and feel a need of help from something or someone outside myself. This sense and this need are to me the meanings of the terms 'sense of sin' and 'need of salvation'. I recognise absolute moral or, rather, spiritual values, quite beyond reason or argument; very often indeed contradicting reason and flouting even scientific law... I am not going to wait until I have fathomed all mysteries and secret lore before I begin to live. It has been my good fortune often to be in company with great souls, who have not only helped me in my intellectual quest for truth about religion, but have always encouraged me to strive towards experience, towards belief in religion. Fitfully and falteringly and with repeated failures I have tried to 'mind that which is pure' in me to guide me to God.

Francis H Knight, 1945

[26.11](#) Whenever we are driven into the depths of our own being, or seek them of our own will, we are faced by a tremendous contrast. On the one side we recognise the pathetic littleness of our ephemeral existence, with no point or meaning in itself. On the other side, in the depth, there is something eternal and infinite in which our existence, and indeed all existence, is grounded. This experience of the depths of existence fills us with a sense both of reverence and of responsibility, which gives even to our finite lives a meaning and a power which they do not possess in themselves. This, I am assured, is our human experience of God.

John Macmurray, 1967

[26.12](#) So one approaches, by efforts which call for the deepest resources of one's being, to the condition of true silence; not just of sitting still, not just of not speaking, but of a wide awake, fully aware non-thinking. It is in this condition, found and held for a brief instant only, that I have experienced the existence of something other than 'myself'. The thinking me has vanished, and with it vanishes the sense of separation, of unique identity. One is not left naked and defenceless, as one is, for example, by the operations of the mind in self-analysis. One becomes instead aware, one is conscious of being a participant in the whole of existence, not limited to the body or the moment... It is in this condition that one understands the nature of the divine power, its essential identity with love, in the widest sense of that much misused word.

Geoffrey Hubbard, 1974

[26.13](#) My experience came after many years of doubting and uncertainty. It came to me one evening, alone in the sitting room at home. It came at a moment when God, who through many people and events over a period of several months had been pursuing me, put his hand on my shoulder. I had to respond – yes or no. It was unequivocal, inescapable and unconditional. It was also completely unemotional; I was stone cold sober – no heavenly visions or lumps in the throat. It was a challenge to the will, a gift of faith for me to reject or accept – and I accepted.

Roy Farrant, 1974

[26.14](#) If anyone had told me in the summer of 1979 that within three years I should be unable to walk, speak, write by hand and feed myself, then surely I would have gone to pieces emotionally and perhaps spiritually. After all, I had just enjoyed a vigorous walking holiday in North Wales, descending from Snowdon by the difficult Crib Goch route... Since hearing the diagnosis, I have been struggling to come to terms with the implications of this illness – no, 'struggling' is the wrong word, for as my physical power has waned, so faith has been wonderfully strengthened... I feel surrounded and upheld by God's love.

Walter Martin, 1984

[26.15](#) In silence, without rite or symbol, we have known the Spirit of Christ so convincingly present in our quiet meetings that his grace dispels our faithlessness, our unwillingness, our fears, and sets our hearts aflame with the joy of adoration. We have thus felt the power of the Spirit renewing and recreating our love and friendship for all our fellows. This is our Eucharist and our Communion.

London Yearly Meeting, 1928

Ways of seeking

[26.16](#) In its early days our Society owed much to a people who called themselves Seekers: they joined us in great numbers and were prominent in the spread of Quakerism. It is a name which must appeal strongly to the scientific temperament. The name has died out, but I think that the spirit of seeking is still the prevailing one in our faith, which for that reason is not embodied in any creed or formula.

Arthur S Eddington, 1929

[26.17](#) I should like to change the name 'seekers' to 'explorers'. There is a considerable difference there: we do not seek the Atlantic, we explore it. The whole field of religious experience has to be explored, and has to be described in a language understandable to modern men and women.

Ole Olden, 1955

[26.18](#) It is because the learning process is continued throughout life that Friends are seekers as well as finders – not one or the other, but both. One only has to think of the need for a continual search for fresh language, unsoiled by use, to know that we must, if we care about truth, continue to be seekers. We may have a firm hold on old truth ourselves, but unless we are eager to find new ways of expressing it we may be unable to speak the word of life to others just when they most need it.

Ruth Fawell, 1987

[26.19](#) God is revealed to individuals through models suited to their temperaments and abilities; to communities through models suited to their culture. Nor will the interpretation of these models always be the same. Each one is only a guide to the truth that is greater than them all yet accessible in the nearest and simplest way... As our experience widens we are brought closer to aspects of God which we did not understand before. But we are compelled to respect the experience and response of others. If there is no one model of the truth and if no model is essential then there is no basis for authoritarianism or heresy-hunts. Our own vision is widened by the vision of others.

Janet Scott, 1980

[26.20](#) The advice to be open to new light from wherever it may come is one of the reasons why the Quakers have continued to answer that of God in everyone. The trust they showed in the living Christ was their strength 300 years ago, as it is today, though we do not all use the same words. A living truth, if it is to stay alive, must speak to the conditions of the times. Once it is tied up in concise terms, bound by the words used and thought to be the last word, it is already on the decline. Life means growth – and death. We should not cling to words that have lost their life. We cannot force ourselves to believe something which does not ring true for us. Christianity used to survive because of the empty tomb; now Christianity survives in spite of the empty tomb. Great truths survive throughout history, clad in the clothes that are right for the times. A change of garb is inevitable if the truth is to be acceptable. But it is only in the trappings – the bare naked truth remains for all to feel, to acknowledge and express.

Jean West, 1988

[26.21](#) It ought to be recognised that at the present time, at least in this country, the real danger is not from a too narrow, cramping and militantly dogmatic theology, but rather from an inveterate haziness of mind, a half-heartedness and general belittlement of the importance of true thinking in religion. And the final outcome of this is the assumption ... that Christianity may indeed reasonably claim to be 'good', that is, to put forward an elevated ethical standard and an edifying moral idealism, but makes and can make no claim to be 'true'. I do not think it likely that terms like 'theology', 'dogma' and 'creed' will ever evoke enthusiasm among members of the Society of Friends. But it ought to be possible to allay what almost amounts to a phobia with regard to them.

John W Harvey, 1947

[26.22](#) We know that as individuals we have no adequate check upon the development of mere notions within our minds; and so we insist upon the discipline of the worshipping community in which mere waywardness of mind or individualism will be seen for what it is. And we know that the stimulus and personal interchange of the religious community will enable the individual to rise to a greater clarity of perception than would be possible for him alone.

Kenneth C Barnes, 1960

[26.23](#) It is difficult for us to reconcile the two ideas of God as a loving Father and as the Creator of all things, because of the existence of cruelty and undeserved suffering in Nature itself. Jesus apparently did take for granted the idea that God controlled the rising of the sun and falling of the rain and had made us male and female. It makes me long to have him here now so that I could ask him some of the questions that his disciples didn't ask him. In fact I find that I am talking to him in my mind and that it is a great deal more profitable than talking to myself; even though it is, in one sense, talking to myself; and even though I don't get the answers to the questions that puzzle me. But that doesn't worry me now, because I have learned, as a scientist, how much I don't understand. I have learned too that when a scientist encounters two apparently irreconcilable ideas, these are the stepping stones to new knowledge.

Kathleen Lonsdale, 1962

[26.24](#) It is often supposed that science and religious belief are incompatible. Indeed, a dichotomy does exist between some traditional views of God's interaction with the universe and science's perception of natural laws. If we only use God to fill the gaps wherever a rational explanation has not been found, God's role must diminish as scientific understanding grows. A 'God of the gaps' is inevitably a rather small God. However, the immanence of God in our world may be appreciated through Science as vividly as through the Arts. Many scientists daily experience God through their work: in the elegance and sophistication of natural design or the beauty and harmony revealed in certain theories. The growing body of scientific knowledge demands a continuous re-thinking of what is meant by 'Creator' but our greater understanding magnifies rather than diminishes our appreciation of God.

[26.24](#) Science and religion have much in common. They are communal activities and involve a search for some greater truth. The sharing of ideas is fundamental to both. The discipline of science can make a valuable contribution to religious thought; critical honesty, the willingness to abandon old ideas and modes of thought when fresh insight demands it and the centrality of experience as an arbiter of truth are as important in one as in the other. In both the scientific and religious searches for truth, the implications of current beliefs are explored to see where they lead. Beliefs are not just safe ledges in an uncertain reality, but rather handholds from which further heights can be reached.

Eleven Quaker scientists, 1989

As a teenager I looked for proof of the existence of God, but soon realised that there would be none. I chose to adopt as a working hypothesis a belief in God, and to go on from there. I have not felt the need to revise that hypothesis – yet. I believe in a powerful, all-knowing God, but a caring and a forgiving God. I believe he says to us: ‘All right, you’ve got life, get on with it, live it! I am there behind to guide you, to help you live it; but don’t expect me to interfere to make life smooth for you – you are old enough to stand on your own two feet.’

[26.25](#)

From what I have learnt as an astronomer I believe that the Universe evolved itself without any active participation from God, and it seems reasonable to me that the world continues, at least on a grand scale, to evolve by itself – that God does not directly interfere with the running of the world; but that he does through people and their attitudes...

I believe that we are God’s agents in this world and that he may require things of us. A lot of my effort goes into trying to understand what God expects of me. I do this by trying to maintain an orientation towards God – to live my life in the spirit – to bring my whole life under the ordering of the spirit of Christ – to acknowledge my discipleship.

S Jocelyn Burnell, 1976

[26.26](#)

You say: ‘But with the best will in the world, I can’t get to the point of believing in God.’ Well then, if you want to believe in him, if you feel something great behind it all and not just words, well, work for God, and you will see not only that it comes to the same thing as believing in him, but something infinitely more alive, more real, more powerful which fills you and satisfies you more than anything you might vaguely imagine under the name of ‘real and living faith’ – a reality, a life and not words.

Pierre Ceresole, 1935

It’s a funny thing about God, which I still haven’t understood. If you say with all your heart: He isn’t there, then oddly he isn’t. He seems to withdraw. In the same way, just not noticing produces the same results. He doesn’t come thrusting himself into your life if you don’t want him there. (I recognise that some people will want to say that’s exactly how God came to them, but I think this is a different matter.) Yet if we say: God, I need you, then he moves closer to us. If we start the conversation, surprisingly it does not simply seem to fade into empty space. A sense of presence gradually begins to make itself felt.

[26.27](#)

Now I really don’t know how I’m going to convince you of that. I also hear people telling me: I’ve tried that and it doesn’t work. And that’s also perfectly true, as we all painfully know from our own experiences. I know it’s true and a very blank feeling it is when we have it. Yet I also know that the presence of God is as real, as the absence is negating. I begin to recognise that ultimately it is not for any intellectual reasons that I believe in God, nor even possibly as a result of my emotional state, but simply from the growing sense that when I call he answers.

I don’t find it easy to write this, for I also need to overcome the sense that you will find what I say faintly ridiculous. However it seems worth the risk, because the alternative is rather bleak – that there is, after all, no converse with God, because we do not begin the conversation. All I want to say is that once the conversation begins, one does not want it ever to stop.

Tony Brown, 1984

From early on, too, I became aware that the movement into a place where in an ineffable way God became real, was not dissimilar from what went on when I entered into the space of imagination. That kind of space was one which attracted me from as far back as I can go in memory, whether it was opened up by someone reading to me, or when I was older by my reading to myself, or by games which drew open that part of me. And I sense that what went on when we sat round the table for reading after breakfast, or when I said my prayers before getting into bed, or when we went to worship on Sundays, belonged to the same kind of experience.

[26.28](#) Other ways into that space which opened up very early were through music, both listening to it and making it, and through the beauties of the world. Obviously now I realise that there are differences, a sense of the presence of God is not just the result of the use of imagination, or attending to something lovely, but the thing which is germane for me now is that inner space of various kinds has called my attention and has been a large and enlivening place.

Christopher Holdsworth, 1985

If we set our hearts on goodness as a personal goal, it means that we have to ignore or suppress all the other parts of ourselves that do not fit into our ideal of goodness. That was what George Fox had already done and he was actually shocked when, on the first part of his inward journey, he came upon the dark and unacceptable parts of himself. Like Simone Weil, the twentieth century mystic, he found that he knew from the inside a potential for all possible crimes. His fantasies were guided by no one but himself, but he quickly made the acquaintance of the things inside him that could be bestial, murderous and depraved. Instead of slamming the door of his consciousness, as many of us do when we come on the less acceptable bits of our inner world, he went on through them, understanding that he would not be of any use to others if he did not acknowledge in himself the impulses to kill, to lust or cheat or indulge his more primitive passions. If he had not had the courage to accept what he discovered, he would never have made the discovery that sets Quaker spirituality apart from the narrow righteousness of the Puritans. He found that, having faced and acknowledged his dark self, he came upon a more liberating truth at the heart of himself.

[26.29](#)

He experienced the moment of enlightenment which enabled him to trust the creative and intuitive part of himself and know that it could not be obliterated by the dark side... He spoke of 'the ocean of darkness and the ocean of light'. Both are symbols of the unconscious and of the contradictions and polarities of our being – our dark negativities and our shining possibilities.

Jo Farrow, 1984

Perceptions of truth

What is love? What shall I say of it, or how shall I in words express its nature? It is the sweetness of life; it is the sweet, tender, melting nature of God, flowing up through his seed of life into the creature, and of all things making the creature most like unto himself, both in nature and operation. It fulfils the law, it fulfils the gospel; it wraps up all in one, and brings forth all in the oneness. It excludes all evil out of the heart, it perfects all good in the heart. A touch of love doth this in measure; perfect love doth this in fullness.

[26.30](#)

Isaac Penington, 1663

I do believe that there is a power which is divine, creative and loving, though we can often only describe it with the images and symbols that rise from our particular experiences and those of our communities. This power is part and parcel of all things, human, animal, indeed of all that lives. Its story is greater than any one cultural version of it and yet it is embodied in all stories, in all traditions. It is a power that paradoxically needs the human response. Like us it is energised by the reciprocity of love.

[26.31](#)

It wills our redemption, longs for us to turn to it. It does not create heaven and hell for us, but allows us to do that for ourselves. Such is the terrible vulnerability of love.

Harvey Gillman, 1988

Perhaps more wonderful still is the way in which beauty breaks through. It breaks through not only at a few highly organised points, it breaks through almost everywhere. Even the minutest things reveal it as well as do the sublimest things, like the stars. Whatever one sees through the microscope, a bit of mould for example, is charged with beauty. Everything from a dewdrop to Mount Shasta is the bearer of beauty. And yet beauty has no function, no utility. Its value is intrinsic, not extrinsic. It is its own excuse for being. It greases no wheels, it bakes no puddings. It is a gift of sheer grace, a gratuitous largesse. It must imply behind things a Spirit that enjoys beauty for its own sake and that floods the world everywhere with it. Wherever it can break through, it does break through, and our joy in it shows that we are in some sense kindred to the giver and revealer of it.

[26.32](#)

Rufus Jones, 1920

To apply the term 'God' (in the Christian sense) is to say that we perceive intuitively a connection between the marvels of the natural world, the moral law, the life of Jesus, the depths of the human personality, our intimations about time, death and eternity, our experience of human forgiveness and love, and the finest insights of the Christian tradition. To deny the existence of 'God' is to say that we cannot (yet) see such connections. But even the word 'God' is not an essential tool for grasping them.

[26.33](#)

John Lampen, 1985

It is not an accident that throughout the centuries women have provided the core of Christian worship. Although, in order to fulfil the Divine Will at that particular place and time, Jesus was born as the son of Joseph, when he passed out of time into eternity surely sex was transcended. Might we not gain also if the male image of the Lord Almighty were replaced in our imagination by a conception more in line with Julian's vision of the Mother-Christ, the dual emblem of the mystery of creative love?

[26.34](#)

Katharine Moore, 1978

All my life I've heard, 'God is love', without understanding what was meant. Recently I've come to feel that in a very real way G-d/ess is the love that flows in and between and among us. The ebb and flow of my commitment to love, to peace, to harmony makes G-d/ess stronger or weaker in my heart.

Sometimes the web feels like G-d/ess' body, her vast cosmos, of which we are an inextricable part. The web is also the love that flows through creation, from G-d/ess, from us, from everywhere. The web is an affirmation and comfort, support and clear-naming. The web is harmony, proving to me by its fleeting, fragile appearances that peace can happen. Most of all, for me, the web is friendship.

[26.35](#) That the web exists is my faith. Spinning at it, dancing along it and calling others into it are my ministry. Ripping it or withdrawing into isolation and despair are my sins. Articulating my faith is hard enough; living it is often beyond me. But we are all connected. Strength seeps in from everywhere and amazing things happen. The sense of participation and communion sweeps over me like ocean waves.

At the end of the article from which this extract is taken, the writer explained her use of 'G-d/ess':

I've yet to find a term that describes how I feel about the divine. 'The Spirit' comes close, and so, sometimes, does 'Goddess'. 'G-d/ess' attempts to convey the difficulty of naming the divine. The dash is an old Jewish practice meant to show the impossibility of confining the divine in a word. The single 'd' and feminine suffix are to show that I don't experience the goddess as different from or inferior to what folks generally refer to as God.

Rose Ketterer, 1987

As the Yearly Meeting in 1994 struggled to find unity on whether 226.35 should have a place in our book of discipline, Jo Farrow wrote:

[26.36](#) In the seventeenth century the first generation of Friends shocked many of their Christian neighbours. In trying to express their experiences of God – within them, as spirit, inward light, seed, inward teacher – they used words and phrases which sounded strange and audacious to their contemporaries. They spoke of their experiences of being drawn into community with one another using metaphors and analogies which were both new and old at the same time. 'The kingdom of God did gather us all in a net...' wrote Francis Howgill, trying to express the sense of relief and excitement which was theirs when they discovered one another and became aware of how deeply they had been drawn together as they struggled to articulate their experiences of the Spirit. In much the same way many women today are discovering a need to express their spirituality in ways which seem as strange to some Friends as the expressions of early Quaker spirituality did to those who first heard them. Rose Ketterer is a member of Haddonfield Friends Meeting, New Jersey. She writes of her attempts to reclaim a more womanly understanding of the divine.

Religion is living with God. There is no other kind of religion. Living with a Book, living with or by a Rule, being awfully high-principled are not in themselves religion, although many people think they are and that that is all there is to it. Religion has got a bad name through being identified with an outward orderliness. But an outward orderliness can be death, dullness and masochism. Doing your duty may be admirable stoicism; it isn't religion.

[26.37](#) To find religion itself you must look inside people and inside yourself. And there, if you find even the tiniest grain of true love, you may be on the right scent. Millions of people have it and don't know what it is that they have. God is their guest, but they haven't the faintest idea that he is in the house. So you mustn't only look where God is confessed and acknowledged. You must look everywhere, to find the real religion. Nor must you look, in others or in yourself, for great spooky visions and revelations. Such visions and revelations come to many, a great deal oftener than we think; and to those to whom they come they are sun, moon and stars. But in most people who know God, and in all such people most of the time, living with God is not an apparition but a wordless and endless sureness. Like the silence of two friends together. Like the silence of lovers.

God is waiting to live like that in every single person in the world.

Bernard Canter, 1962

[26.38](#) God for me is the whole; and 'in him I live and move and have my being'... Since I am a person God must be in some measure personal. But the universe is full of other energies, and so God is other than personal too. With Gerard Manley Hopkins I sense that he is 'past all grasp, God'; and yet with Tennyson I am sure that 'Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet'. This is so infinitely wonderful and mysterious that my natural human conceit is checked, I see myself in perspective, and worship becomes a rational response. Reverence for the world, for life, for man, leads on inescapably to reverence for the whole which I call God.

Donald Court, 1965

[26.39](#) True faith is not assurance, but the readiness to go forward experimentally, without assurance. It is a sensitivity to things not yet known. Quakerism should not claim to be a religion of certainty, but a religion of uncertainty; it is this which gives us our special affinity to the world of science. For what we apprehend of truth is limited and partial, and experience may set it all in a new light; if we too easily satisfy our urge for security by claiming that we have found certainty, we shall no longer be sensitive to new experiences of truth. For who seeks that which he believes that he has found? Who explores a territory which he claims already to know?

Charles F Carter, 1971

[26.40](#) I do not know the course I am to run, all is hid in mystery, but I try to do right in everything... Look up to true religion as the very first of blessings, cherish it, nourish and let it flourish and bloom in my heart; it wants taking care of, it is difficult to obtain. I must not despair or grow sceptical if I do not always feel religious. I felt God as it were, and I must seek to find Him again.

Elizabeth Fry, 1798

[26.41](#)

What is my religion? My friends, my teachers, my God. And who is my God? He speaks within me; if I mishear, my friends correct me; if I misdo, I look to Jesus Christ. How then am I taught? I hear in the silence, I ponder in solitude, and I try in the noisy crowd to practise it. What do I learn? To put gaiety before prudence, grace before pleasure, service before power. What am I commanded? To seek patience in suffering, humility in success, steadfastness always. What is forbidden me? To reject another's love, to despise another's wisdom, to blaspheme another's God. And to what purpose? To help others, that we may enter the Commonwealth of Heaven together, each to find our Being in the Whole.

Frederick Parker-Rhodes, 1977

The Light that shines for all

[26.42](#)

Now the Lord God has opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the Light of Life, and became the children of it, but they that hated it and did not believe in it were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light, without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw in that Light and Spirit, which was before Scripture was given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth, that all must come to that Spirit, if they would know God or Christ or the Scriptures aright, which they that gave them forth were led and taught by.

George Fox, 1648

[26.43](#)

The heart of the Quaker message does not lie in a doctrine expressed in abstract terms, but in an experience of power and grace, known in our hearts and also related to the structure of the universe; also known individually and recognised as belonging to all. At the same time this universal spirit is focused and made personal in Jesus in a way which makes it appropriate to speak of the Universal Light as the Light of Christ. It is from this double emphasis on universal and Christ-like that the Quaker message starts. It is these two elements, held firmly together, which provide the coherence and unity of Quakerism.

L Hugh Doncaster, 1972

The Light of Christ

[26.44](#)

If you would know God and worship and serve God as you should do, you must come to the means he has ordained and given for that purpose. Some seek it in books, some in learned men, but what they look for is in themselves, yet they overlook it. The voice is too still, the Seed too small and the Light shineth in darkness. They are abroad and so cannot divide the spoil; but the woman that lost her silver found it at home after she had lighted her candle and swept her house. Do you so too and you shall find what Pilate wanted to know, viz., Truth. The Light of Christ within, who is the Light of the world and so a light to you that tells you the truth of your condition, leads all that take heed unto it out of darkness into God's marvellous light; for light grows upon the obedient. It is sown for the righteous and their way is a shining light that shines forth more and more to the perfect day.

William Penn, 1694

Christ has not conquered to excuse us, but that we should follow his steps.

[26.45](#) Job Scott, 1792

The New Testament clearly sets out Christ as fully human and as fully divine. The writers are conscious of no difficulty or contradiction involved in this position. It seemed to them the most natural thing in the world. Probably the sense of contradiction only arises in our minds through ignorance of what is meant by personality. We set divinity over against humanity, on the assumption that so much added to the one must be so much subtracted from the other. Some have so emphasised Christ's divinity as to leave no room for his humanity, while others have done just the reverse. It seems so easy to solve the problem by cutting the knot: either say that Christ was absolute God or that he was ordinary man. But this does not solve the problem, for either solution fails to take account of many of the facts. The difficulty is to get a conception of Jesus that is true to all the facts – of one who was the incarnate Son of God and yet (perhaps we should say 'and therefore') was truly man. It is a pity that we insist on using the terms 'humanity' and 'divinity' as though they implied opposition. May we not rather say that Jesus 'shows us the divine life humanly lived and the human life divinely lived'?

[26.46](#)

Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting, 1919

If you allow me to have Christ simply as a friend, he may become what you call God; if you force him on me as God, he cannot become a friend.

[26.47](#)

Pierre Ceresole, 1920

I am far from having arrived at the mount of vision where so many more faithful disciples have stood, above all mists of doubt: yet to think of Christ has meant again and again a parting in the clouds through which a beam of light comes gleaming. Sometimes that light has shone into my vision reflected from word or deed of some man or woman who themselves have been illumined by the same Lord; sometimes the echo of his words in the New Testament; the impress of what he did, above all of what he was, and is and will be, has brought the help I needed.

[26.48](#)

I do not understand more than a very little of that life; there are passages in the gospels which puzzle me; I know there may be in the narrative things imperfectly reported or misunderstood by those who heard him. But there he remains, and life goes forth from him still into our lives, bringing hope and forgiveness and healing, a new vision and a new spirit.

T Edmund Harvey, 1949

26.49 'I and the Father are One'. That means to me that I think of God in terms of Jesus Christ, that I pray to Jesus as representing the Father to my consciousness, or to the Father as I see him in Jesus. Carry that thought to Calvary itself. See in the crucifixion not merely a martyr's death, not merely a passing gleam of God's love, certainly not a sacrifice to God carrying a legal significance, but in truth the flashing into light of an eternal fact, the nature of God's relation to sin, of the pain we inflict on his heart by our own wrongdoing. Here is the wonderful dynamic of the cross. God calls you to him. He shows you his suffering, he shows you the hatefulness of the sin that caused it, and, in showing you his love, shows you the punishment of alienation from him, the hell of the unrepentant, in which we must remain until repentance opens the gate for the prodigal and gives entrance to the free forgiveness and love of the Father's house. In Jesus, in his life and his death upon the cross, we are shown the nature of God and the possibilities that are within our reach. We are shown the world as the Father sees it, are called to live in harmony with his will and purpose, to hate the sins that made him mourn, to scale the barrier of sin and discover that the way of penitence lies open and direct to the Fatherly heart. No legal bargain, but a spiritual conflict, an inward change, the rejection of the living death of sin, the choice of the new birth, of the purified self, the conversion from a low and earthly to a high and spiritual standard of life and conduct – here you have the practical conditions of salvation, and in the active, free and holy love of God, ever seeking entrance, ever powerful if we but yield the gateway of our heart, is the substance of the Gospel.

John Wilhelm Rowntree, 1904

26.50 We can respond to the Christ-event in such a way that we see Jesus as a symbol of God, a concrete example of divine being and action. When we do this, though we make statements focused on Jesus, we are in fact trying to talk about God. Using this symbol we can talk about God as helpless and humble, sharing human vulnerability with us. We can see the brokenness of God, the giving up of power in order to take on pain and mortality; the creativity of love which remakes hope out of despair, promise out of sin; the incarnation of the divine in the human, making all of life sacred; the fusion of holiness with life; the divine self-offering. Using this symbol we can talk about comfort; about the light that shines in the darkness; about the certainty of love and joy. We can see the presence of God in every aspect of our lives, so that whatever our situation it is shared and understood. Using this symbol we can above all see God in our fellow-humans and thus be called to service. In every homeless child, every refugee, every criminal or outcast, every worker or preacher, those in authority and those without it, there is a child of God, one who is precious and loved.

Janet Scott, 1980

26.51 The central perceptions of Christianity remain as a source of perennial wisdom without which we sink into non-life. Incarnation, the cross, repentance, forgiveness, resurrection – these unfashionable words express the deep realities of the human condition. At the time of our origin the first Friends relinquished the excrescences and the exterior trappings by which the churches obscured the central vision. When we read George Fox and are shaken by a power and a passion which we apparently have lost, what we should seek is not an impossible return to the historical moment which fostered such convictions but to see in the terms of our own very different, though also chaotic, times what the centrality of Christ can mean to us now.

Lorna M Marsden, 1985

[26.52](#)

If we try to imagine ourselves in the position of the first disciples, we would have to think of ourselves as strictly monotheistic Jews, believing in the one God, Jehovah, the creator. As they associated with Jesus, they gradually came to recognise more and more in him: first the special rabbi who taught with authority and not as the scribes; then the Christ, the holy one of God; finally the affirmation of Thomas: 'My Lord and my God'. What a terrible thing for a Jew to have said – and yet, somehow, that was the effect of the impact Jesus made. And then, after his earthly life was finished, these same disciples and their friends were aware of the continuing life of his spirit among them, encouraging, guiding and sustaining them. In short, they had a threefold experience of one reality: they knew God the father; they knew the person of Jesus who was so identified with him that Thomas could burst out with his great affirmation; and they knew the continuing inspiration of the spirit which they identified with him.

L Hugh Doncaster, 1963

[26.53](#)

I cannot explain the mystery of how someone who is a human being just as I am can also be worshipped. And yet the more real the mystery has become for me, it isn't that Jesus has become more like God, but that all my brothers and sisters have. It is through him that I recognise God in my neighbour – through Jesus I've discovered the uniqueness of everyone. And there was in him a quality of willingness to be defeated and destroyed by his enemies and to go on loving them, that alone made possible a new quality of life afterwards.

Paul Oestreicher, 1981

We make our guesses at the nature of God, and we are often like my small daughter who said, 'My mind goes round and round when I want to think about God, but I can think about Jesus.' To me Jesus is a window through to God, a person who in terms of personality, in a way that can be grasped by our finite minds, shows what mercy, pity, peace are like in human life. I turn to the Jesus of the New Testament – to his healing word, his freedom from anxiety, his outreaching insight, to him as a whole person – not to imitate him but to let him live and grow in my life...

[26.54](#)

I do not pray to him – I look at him, dwell upon him, love him. But it is the presence of the God he worshipped of which I am conscious as I look at the night sky, the sleeping child and the rose. When I listen in the quietness and when I pray, it is to God that I listen and pray. And since personality is the highest value that I know in life, since all truth comes to us through the medium of human minds and thoughts, I am not surprised that God too comes to me in terms of personality. I can well understand how to many Christians Christ comes as a tangible figure, a Son of God in a special unique way, even though that is not the way he comes to me. Every word that comes to our lips is a symbol and the symbol of the father God has been sanctified by Jesus' use of it as well as by how it has been used throughout the Bible. We have much to learn about the image of fatherhood and from the growing and developing idea of God in the Old Testament. Now we may be beginning to learn about God the mother as well.

Ruth Fawell, 1987

Jesus the Jew of Nazareth, ... to me, puts a question mark and an exclamation mark to everything. It is not a matter of saying 'Jesus is the answer'. It would be true and more useful to say that Jesus is the question. Here the questions of action and achievement, of God and humanity, are brought to a focus in the paradox of triumph on a cross, of God dying as a man, of a man living as God. Here the question mark which death and suffering put against the love and joys of this world is itself confronted with a question: 'Death, where is thy sting?' And in the light of this, we are faced with the question: 'Who do you say that I am?' I have found, too, that it is easy to side-step the challenge of Jesus. The history of the early church and the growth of the creeds, which are such red rags to Quakers, is precisely the attempt of the church not to lose sight of this paradox, this knife edge, this scandal. Constantly, people wanted to make things easier to grasp and more comfortable to live with by stressing the human side of Jesus at the expense of the divine or vice versa. No one would deny that the attempt to encapsulate the truth about Jesus in words is bound to fail, but the achievement of those years was to keep the tension that he embodies alive so that it has resonance now, instead of opting for an easier answer.

[26.55](#)

Hugh Pyper, 1986

The resurrection, however literally or otherwise we interpret it, demonstrates the power of God, to bring life out of brokenness; not just to take the hurt out of brokenness but to add something to the world. It helps us to sense the usefulness, the possible meaning in our suffering, and to turn it into a gift. The resurrection affirms me with my pain and my anger at what has happened. It does not take away my pain; it still hurts. But I sense that I am being transfigured; I am being enabled to begin again to love confidently and to remake the spirit of my world.

[26.56](#)

S Jocelyn Burnell, 1989

I decided long ago that God was not the most 'powerful' thing in the universe. He much more resembles a barefoot Galilean prophet speaking in up-country dialect, followed by tax-gatherers, fishermen and prostitutes, who becomes a nuisance and ends up (very properly) by being crucified while the guards dice for his clothes – more to pass the time than because the garments are worth anything. It is not because God is powerful that I worship him; if he is powerful it is in some dimension that I don't know anything about, which we can agree (if you like) to call eternity...

No, the moment when I love God is at the moment when the Galilean prophet was watching his followers melt away and suspected that Simon Peter the fisherman would soon be off too, back to his nets. 'Wilt thou also go away?' he asks Simon; but mercifully Simon is too stupid to see the point of the question, or to take his chance to get out. 'Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the word of eternal life.' That's it, the obscure, futile shaky thing, as feeble as a baby in a stable, that's what I worship.

[26.57](#)

J Ormerod Greenwood, 1973

For two thousand years there has been emphasis on the Yang aspects of Christ, that is, on the amazing teacher, healer and master of all spiritual power, he who rebuked the winds and the waves and told his disciples they had only to believe and mountains could be uprooted and set down in the seas. This over-emphasis upon the power aspect of the spirit has resulted ... in domination of the planet. But because intuitive reverence has been missing we have unwittingly set about destroying the living and healing processes which actually hold the world together.

[26.58](#) The Yin or feminine aspect of the Christ now awaits our discovery. This is the Christ in the second period of the Gospel story. He who, echoing his mother's receptivity to the divine, in the garden of Gethsemane prayed, 'Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt.' Just here in the rending of the material, which the cross betokens, a new invasion of spirit into matter occurs. This is the Christ, agonisingly separated from spirit, who by his receptivity makes possible a fresh flow of impregnation from the divine, right down into the depths of nature and into humanity.

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985

[26.59](#) An awareness of older, lonely Friends grew in me with many hours spent visiting, and I felt able to volunteer for work with the Children's Meeting, which I really enjoyed. Living where we did near all the symptoms of inner-city decay and change I had ample opportunity to feel the needs of those around us. This process of awareness culminated when I rather simply and naïvely asked God for a deeper understanding of Christ. I think I expected something rather comforting and lovely. Instead all the world's suffering was gathered up in a moment and pressed upon me. It was quite searing, quite devastating. The experience gave me an understanding of Jesus as one deeply involved in our suffering and pain, actually experiencing it too, that God is not remote but that *God is with us*. Truly Emmanuel.

Rosamond Robertson, 1990

[26.60](#) Those of us who cannot yet personally witness to the experience of direct encounter with the living Christ can only at our peril deny the truth of the experience to which others testify; just as those who do feel this experience are on equally dangerous ground when on account of it they claim that they alone possess the sole route to that God whom Jesus of Nazareth defined as spirit and whose kingdom he once likened to a house with many mansions. Respect for the validity of personal encounter with the spirit of God, subjected to the check of corporate discipline, is part of the essence of our Quaker witness. Thus, though both our practices of worship and our theological understandings now differ widely, these variances may be accepted as elements within the direct, continuing development of the spirit of Jesus, the sensing of which was at the heart of the original Quaker experience.

Richard Rowntree, 1987

The Universal Light

[26.61](#) There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren.

John Woolman, 1762

[26.62](#) The light for which the world longs is already shining. It is shining into the darkness, but the darkness does not apprehend it. It is shining into the darkness, but the darkness is not overcoming it. It is shining in many a soul, and already the new order has begun within the kingdom of the heart. It is shining in many a small group and creating a heavenly-earthly fellowship of children of the light. It will always shine and lead many into the world of need, that they may bear it up into the heart of God.

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

[26.63](#) The light that shines into man's heart is not of man, and must ever be distinguished both from the conscience which it enlightens and from the natural faculty of reason which, when unsubjected to its holy influences, is, in the things of God, very foolishness. As the eye is to the body, so is conscience to our inner nature, the organ by which we see; and as both light and life are essential to sight in the natural eye, so conscience as the inward eye cannot see aright without the quickening and illumination of the Spirit of God.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1879

[26.64](#) Wrth roi pwyslais ar y Goleuni oddimewn nid ydym yn dyneiddio crefydd yn ormodol. Nid ein goleuni ni ydyw; ei dderbyn yr ydym ni. A ni ynghanol ein profiadau gyda'n cyd-ddynion, daw rhyw oleuni sydd yn peri i'r profiadau hynny edrych yn wahanol. Dywedwn, yn drwsgl, mai'r Goleuni Oddimewn sydd yn peri'r cyfnewidiad, a chredwn mai oddiwrth Dduw y daeth. Sut y gwyddom nad ydym yn ein twyllo ein hunain? Yn y pen draw nid oes gennym ddim ond ein profiad ein hunain i bwyso arno. Yn y pen draw nid oes gan un a dderbynio'r grefydd fwyaf traddodiadol ddim ond ei brofiad i bwyso arno.

Waldo Williams, 1956

For a translation of this extract into English see [English translations of passages in Welsh](#)

[26.65](#) This central affirmation, that the Light of the Christ-like God shines in every person, implies that our knowledge of God is both subjective and objective. It is easy to misconstrue 'Inner Light' as an invitation to individualism and anarchy if one concentrates on the subjective experience known to each one. But it is an equally important part of our faith and practice to recognise that we are not affirming the existence and priority of your light and my light, but of the Light of God, and of the God who is made known to us supremely in Jesus. The inward experience must be checked by accordance with the mind of Christ, the fruits of the Spirit, the character of that willed caring which in the New Testament is called Love. It is further checked by the fact that if God is known in measure by every person, our knowledge of him will be largely gained through the experience of others who reverently and humbly seek him. In the last resort we must be guided by our own conscientiously held conviction – but it is in the last resort. First we must seek carefully and prayerfully through the insights of others, both in the past and among our contemporaries, and only in the light of this search do we come to our affirmation.

L Hugh Doncaster, 1972

[26.66](#) We may seem at times to take God for granted. But we know the beyond in our midst; we rely on grace, on God's free, sustaining, creative and lively action as we rely on the air we breathe and the ground we walk on.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

[26.67](#) We misunderstand the truth of the Inward Light if we imagine that it means a present inspiration independent of the past. Fox claimed that he had a word from the Lord as sure as any of the Apostles ever had. We join him in affirming our faith in the contemporary inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But Fox could never have made his claim if he had not recognised the word of the Lord which came to the Apostles.

H G Wood, 1951

[26.68](#) The Inner Light does not lead men to do that which is right in their own eyes, but that which is right in God's eyes. As the Light is One, so its teaching is ultimately (though not superficially) harmonious. In actual experience, it is not found that souls truly looking to the Inner Light as their authority will break away from each other in anarchy.

Ellen S Bosanquet, 1927

[26.69](#) There is no easy optimism in the Quaker view of life. Fox had no illusions about sin; but he asks us to deal with it in a new way. When early Friends likened God's gift to a 'Seed' they did not think of it as growing inevitably into a noble tree. They were fully aware of the influences that might arrest its growth. Fox never regarded the conquest of sin as a casual undertaking. But with astonishing psychological insight he laid the whole emphasis of his method not on the sin but on the light that revealed it. By implication he was criticising those who were so obsessed with the fallen state of man that they stayed their eyes on man's wickedness rather than on the means of his redemption. To contemplate evil is a poor way of becoming good... Fox assures his friends that light will come on conditions. These conditions were well laid down by Isaac Penington in the darkness of Reading gaol: 'We were directed to search for the least of all seeds and to mind the lowest appearance thereof, which was its turning against sin and darkness; we came by degrees to find we had met with the pure living eternal Spirit.'

The practice of minding 'the lowest appearance' of the Seed involves a steady discipline. We must face the austerity as well as accept the joy of life if we are to grow. The method of this discipline is beautifully and most practically suggested in George Fox's oft-repeated instruction, 'Mind that which is pure in you to guide you to God.' Here Fox displays a deep psychological insight, born of his own personal struggle. We are to use the little that we have to make it more. We are to tend the small Seed and help it to grow.

Edgar B Castle, 1961

[26.70](#) Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.

Isaac Penington, 1661

If you build upon anything or have confidence in anything which stands in time and is on this side eternity and [the] Being of beings, your foundation will be swept away, and night will come upon you, and all your gathered-in things and taken-on and imitated will all fail you... Why gad you abroad? Why trim you yourselves with the saints' words, when you are ignorant of the life? Return, return to Him that is the first Love, and the first-born of every creature, who is the Light of the world...
[26.71](#) Return home to within, sweep your houses all, the groat is there, the little leaven is there, the grain of mustard-seed you will see, which the Kingdom of God is like; ... and here you will see your Teacher not removed into a corner, but present when you are upon your beds and about your labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging and giving peace to all that love and follow Him.

Francis Howgill, 1656

To you who are seekers, to you, young and old who have toiled all night and caught nothing, but who want to launch out into the deeps and let down your nets for a draught, I want to speak as simply, as tenderly, as clearly as I can. For God *can* be found. There *is* a last rock for your souls, a resting-place of absolute peace and joy and power and radiance and security. There is a Divine Center into which your life can slip, a new and absolute orientation in God, a Center where you live with Him and out of which you see all of life through new and radiant vision, tinged with new sorrows and pangs, new joys unspeakable and full of glory... The reality of Presence has been very great at times recently. One knows at first hand what the old inquiry meant, 'Has Truth been advancing among you?'

Thomas R Kelly, 1941

I would hesitate to claim that I receive direct guidance from God – I do not hear a divine voice that tells me what to do. But I do have a sense that I am being drawn to take one course of action rather than another. The guidance, however, arises from a countless number of experiences, influences, attitudes and disciplines which I have accumulated over the years and upon which I have reflected. So
[26.73](#) certain types of action seem to be my natural response to particular circumstances. In them all the sense of the presence of God is real and immediate but it is not unmediated.

George Gorman, 1973

What manner of spirit are we of? Have we any connection with the spirit which descended on the upper room, sounding like 'a mighty rushing wind'? Do we look to be swept out of our comfortable existence by an invading power which comes, as Jesus said, no one knows whence? Or do we look rather for a gentler movement within? Do we say, it was this Spirit of God which breathed into our human clay to make us living souls? It is there, in our humanity, but mixed with
[26.74](#) passions which confuse its purpose, limited by the tunnel vision of the self. Occasionally a blinding flash may come from without and someone is jolted forwards; but the Spirit's normal method is a quiet insistence, a still small voice barely audible amid the turbulence of earthquake, wind and fire.

Stephen Allott, 1981

For some time now I have thought of God in more pantheistic terms than I suppose is true of most of my Quaker brothers and sisters. To me, God is something about the universe, something about the depth in each of us.

[26.75](#) We've never talked about it in the meeting but this difference in thinking doesn't seem to matter in what we share. We visit the prison in Richmond together, give shelter to runaway teenagers, aid those who are resisting the war. We come together and wait quietly to regain our sense of what lies deepest in us, of the things most important to us. Then when we each of us speak and listen from this condition of mind and heart we somehow understand and are bound together in ways that are healing and empowering.

To me, these are the things that are prayer and revelation and encounter with that which is holy. And when I find something like them beyond the meeting and its membership there too I sense a unity of being. These are the things which, for me, any thought of God must have to do with. How thankful I am that this seems so surely to be true for the others with whom I share the silences, the concerns, the activities of this meeting that I love so well.

Anonymous, 1970

[26.76](#) Within the Society of Friends we have our own problems with the traditional language of Christian spirituality... There are those who can comfortably talk in Christian language, because they experience it deeply as expressing truth and reality as they perceive it. For them it is not 'just a language'; it *is* the truth. The words used are inseparable from the underlying truths, the stories, the tradition, the nature of God as revealed in Jesus. There is no 'gap' between their experience of faith, their beliefs and the language used by the Christian tradition. There are those who just cannot use that language at all, because for them it precisely does not express their deepest truths, and may in fact be felt to deny or even violate them. For these people, their deepest experiences of spiritual reality, as they have encountered it, cannot be encompassed by a language that has acquired so many historical accretions and distortions that it has become at best meaningless and at worst a falsification of truth. So they must grapple with the equal inadequacy of contemporary language to express the depths of their searching.

Pam Lunn, 1990

[26.77](#) In this day and age the place where Friends find their unity is in the kind of God they worship. Their apprehension of the relationship of Jesus Christ to God embraces every orthodox and unorthodox shade of theology from unitarian to trinitarian; but whether we regard Jesus ... as God himself or as the supreme revealer of God to man, it is the same kind of God: a spirit of peace, truth, love and redeeming power. We need to feel the influence of this Spirit in our lives rather than to argue about our different modes of apprehending him. Directly we begin to chide each other for orthodoxy or unorthodoxy, we cease to be the catholic body we are; for the logical end of such chiding is sanctions and the excluding of the weaker body by the stronger. Let us keep our different modes of apprehension and remember always that it is the same God we serve, revealing himself to each according to his faith, his openness and his need.

Beatrice Saxon Snell, 1961

It is not opinion, or speculation, or notions of what is true, or assent to or the subscription of articles or propositions, though never so soundly worded, that ... makes a man a true believer or a true Christian. But it is a conformity of mind and practice to the will of God, in all holiness of conversation, according to the dictates of this Divine principle of Light and Life in the soul which denotes a person truly a child of God.

[26.78](#)

William Penn, 1692

discussion

- **islam means to submit to the will of what the english call God [Daniela Salazarpls write brief halal discussion of this]**
 - **to walk in service of Spirit is to practice what the quran calls islam**
 - **submission to the path of Friendship calls us to do the same in spirit**
- **in understanding the Truth communicated in quaker testimony it is Clear that the Spirit is but one of the Many Names for the Most High**
- **a Message is but a reflection of what has already been revealed given as those receiving it may understand it.**
- **it is this Source we seek when we gather in Meeting**

E3

E3

What shall we hand on? Where is the Spirit now leading us? In this book we have seen how we have been gathered, guided and ordered for more than three hundred years. We shall want both to keep the rich openings we have inherited and to be open to continuing guidance in changing circumstances. This will only be possible if we heed the promptings of love and truth which we trust as the leadings of God.

Individually and corporately Friends are seeking new ways of expressing our testimonies to equality and social justice, to the building of peace, to truth and integrity in public affairs, and to simplicity in a lifestyle that reflects our renewed understanding of our relationship with all creation.

As we try to respond to new leadings we often cannot discern what will remain important and what will be seen as ephemeral. There will be tensions as we wrestle with our diverse perceptions and convictions, and tensions can be creative. Our hope and our experience is that when we are faithful we shall be rightly led.

How can we walk with a smile into the dark? We must learn to put our trust in God and the leadings of the Spirit. How many of us are truly led by the Spirit throughout our daily lives? I have turned to God when I have had a difficult decision to make or when I have sought strength to endure the pain in dark times. But I am only slowly learning to dwell in the place where leadings come from. That is a place of love and joy and peace, even in the midst of pain. The more I dwell in that place, the easier it is to smile, because I am no longer afraid.

29.01 If we dwell in the presence of God, we shall be led by the spirit. We do well to remember that being led by the spirit depends not so much upon God, who is always there to lead us, as upon our willingness to be led. We need to be willing to be led into the dark as well as through green pastures and by still waters. We do not need to be afraid of the dark, because God is there. The future of this earth need not be in the hands of the world's 'leaders'. The world is in God's hands if we are led by God. Let us be led by the Spirit. Let us walk with a smile into the dark.

Gordon Matthews, 1987

Following consideration of priorities in financing the work of London Yearly Meeting in 1992, Meeting for Sufferings minuted:

The ground of our work lies in our waiting on and listening for the Spirit. Let the loving spirit of a loving God call us and lead us. These leadings are both personal and corporate. If they are truly tested in a gathered meeting we shall find that the strength and the courage for obedience are given to us. We need the humility to put obedience before our own wishes.

We are aware of the need to care for ourselves and each other in our meetings, bearing each other's burdens and lovingly challenging each other.

29.02 We also hear the cry of those in despair which draws out our compassion. We know the need to speak for those who have no voice. We have a tradition of service and work which has opened up opportunities for us. But we are reminded that we are not the only ones to do this work. Not only can we encourage a flow of work between our central and our local meetings; but we must recognise the Spirit at work in many bodies and in many places, in other churches and faiths, and in secular organisations.

When we look at our past we can see the length of time needed for transformation. We are a small church with the pretensions to change the world. But first we have to let God change us – to empower us to be better Friends, and more active in our own work. We should not be creating structures to work for us, but empowering each other to do the work laid on each of us. However we

plan ... the Spirit is unchanging and will always lead us... All is interconnected, worship with action, wisdom with love.

We must look to our meetings, to our love for each other, and our corporate discipline. We must look to ourselves, to speak of our lives and to let our lives speak. Above all we must look to the Truth. We have an Inward Teacher who teaches, guides and commands us. When we know what we have to do, how to do it will come.

29.03 We seem to be at a turning point in human history. We can choose life or watch the planet become uninhabitable for our species. Somehow, I believe that we will pass through this dark night of our planetary soul to a new period of harmony with the God that is to be found within each of us, and that S/he will inspire renewed confidence in people everywhere, empowering us all to co-operate to use our skills, our wisdom, our creativity, our love, our faith – even our doubts and fears – to make peace with the planet. Strengthened by this fragile faith, empowered by the Spirit within, I dare to hope.

Pat Saunders, 1987

29.04 It is said that all great movements progress through three stages: ridicule, discussion, adoption. For the anti-vivisection movement the stage of ridicule is passing, the stage for discussion has begun. Will the Religious Society of Friends condemn vivisection before or after its abolition? Our yearly meeting at present is not a participant in this unfolding humane drama but a silent spectator to it... Should a search for unity with the anti-vivisection movement not be our concern?

Ralph Rowarth, 1994

29.05 We recognise the enormous powers of newly developing genetic engineering techniques to change living matter with speed and scope hitherto unthinkable. Recent applications of bio-engineering to plant and animal species have benefited mainly people in materially wealthy countries at the expense of the materially poor, and of global biodiversity. Continuation of these technologies and their extension to human beings highlights the need for Friends to affirm that the intrinsic value of all life forms is not restricted to their utilitarian functions, and that the richness of human diversity should never be reduced to the level of a commodity or made subject to market forces. The potential of genetic technologies for good and ill requires humility, wisdom, and lovingkindness, and also the capacity to know when to stop. We Friends need to bring our own diverse gifts to help ensure that research into and application of genetic technologies do not proceed without consideration for justice, democracy, and respect for the dignity and well-being of all.

Amber Carroll and Grace Jantzen, 1994

In reflecting on time spent working in Vietnam in the early 1970s, Helen Steven wrote:

Perhaps our most positive contribution to peace-making was to affirm and value Vietnamese culture in the face of the appalling destruction which we saw around us.

29.06 I believe that it is this fundamental respect for 'that of God' in everyone which is at the heart of all true development. On my return home I was horrified by our cultural, material and spiritual arrogance. I believe that it is profound arrogance which initiates aid programmes which force western methods of education, medicine or agriculture on people with traditions longer than our own; it is arrogance to assume that any political system or social or economic structure must be maintained and defended no matter how many people are bombed, napalmed or tortured in the process. Surely arrogance drives us to rape and destroy the earth's scarce resources to fuel and protect the needs of one generation in one corner of the globe. And supreme arrogance to believe that we have the monopoly of spiritual truth.

I came home from Vietnam convinced that the real task of development lies at home at our own door.

1987

We are all one, in a subtle but most significant way, one in the sense of being interdependent. I would not be as I am without you; you would not be as you are without me. At one level this is not difficult to understand. I realise how much I am the product not only of my parents' genes, but also of their emotional and intellectual influence which derived, in turn, from the ambience of their own family life, culture and education. And I am the product of my schooling, the intellectual ideas which have shaped my thoughts, my friends, my wife, my children – all of whose lives I, in turn, am helping to create.

29.07 This is easy to grasp. It is also easy to grasp how, for example, our tastes and addictions influence people far outside our range of knowledge. For instance, whether I prefer tea to coffee for breakfast affects the economy of, say, Sri Lanka or India, Kenya or Colombia. And this means that the lives of millions of people I have never met are affected. The whimsy of my taste buds may lead to the bankruptcy or the prosperity of nations, to revolutions or oppressions. Who knows? All we can be sure of is that everything we do, say or think cannot help having an impact on the totality, the All of which we form a part.

Adam Curle, 1992

We Quakers say we have no creed. We almost do! For nearly all of us would say we believe in 'that of God in everyone'.

How easy that is to say. How difficult to live! If we mean it, we have to live it. That is why some of us in Northern Ireland do speak to the men of violence. It does not mean we agree with what they do. It does mean believing in the good that is in everyone and in the potential for growth and change

29.08 that is in us all.

Some of our closest friends used to be involved in violence and have changed. I have learnt so much from them and their courage in changing, and I am encouraged to believe that anyone can change.

Diana Lampen, 1991

We have to take responsibility in our own countries for the trade in weapons, which will continue unless we intensify our actions against it. Let us do this together as an international body. Let us picture where Jesus Christ would be in this matter. What would he be saying about the trade in weapons? I often have to remind myself of this, and I even try to remind some of my colleagues in the Australian Senate – well, what would Jesus be saying about this or that – and it pulls them up a bit short, I can tell you.

29.09 He would be there, he would be working with us, he would be arguing and doing everything in his power to ensure that this trade, which is totally immoral, was stopped as soon as possible. It's a big job, Friends, but Quakers have often taken on a prophetic role in the past. We should be glad of the example of the slave abolitionists and remember their strength, their courage, their witness, and do likewise now.

Jo Vallentine, 1991

We are trustees of a long tradition which has sought to bring our religious convictions into the world 'and so excite our endeavours to mend it'. We are trying to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.

29.10 Fundamentally, taxation for war purposes is not a political or a fiscal issue. We are convinced by the Spirit of God to say without any hesitation whatsoever that we must support the right of conscientious objection to paying taxes for war purposes. We realise that we live in a world where it is impossible to see clearly the final consequences of the actions we might initiate from this Meeting. Nevertheless we are impelled by our vision of a peaceful and loving society.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to explore further and with urgency the role our religious society should corporately take in this concern and then to take such action as it sees necessary on our behalf. We know that this is only one further step in our witness to the Truth, to which we are continually summoned. We go forward in God's strength.

London Yearly Meeting, 1987

What we have heard on the degree of secrecy which permeates our national institutions brings out in us fear, shock, distress and dilemma at the level of deviousness and distortion that flows from this. The vast security apparatus extends through the whole fabric of society. As a Religious Society we have an historic message of love which will conquer the fear which lies at the base of this increasing secrecy.

29.11 We need to uphold those who experience persecution and harassment as a result of this secrecy. We must also ask ourselves: 'Just how truthful are we?' Recognising the sincerity of those of opposing views, we are reminded of the need for our whole lives to be in harmony, so we can speak powerfully to others.

Conference on 'The secret state', convened by Warwickshire Monthly Meeting, 1989

29.12 Early Friends were inclined to address the monarch or ambassadors negotiating a peace treaty. Friends are now more likely to address those involved in the work of international institutions, like the UN or the European Economic Community, although letters are still written to the Prime Minister, and recently British Friends addressed the monarch. It might also be argued that power in today's world has shifted from governments to global financial interests, and it is there that Quaker efforts should be directed.

Our primary objective in speaking truth to power on social and economic issues, especially on the problem of world poverty, should be the interests of the poor. Our role is to remind the rich and privileged, including ourselves, of the challenge to surrender privilege.

Cecil R Evans, 1987

29.13 We have thought and felt deeply about the disgrace that there is poverty in our wealthy country. So long as any one person in our midst can say 'I exist, but I'm nothing' the longing for a more just social order will persist. The truth is that we are all hurt and need healing. There is a spiritual poverty among both rich and poor... If we are to be whole, we can no longer ignore the divisions created by idolising wealth, success and power. A key to a deep-rooted response to poverty is to throw away the illusion that the rich alone have much to offer and to grasp the reality that we all have much to gain from one another.

London Yearly Meeting, 1987

Quakers believe that the same God who is graciously present with us is also known in other religions of the world, and by all who are 'humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout'. An encouraging aspect of the Inter-Church Process has been its lively awareness of Britain as a multi-faith community... But beyond the other faiths, there is a whole people of God, the whole of humanity. We affirm, with the Swanwick [inter-church] declaration, that 'the world with all its sin and splendour belongs to God.' ... The gospel-imperative for the church is to serve the people of God, and most especially 'these least'. The hungry, the homeless, the sick and the prisoners abound in Britain today: the world cries out for justice and peace.

Meeting for Sufferings, 1988

We recognise and celebrate what we as Black, Asian and mixed-heritage Friends [in Britain] bring to the Society and with pride we affirm our rich positive contributions. However, we find spoken and unspoken assumptions that because we are Black people we are economically needy, socially deprived, culturally disinherited and spiritually in need of Quaker instruction. We experience isolation both physical and spiritual within our meetings. It is not just a matter of numbers but without the active commitment to promote diversity within the Society of Friends it will continue to be difficult to foster a true experience of a spiritual community.

29.15 As Black and white Friends we recognise the importance of our children's needs to know and value themselves and the world around them with the love and support of a settled and secure family environment. We must all strive to ensure that race is not a barrier to our children's success. We need to look honestly and openly at the structure of our meetings and seek to broaden our experience of other enriching forms of worship. Quakerism enables us to face both the glory and the seemingly unfaceable in ourselves. Let us do so now – together.

Epistle of Black, white, Asian and mixed-heritage Friends, 1991

At the World Conference of Friends in 1991, Val Ferguson asked:

Does anything unite this diverse group beyond our common love and humanity? Does anything make us distinctively Quaker? I say yes. Each of us has different emphases and special insights, but wherever Friends are affirming each other's authentic experience of God, rather than demanding credal statements, we are being God's faithful Quakers. Wherever we are seeking God's will rather than human wisdom, especially when conflict might arise, we are being faithful Quakers. Wherever we are affirming the total equality of men and women, we are being God's faithful Quakers. Wherever there is no division between our words and our actions, we are being faithful. Whenever we affirm that no one – priest, pastor, clerk, elder – stands between us and the glorious and mystical experience of God in our lives, we are faithful Friends. Whether we sing or whether we wait in silence, as long as we are listening with the whole of our being and seeking the baptism and communion of living water, we will be one in the Spirit.

Over 300 Young Friends from 34 countries, 57 yearly meetings, and 8 monthly meetings under the care of Friends World Committee for Consultation, met at Guilford College, Greensboro, North Carolina in July 1985, to envisage the future of the Religious Society of Friends and to see how their lives should speak within that vision.

We have come together from every continent, separated by language, race, culture, ways we worship God, and beliefs about Christ and God... We have been challenged, shaken up, at times even enraged, intimidated, and offended by these differences in each other. We have grown from this struggle and have felt the Holy Spirit in programmed worship, singing, Bible study, open times of worship and sharing, and silent waiting upon God.

Our differences are our richness, but also our problem. One of our key differences is the different names we give our Inward Teacher. Some of us name that Teacher Lord; others of us use the names Spirit, Inner Light, Inward Christ or Jesus Christ. It is important to acknowledge that these names involve more than language; they involve basic differences in our understanding of who God is, and how God enters our lives. We urge Friends to wrestle, as many of us have here, with the conviction and experience of many Friends throughout our history that this Inward Teacher is in fact Christ himself. We have been struck this week, however, with the experience of being forced to recognise this same God at work in others who call that Voice by different names, or who understand differently who that Voice is.

29.17 We have often wondered whether there is anything Quakers today can say as one. After much struggle we have discovered that we can proclaim this: there is a living God at the centre of all, who is available to each of us as a Present Teacher at the very heart of our lives. We seek as people of God to be worthy vessels to deliver the Lord's transforming word, to be prophets of joy who know from experience and can testify to the world, as George Fox did, 'that the Lord God is at work in this thick night'. Our priority is to be receptive and responsive to the life-giving Word of God, whether it comes through the written word – the Scriptures, the Incarnate Word – Jesus Christ, the Corporate Word – as discerned by the gathered meeting, or the Inward Word of God in our hearts which is available to each of us who seek the Truth.

This can be made easier if we face the truth within ourselves, embrace the pain, and lay down our differences before God for the Holy Spirit to forgive, thus transforming us into instruments of healing. This priority is not merely an abstract idea, but something we have experienced powerfully at work among us this week.

Our five invited speakers presented vivid pictures of economic, ecological and military crisis in this world today. We acknowledge that these crises are in fact only a reflection of the great spiritual crisis which underlies them all. Our peace testimony inspires us, yet we move beyond it to challenge our world with the call for justice. We are called to be peacemakers, not protestors.

It is our desire to work co-operatively on unifying these points. The challenges of this time are almost too great to be faced, but we must let our lives mirror what is written on our hearts – to be so full of God's love that we can do no other than live out our corporate testimonies to the world of honesty, simplicity, equality and peace, whatever the consequences.

We pray for both the personal and inner strength as well as the corporate strength of a shared calling/struggle that will empower us to face all the trials that we will necessarily encounter. We have no illusions about the fact that to truly live a Christian life in these cataclysmic times means to live a life of great risk.

We call on Friends to rediscover our own roots in the vision and lives of early Friends whose own transformed lives shook the unjust social and economic structures of their day. They treasured the records of God's encounters with humanity found in the Bible, and above all, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. And we call upon Friends across the earth to heed the voice of God and let it send us out in truth and power to rise to the immense challenge of our world today.

And now at this critical point in time, when our outdated world view no longer satisfies, comes this breakthrough: science and mysticism speaking with one voice, the rediscovery of our own (Christian) creation-centred and mystical tradition, and the recognition of the spiritual wisdoms of the native traditions. All uniting and all challenging in a profound way our narrowly drawn boundaries.

29.18 Are we willing to open ourselves to this wider vision, to cease our urge to control and dominate, to listen instead to our hearts, to recognise again the integrity and sacredness of this planet which we have so abused? This means entering into a new relationship with 'our Mother the Earth', it means seeing ourselves again in a cosmic context, a larger perspective, which includes fire-ball, galaxy, planet and all other life forms.

If we can move from our 'human-sized' viewpoint and look instead from the cosmic viewpoint, there is a sudden and dramatic widening of the lens through which we look. Redemption is seen to be for all creation, and our human story, far from being diminished, is incorporated in the whole drama of an emerging universe.

Grace Blindell, 1992

29.19 Therefore, dear Friends, wait in the Light, that the Word of the Lord may dwell plentifully in you.

William Dewsbury, 1675

E3 discussion

Said Hufflepuff, "I'll teach the lot

And treat them just the same.....

Queries

abolition is the unfinished business of american Friends. how do our action contribute to holding every body every where in equal esteem? what of our practice does not contribute to this? how do we communicate among ourselves and to others about the antecedents of slavery and the inequalities we have inherited today?

education has been the ongoing work of Friends and knowledge is a public good and vehicle of spirit in many cases. How do we educate ourselves and future generations about our testimony? to what do we contribute to futurity as Friends, relatives, and ancestors?

continuing Revelation has carried many leadings. where does it now lead us in service of equality under the heavens?

e³ = 1 divine Light in every body*and every thing*else 2

Peace through cooperative economics

Peace

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. Theirs 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 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.

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

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.

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.

24.04 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](#)

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

24.05 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.

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

24.06 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.

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

24.07 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.

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

24.08 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.

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?

24.09 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.

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.

24.10 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.

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.

24.14

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

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.

24.15

Kathleen Lonsdale, 1964

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...

24.16 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

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:

24.17 Yet there was in the depths 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

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:

24.19 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

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.

24.21 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 Pennington, 1661

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.

24.22

Wolf Mendl, 1974

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.

24.23

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

24.24

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.

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.

24.27 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

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.

24.28 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

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

24.31 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

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.

24.34

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.

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...

24.35

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.

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

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

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

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
24.39 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.'

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.'

24.40 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

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.

24.42 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

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.

24.43

J Duncan Wood, 1962

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.

24.44

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:

24.45 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

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...

24.47 [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

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.

24.49 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

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.

24.51 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.

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.

24.52 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

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.

- 24.55 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

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:

- 24.56 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

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.

- 24.57 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

Our peace testimony

24.0

1

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 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.

24.0
1 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

24.0
2 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

24.0
3 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.

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.

24.0
4 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](#)

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

24.0
5 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.

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

24.0
6 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.

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

24.0
7 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.

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.

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.

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.

24.1
0 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.

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

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

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

24.1
4

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

24.1 I was asked to be at the Tribunal in Manchester by 11 am on Tuesday, i.e. yesterday. I was there with
4 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

24.1 I have sometimes been asked what were my reasons for deciding on that refusal to register for war
5 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

24.1 On my third or fourth attendance at the Sunday service with Friends, an American young Quaker
6 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

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:

24.1
7 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

24.1
8 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

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:

24.1
9 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.

24.2
0 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

24.2
1 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’.
1 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

24.2
2 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

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.

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

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

24.2
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Kenneth C Barnes, 1987

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.

24.2
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Kathleen Lonsdale, 1953

Practical expressions of our peace testimony

Public protest

24.2
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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.

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.

24.2 I am further authorised by my 13-year-old Vietnamese god-daughter whose guardian I am. She was
7 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

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.

24.2
8 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

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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.

24.2
9 On occasions of public calamity Friends' post must be the care of the poor and the relief of distress.
William Allen, 1812

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

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
24.3 the influence of Woolman seemed to be in his own lifetime... But failure does not matter. All that
1 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

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
24.3 Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and he calls each of us to a ministry or vocation of
2 reconciliation.

Sydney Bailey, 1980

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

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.

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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.

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...

24.3
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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

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.

24.3
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Sydney Bailey, 1984

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...

24.3

7 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

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

24.3 service.

8

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

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.

24.3
9 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.'

24.4
0 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.'

0 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

24.4
1 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

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

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

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.

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:

24.4
5 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?

24.4
6 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

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...

24.4
7 [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.

[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.

24.4 Not only is it an inappropriate and impossible model for others to follow, it is itself responsible for
8 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

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.

24.4
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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

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.

24.5
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London Yearly Meeting, 1937

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.

24.5 If we are to face these issues aright we are called to re-examine our whole way of life. At the
1 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.

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:

24.5 Much of our present affluence in Britain was built on the cheap labour, inadequate food, poor
2 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.

2 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

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.

[24.5](#) The sense of our common humanity is latent within us, but only occasionally do we appreciate it as a
[3](#) 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

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

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.

- 24.5 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

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:

- 24.5 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

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.

- 24.5 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

- 24.5 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

24.5
9 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'.

24.6
0 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

Peace discussion

[tom kunesh on seeking a decolonial peace](#)

Unity in community

Unity in community

[27.01](#) The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers.

William Penn, 1693

[27.02](#) Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the Spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of Truth amongst them. And as it pleased the Lord to make way for my going at a time when the troubles of war were increasing and when by reason of much wet weather travelling was more difficult than usual at that season, I looked upon it as a more favourable opportunity to season my mind, and bring me into a nearer sympathy with them. And as mine eye was to the great Father of Mercies, humbly desiring to learn what his will was concerning me, I was made quiet and content.

John Woolman, 1763

[27.03](#) Can we settle the question, 'Is the Society of Friends Christian or not?' In the historical sense the answer is Yes: but that does not preclude the possibility that we may now be called to a new and wider perception of the Truth. We have the witness of the Society itself, as well as the example of Jesus, against turning yesterday's inspiration into today's dogma. Today's world-wide knowledge of people and their religions does present a challenge which our universalists are right to try to meet – just as our Christians are right to remind us that the insights of the past must not lightly be thrown away. It may be valuable to live for a while in the tension between the universal and the specific; and if so, there may be a special vocation here through which our Society (with its tradition of respect for the divine Seed in everyone) can minister to the church at large. Or it may be that a synthesis is possible, once we can agree on what is essential to being a Christian.

John Lampen, 1985

We have acquired a much greater understanding of non-Christian religions from newcomers who have settled in this country since the end of World War II and this has increased the sympathy and respect of many Friends for these faiths. This broader approach to religion has led to an affirmation by 'universalist' Friends that no one faith can claim to be a final revelation or to have a monopoly of the truth and to the rejection of any exclusive religious fundamentalism whether based in Christianity or any other religion.

The ferment of thought in this post-war period has produced a wide variety of beliefs in our Religious Society today and not a little misunderstanding on all sides. Intolerance has reared its head. Some Friends have voiced objections to the use of Christian language in meetings for worship and for business; others have been told that there is no place for them in our Religious Society if they cannot regard themselves as Christians. It has become quite customary to distinguish between 'Christians' and 'universalists' as if one category excluded the other.

[27.04](#) This situation has led many Friends to suppose that universalist Friends are in some way set over against Christocentric Friends. This is certainly not the case. Universalism is by definition inclusivist, and its adherents accept the right to free expression of all points of view, Christocentric or any other. Indeed, in London Yearly Meeting there are many universalists whose spiritual imagery and belief are thoroughly Christocentric.

From the beginning the Quaker Christian faith has had a universal dimension. George Fox saw the Light 'shine through all' and he identified it with the divine Light of Christ that 'enlightens every man that comes into the world' (John 1:9). He pointed out, as did William Penn in greater detail, that individuals who had lived before the Christian era or outside Christendom and had no knowledge of the Bible story, had responded to a divine principle within them. In these terms, all Quaker Christians are universalists. Obedience to the Light within, however that may be described, is the real test of faithful living.

Alastair Heron, Ralph Hetherington and Joseph Pickvance, 1994

See also [26.43](#)

[27.05](#) The church [is] no other thing but the society, gathering or company of such as God hath called out of the world and worldly spirit to walk in his light and life... Under this church ... are comprehended all, and as many, of whatsoever nation, kindred, tongue or people they be, though outwardly strangers and remote from those who profess Christ and Christianity in words and have the benefit of the Scriptures, as become obedient to the holy light and testimony of God in their hearts... There may be members therefore of this Catholic church both among

heathens, Turks, Jews and all the several sorts of Christians, men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart, who ... are by the secret touches of this holy light in their souls enlivened and quickened, thereby secretly united to God, and there-through become true members of this Catholic church.

Robert Barclay, 1678

[27.06](#) I have assumed a name today for my religious principles – Quaker-Catholicism – having direct spiritual teaching for its distinctive dogma, yet recognising the high worth of all other forms of Faith: a system, in the sense of inclusion, not exclusion; an appreciation of the universal and the various teachings of the Spirit, through the faculties given to us, or independent of them.

Caroline Fox, 1846

Henry T Hodgkin (1877–1933) played a leading part in the Friends Foreign Mission Association and the Student Christian Movement, and in founding the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He worked as a missionary in China and came to appreciate the validity of other witnesses to God than the Christian one.

[27.07](#) By processes too numerous and diverse even to summarise, I have reached a position which may be stated in a general way somewhat like this: 'I believe that God's best for another may be so different from my experience and way of living as to be actually impossible to me. I recognise [a change] to have taken place in myself, from a certain assumption that mine was really the better way, to a very complete recognition that there is no one better way, and that God needs all kinds of people and ways of living through which to manifest himself in the world.'

This has seemed to carry with it two conclusions which greatly affect conduct. One is that I really find myself wanting to learn from people whom I previously would have regarded as fit objects for my 'missionary zeal'. To discover another way in which God is operating – along lines it may be distasteful or dangerous to me – is a large part of the fun of living. The second direction in which conduct is influenced is the deliberate attempt to share the life and interests of others who are not in my circle ... [for] in such sharing I can most deeply understand the other's life and through that reach, maybe, fresh truths about God.

1933

The city of Birmingham, England, where I live, is one of the most racially and religiously mixed communities in Europe. It has a stimulating, challenging and exciting atmosphere. On one occasion, at a big interfaith gathering, I was being very Quakerly and very enlightened. The discussion was about prayer, and I confessed that it was my habit to pray anywhere and that I could do so sitting comfortably in a chair. A devout Muslim woman in the conference was shocked at what she saw as my easygoing familiarity with God, my lack of respect, my denial of my own human dignity. When you think of God, she said, there is only one possible response. It is to go down on your *knees*.

[27.08](#)

I recognised the truth in what she said and have acted on it ever since, though I regret I have not yet been brave enough to kneel in the meeting house. That will come. From this unnamed woman I learned something of Islam – submission to God – in a way that no Christian had ever taught me. But the words are immaterial. It was not the Mosque or the Qur'an addressing me, but the living God I know in Christ speaking through her.

John Punshon, 1987

[27.09](#)

As for me, Jesus is a man so great that you may call him the only begotten Son of God, or Divine. We may call His Spirit Love, Light, Truth or Way. Yet that Spirit is so universal and eternal, that I cannot but believe that it has been prevailing everywhere, more or less in all religions, even from before the birth of the historic Jesus, and I believe that it is living more or less in all human beings in the world. This is why Jesus says all that he has taught us is our Father's and not Jesus' own.

Yukio Irie, 1959

[27.10](#)

Remember Jesus' answer to the woman of Samaria: 'Neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and in Truth.' In the depth of meditation, in the gathered meeting we rise above all limitations. Gone are the concepts of Quakerism and Vedanta. Gone are the ideas of being a Christian or a Hindu. All these concepts are valid on their own level. They have their place, but they are transcended when we merge our minds in Spirit. I believe this is what Jesus and all the other World Teachers wanted us ultimately to do.

Swami Tripurananda (Jonathan Carter), 1979

[27.11](#) 'What think ye of Christ?' is central both in our relationships with other religions and in our relationship with one another within the Society of Friends... We are truly loyal to Jesus Christ when we judge the religious systems of the world by the standard which he himself used: 'Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord ... but he that doeth the will of my Father'. Every tree is to be known by its fruits: not by its dead wood or thorns or parasites, but by the fruit of its own inner life and nature. We all know the fruits of the Spirit and recognise the beauty of holiness in our own ancestral tree... The flowers of unselfish living may be found growing in other people's gardens and ... rich fruits of the Spirit may be tasted from other people's trees. They spring from the same Holy Spirit of Truth, the same Seed of God, whose power moves us through Christ.

Marjorie Sykes, 1957

Friends and the Christian church

[27.12](#) The unity of Christians never did nor ever will or can stand in uniformity of thought and opinion, but in Christian love only.

Thomas Story, 1737

Even in the apostles' days Christians were too apt to strive after a wrong unity and uniformity in outward practices and observations, and to judge one another unrighteously in those things; and mark, it is not the different practice from one another that breaks the peace and unity, but the judging of one another because of different practices...

[27.13](#) And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master, to whom they are to give an account, and not to quarrel with one another about their different practices (Rom 14:4). For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him, and that he walks in his rank, in his own order, in his proper way and place of subjection to that; and this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk.

Isaac Penington, 1660

[27.14](#) What, then, is the focus for Christian unity? It must be Jesus, who calls us not into structures but into discipleship and to follow him in his way. Can we not know that we are one in him when we are faithful to his calling and when we exercise towards one another that greatest gift of love? Can we not rejoice in our diversity, welcoming the opportunities to learn from each other? Can we not seek a recognition of each other's ministries as the work of the same Spirit? That Spirit can, if we are ready to adventure, lead us into ways we have not known before.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

[27.15](#) A rich variety of expression and of practice is to be expected as the Life streams through disciples of every race and clime and condition... It does not press men into a rigid mould of thought or action; rather it would pour its own joy into every mould of humanity. We have sought unity through agreement in doctrines and institutions; and the track of church history, like some new road through the desert, is strewn with the parched skeletons of our failures.

William Charles Braithwaite, 1919

[27.16](#) We may picture God as weaving a pattern with the lives of men and women. We can glimpse but small fragments of the whole design; in moments of inspiration we can see more clearly, while the saints see most of all. Through it there runs a Quaker strand. It may be only a single thread but it is not insignificant, for without it the pattern would be marred. Yet that thread of itself does not make the whole design. The Society of Friends is but a part of the Christian church, and the measure of truth which it possesses may only rightly be considered in relation to the whole. The work of the Church in the world today is surely not something to be carried out in miniature by each part, but it is a mighty whole to which each should contribute according to its special gifts and strengths.

William G Sewell, 1946

[27.17](#) Historically our Society stands in the Christian tradition; ... we unite in the desire that Friends everywhere should share in the life and fellowship of the wider Christian community and co-operate as fully as possible in its work... Many of us value opportunities for worship and service with our fellow Christians. No one can measure the debt we owe to the influence and inspiration and leadership of many of our fellow Christians, to the stimulus and fellowship some of us have known in inter-church groups and inter-denominational movements. And there is, too, the valuable service rendered by Christian scholars and thinkers for which we are profoundly thankful.

Friends World Conference, 1952

27.18 For the Church ... is really the people – the children and followers of God. Manses and moderators, sermons and synods are the mere packaging of this people, perhaps inevitable, anyway historical, but not to be mistaken for the thing itself. The thing itself, the believing and worshipping people, has two important characteristics which the individual Christian must never forget. The Church is a community, and it is a continuity... Quakers may be an experimental sect – both in the modern sense of pushing forward the frontiers of faith, and in the older sense of insisting upon experience as the basis of their faith – but if we are honest we must admit that we build upon the foundations laid for us over many centuries by the Church.

Gerald Priestland, 1982

Secreted within the organism that is the historical Christian faith, there is a mystical and spiritual tradition which uses metaphor, symbol, image and art to come to terms with the questions thrown up by the lifestyle and religious commitment that it has made and to which it remains loyal.

27.19 It could be that the modern ecumenical movement is essentially such a quest for meaning through spirituality. Catholics wanting to take communion with Methodists, or Quakers willing to take communion with anybody, are left in no doubt that they are departing from the party line. One sometimes needs a strong conscience to practise unity against the wishes of one's denominational authorities. But hard though it is to see it sometimes, the old, hierarchical, entirely male, theological style of church leadership is weakening. The real ecumenical movement is found among people who have experienced unity, and the universal faith is found there. But this universal faith lives in a way of life, rather than a set of beliefs.

John Punshon, 1987

27.20 The spirit of the ecumenical movement far transcends its rather regressive concern for agreement on beliefs. It is concerned rather more for the realisation of unity in worship, in discipleship, in community and in a common response to the social challenges of our time. In this concern Friends can be wholly one. Our rejection of formal agreements should therefore be balanced by a positive affirmation of a unity of another kind, a unity of spirit, of search and of struggle. For us, real unity between Christians will arise from the honest communication of our faith to each other in our own specific situations, spirit to spirit, and it will take form in lives lived together and work done together. It will be a unity that includes without also excluding, which preserves the core faith without also pruning off the distinctive interpretations.

Rex Ambler, 1989

Creeds

[27.21](#)

Creeds are milestones, doctrines are interpretations: Truth, as George Fox was continually asserting, a seed with the power of growth, not a fixed crystal, be its facets never so beautiful.

John Wilhelm Rowntree, 1904

[27.22](#)

All Truth is a shadow except the last, except the utmost; yet every Truth is true in its kind. It is substance in its own place, though it be but a shadow in another place (for it is but a reflection from an intenser substance); and the shadow is a true shadow, as the substance is a true substance.

Isaac Penington, 1653

We do not in the least deprecate the attempt, which must be made, since man is a rational being, to formulate intellectually the ideas which are implicit in religious experience... But it should always be recognised that all such attempts are provisional, and can never be assumed to possess the finality of ultimate truth. There must always be room for development and progress, and Christian thought and inquiry should never be fettered by theory... Among the dangers of formulated statements of belief are these:

[27.23](#)

- a. they tend to crystallise thought on matters that will always be beyond any final embodiment in human language;
- b. they fetter the search for truth and for its more adequate expression; and
- c. they set up a fence which tends to keep out of the Christian fold many sincere and seeking souls who would gladly enter it.

Particularly in these days we need to be on our guard against these dangers. Multitudes of people are being shaken out of their comfortable beliefs by the terrific experiences through which the world is passing, and are seeking a secure basis for their faith. And some are finding a Reality which is much too great to be confined within the narrow limits of a creed.

True basis of Christian unity, 1917

27.24 Rejection of creed is not inconsistent with being possessed by a living belief. We have no creed in science, but we are not lukewarm in our beliefs. The belief is not that all the knowledge of the universe that we hold so enthusiastically will survive in the letter; but a sureness that we are on the road. If our so-called facts are changing shadows, they are shadows cast by the light of constant truth. So too in religion we are repelled by that confident theological doctrine which has settled for all generations just how the spiritual world is worked; but we need not turn aside from the measure of light that comes into our experience showing us a Way through the unseen world. Religion for the conscientious seeker is not all a matter of doubt and self-questionings. There is a kind of sureness which is very different from cocksureness.

Arthur S Eddington, 1929

27.25 The Quaker objection to credal statements is not to beliefs as such but to the use of an officially sanctioned selection of them to impose a uniformity in things where the gospel proclaims freedom. 'Credo' is the Latin for 'I believe'. The meaning of the word is debased if you confine it to an act of the will giving intellectual assent to articles of faith. It is much better translated as 'I commit myself to...' in the sense that one is prepared to take the full consequences of the beliefs one has adopted. One adopts not so much a set of propositions as the discipline of working out in one's life and experience the consequences of the truth one has espoused. The value of the beliefs lies solely in their outworking. This I take to be the heart of the original Quaker message.

John Punshon, 1978

27.26 This is the truth which we know and try to live ... that every person is capable of response to the divine Spirit; that this Spirit, or Light, or God reaches out to each one directly and freely; that if we follow the leadings of this Spirit faithfully we are led out of sin into unity with the divine will; that this unity leads us into love of and care for all humankind, who are our kin; that what the Spirit shows us is living truth which cannot be fettered by words.

Janet Scott, 1980

The Bible

And the end of words is to bring men to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter. So, learn of the Lord to make a right use of the Scriptures: which is by esteeming them in their right place, and prizing that above them which is above them.

[27.27](#)

Isaac Penington

From these revelations of the Spirit of God to the saints have proceeded the Scriptures of Truth, which contain:

- a. a faithful historical account of the actions of God's people in divers ages, with many singular and remarkable providences attending them;
- b. a prophetic account of several things, whereof some are already past, and some are yet to come;
- c. a full and ample account of all the chief principles of the doctrine of Christ, held forth in divers precious declarations, exhortations and sentences, which, by the moving of God's Spirit, were at several times and upon sundry occasions spoken and written unto some Churches and their pastors.

[27.28](#)

Nevertheless, because they are only a declaration of the fountain and not the fountain itself, therefore they are not to be esteemed the principal ground of all truth and knowledge, nor yet the adequate, primary rule of faith and manners. Yet, because they give a true and faithful testimony of the first foundation, they are and may be esteemed a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit, from which they have all their excellency and certainty: for as by the inward testimony of the Spirit we do alone truly know them, so they testify that the Spirit is that Guide by which the saints are led into all truth: therefore, according to the Scriptures the Spirit is the first and principal Leader.

Robert Barclay, 1678

A host of scholars have been at work for centuries to discover and understand the Jesus of history, and with strangely divergent results. The great quest still goes on and I seek to learn from it. But I cannot separate the Lord and Master of the first disciples from his risen spirit and personality which has gone on unfolding itself to those who seek him, healing, renewing, inspiring, redeeming and guiding.

[27.29](#) Thus I try to keep in touch with his life and message given first in Palestine, with the impact of his life and personality on the early disciples, as day by day I read a portion of the New Testament; I try, too, to learn something of what his spirit has enabled others to be down all the ages since, from the study of the lives of the saints, both canonised and uncanonised, and by reading some of their writings. In the life of many who would not be called saints, and some even who might not be thought of as good men or women, I find flashes of light which to me are sparks or gleams from the light of Christ. I know that my own thoughts of God, my experience, my clumsy and imperfect prayer, are all penetrated by what Jesus Christ has meant to me. In doubts and difficulty his faith in God's love, his willingness to face even the awful burden of the cross and all that it involved, are a constant stay, bringing renewal of faith and of hope.

T Edmund Harvey, 1949

As a book containing foundation documents of both the Jewish and Christian religions, the Bible has, of course, unique historical value, both faiths having contributed richly to the world's culture and public life. Again, our Quaker forerunners' use of the Bible to nurture and check the working of Light Within was both wise and profitable. So it is for us. Yet the Bible's supreme value resides in the power of its finest passages as expressions of vital religion which is both personally and socially transforming.

[27.30](#) What kind of approach to the Bible leads to that discovery? An intelligent analytical and critical approach has its rightful place. We then stand over the Bible as subjects investigating an object. An inversion of this subject-object relationship is, however, possible. We then approach the Bible not mainly to criticise, but to listen; not merely to question, but to be challenged, and to open our lives penitentially both to its judgments and to its liberating gospel.

Pathways to God are many and varied. Friends, however, along with a great company of other seekers, have been able to testify that this receptive personal response to the biblical message, and especially to the call of Jesus, leads to joyous self-fulfilling life, and to a redemptive awareness of the love and glory of God.

George Boobyer, 1988

How much the Bible has to teach when taken as a whole, that cannot be done by snippets! There is its range over more than a thousand years giving us the perspective of religion in time, growing and changing, and leading from grace to grace. There is its clear evidence of the variety of religious experience, not the kind of strait-jacket that nearly every church, even Friends, have sometimes been tempted to substitute for the diversity in the Bible. To select from it but a single strand is to miss something of its richness. Even the uncongenial and the alien to us is happily abundant in the Bible. The needs of men today are partly to be measured by their difficulty in understanding that with which they differ. At this point the Bible has no little service to render. It requires patient insight into the unfamiliar and provides a discipline for the imagination such as today merely on the political level is a crying need of our time.

[27.31](#)

Further the Bible is a training school in discrimination among alternatives. One of the most sobering facts is that it is not on the whole a peaceful book – I mean a book of peace of mind. The Bible is the deposit of a long series of controversies between rival views of religion. The sobering thing is that in nearly every case the people shown by the Bible to be wrong had every reason to think they were in the right, and like us they did so. Complacent orthodoxy is the recurrent villain in the story from first to last and the hero is the challenger, like Job, the prophets, Jesus and Paul.

Henry J Cadbury, 1953

If we no longer believe in the Bible in the old way, what do we now believe? This question must be put to each one of us, and we have to find an answer. Knowledge of the Bible is very important, but it is unnecessary for us to accept it as infallible or as a legal document; we must think and judge for ourselves, listening to that which speaks to our innermost being.

[27.32](#) The Bible is not sacrosanct. It comes from times very different from our own with a different concept of man. It does not contain the absolute literal truth, but it can teach us the truth of life. Dogma is the language of theology. I do not set any limits for my thought in seeking truth in intellectual honesty. But more important than anything else is an anchorage in the divine which is to be found in the depth of every human being; it cannot be formulated in words but must be expressed in life and in relations with our fellow men.

Jesus is the most important person in the Bible, not because the Bible or the churches proclaim it, but because he gave men a new concept of God.

Elsa Cedergren, 1982

Personal experience makes me think that Bible study is more rewarding undertaken by a group than in solitude... A group may pool their insights and reactions, their knowledge, doubts and stumbling-blocks, and together arrive at greater understanding (of themselves as well as of the Bible) than they could ever have done separately... Though the purpose of study should be serious (indeed without a fundamental seriousness a group will not last for long), surely it need not be over-solemn. The Bible is a human book, and you will find everything human somewhere in it, including humour. We must be prepared for conflict; some of the truth we discover may be unpalatable; and it is essential that we do not cheat, but keep on looking for the truth.

[27.33](#)

Joan Fitch, 1980

We understand the Bible as a record arising from ... struggles to comprehend God's ways with people. The same Spirit which inspired the writers of the Bible is the Spirit which gives us understanding of it: it is this which is important to us rather than the literal words of scripture. Hence, while quotations from the Bible may illuminate a truth for us, we would not use them to prove a truth. We welcome the work of scholars in deepening our understanding of the Bible.

[27.34](#)

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

See also [26.42](#)

Priesthood

The priesthood of all believers is a foundation of our understanding of the church. Our own experience leads us to affirm that the church can be so ordered that the guidance of the Holy Spirit can be known and followed without the need for a separated clergy... The Spirit in which the apostles lived, ... which was poured out at Pentecost on all the church, young and old, women and men, continues in our experience to empower all members of the church in a variety of ministries.

[27.35](#)

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

Just as Quakers do not limit the service of God to certain times, or places, or people, so they do not have a set-apart priesthood... There is no need for any specific person to be designated prophet, priest, or church leader. Quakers would say that if people are open to the power of love and light in their lives then they will themselves become prophetic and priestly, and will not need to follow the external authority of church leaders. They will become empowered to be themselves, to find God in their hearts and to serve other people.

[27.36](#)

Harvey Gillman, 1988

See also [10.05](#), [12.02](#) & [19.31](#)

Sacraments

Jesus, when he took up the little children and said, 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven', was speaking of Jewish children, who, according to the Jewish custom, would not have been baptised, and the Quaker position is really summed up in the words 'John indeed baptised with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit'. It is the inward change, the inward purification, the spiritual fact and not the outward symbol, that belongs in truth to the Kingdom of God. Neither in the refusal to baptise nor to take the supper do Friends set forth a negation. They assert, on the contrary, the positive truth that the religious life is the inward life of the spirit. But no place or time can limit its action, nor any symbol adequately express it.

[27.37](#)

John Wilhelm Rowntree, 1902

Alongside Friends' stress on the primacy of God's action, we set great store by the centrality of ordinary experience. We agree with the witness of the universal church that mystical experiences are attested by the moral quality of people's lives. The whole of our everyday experience is the stuff of our religious awareness: it is here that God is best known to us. However valid and vital outward sacraments are for others, they are not, in our experience, necessary for the operation of God's grace. We believe we hold this witness in trust for the whole church.

[27.38](#)

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

To Fox and the early Friends the whole of life seemed sacramental, and they refused to mark off any one particular practice or observance as more sacred than others. They took the same stand with regard to Sunday, or First Day; it was not in itself more holy than Saturday or Monday; every week-day should be a Lord's Day. Their whole attitude was gloriously positive, not negative. They were 'alive unto God' and sensed him everywhere.

[27.39](#) We do not say that to observe the sacraments is wrong, but that such observance is not essential to wholehearted Christian discipleship and the full Christian experience. We do not judge our fellow Christians to whom the outward sacraments mean so much. Rather do we wish, by prayerful fellowship with them, to be led unitedly with them to a deeper understanding of what underlies those sacraments, and so to share a richer experience of the mind of Christ.

Gerald K Hibbert, 1941

The Quaker conviction is that the operation of the Spirit outruns all our expectations. We acknowledge that the grace of God is experienced by many through the outward rite of baptism, but no ritual, however carefully prepared for, can be guaranteed to lead to growth in the Spirit. A true spiritual experience must be accompanied by the visible transformation of the outward life. Our understanding of baptism is that it is not a single act of initiation but a continuing growth in the Holy Spirit and a commitment which must continually be renewed. It is this process which draws us into a fellowship with those who acknowledge the same power at work in their lives, those whom Christ is calling to be his body on earth.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

[27.41](#) We would assert that the validity of worship lies not in its form but in its power, and a form of worship sincerely dependent on God, but not necessarily including the words and actions usually recognised as eucharistic, may equally serve as a channel for this power and grace. We interpret the words and actions of Jesus near the end of his life as an invitation to recall and re-enact the self-giving nature of God's love at every meal and every meeting with others, and to allow our own lives to be broken open and poured out for the life of the world.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

Many of the testimonies and practices established by early Friends have survived only in part. One which has almost died out in Britain is the naming of days and months by number instead of by names of pagan origin. It is rare now to hear 'first day' instead of 'Sunday' or 'third month' instead of 'March', though the practice is still acceptable.

Another testimony held by early Friends was that against the keeping of 'times and seasons'. We might understand this as part of the conviction that all of life is sacramental; that since all times are therefore holy, no time should be marked out as more holy; that what God has done for us should always be remembered and not only on the occasions named Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

[27.42](#)

This is a testimony which seems to be dying of neglect. Many Friends, involved with family and the wider society, keep Christmas; in some meetings, Easter and its meaning is neglected, not only at the calendar time but throughout the year. What I would hope for is neither that we let the testimony die, nor that we keep it mechanically. I hope for a rediscovery of its truth, that we should remember and celebrate the work of God in us and for us whenever God by the Spirit calls us to this remembrance and this joy.

Janet Scott, 1994

We need to guard against under-valuing the material expressions of spiritual things. It is easy to make a form of our very rejection of forms. And in particular, we need to ask ourselves whether we are endeavouring to make all the daily happenings and doings of life which we call 'secular' minister to the spiritual. It is a bold and colossal claim that we put forward – that the whole of life is sacramental, that there are innumerable 'means of grace' by which God is revealed and communicated – through nature and through human fellowship and through a thousand things that may become the 'outward and visible sign' of 'an inward and spiritual grace'.

[27.43](#)

A Barratt Brown, 1932

I personally believe that there is a quality in the bareness of Christian Quakerism, which may act as a bridge between the past and the future, allowing space for Friends to dare to search within... To be a Quaker is by no means to say goodbye to myth, ritual and symbol, but rather to find myself set free to discover them as the very essence of the way I now experience... Quakers are bridge people. I remain on that bridge, part of my roots reaching back into the Christian past and part stretching forward into the future where new symbols are being born.

[27.44](#)

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985

See also [26.15](#)

make it Plain

making it Plain

[28.01](#) The very simple heart of the early Quaker message is needed as much to-day as it ever was... The really universal thing is a living experience. It is reached in various ways, and expressed in very different language... The common bond is in the thing itself, the actual inner knowledge of the grace of God. Quakerism can only have a universal message if it brings men and women into this transforming knowledge. The early Friends certainly had this knowledge, and were the means of bringing many thousands of seekers into the way of discovery. In virtue of this central experience, the Quaker movement can only be true to itself by being a missionary movement.

Henry T Hodgkin, 1916

[28.02](#) When you come to your meetings ... what do you do? Do you then gather together bodily only, and kindle a fire, compassing yourselves with the sparks of your own kindling, and so please yourself ... ? Or rather do you sit down in the true silence, resting from your own will and workings, and waiting upon the Lord, with your minds fixed in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you ... and prepares you, and your spirits and souls, to make you fit for his service?

William Penn, 1677

[28.03](#) Now I was sent to turn people from darkness to the light that they might receive Christ Jesus, for to as many as should receive him in his light, I saw that he would give power to become Sons of God, which I had obtained by receiving Christ. And I was to direct people to the Spirit that gave forth the Scriptures, by which they might be led into all Truth, and so up to Christ and God, as they had been who gave them forth. And I was to turn them to the grace of God, and to the Truth in the heart, which came by Jesus, that by this grace they might be taught, which would bring them into salvation, that their hearts might be established by it, and their words might be seasoned, and all might come to know their salvation nigh.

George Fox, 1648

[28.04](#)

When I grew to about thirteen years of age, I began to discover something about me, or in my mind, like the heavenly anointing for the ministry; for the Lord had revealed His word as a hammer and had broken the rock in pieces in my living experience; and I was contrited under a sense of power and love; saying even vocally when alone, 'Lord, make me a chosen vessel unto Thee'... With respect to my first appearances [in ministry, when about seventeen years old]... I shrunk from it exceedingly; and often have I hesitated, and felt such a reluctance to it, that I have suffered the meeting to break up without my having made the sacrifice: yea, when the word of life in a few words was like a fire within me... It pleased the Lord to call me into a path much untrodden, in my early travels as a messenger of the Gospel, having to go into markets and to declare the truth in the streets... No one knows the depth of my sufferings and the mortifying, yea, crucifying of my own will, which I had to endure in this service; yet I have to acknowledge to the sufficiency of divine grace herein... At Bath I had to go to the Pump Room and declare the truth to the gay people who resorted there. This was a time very relieving to my sorely exercised mind. In these days and years of my life I was seldom from under some heavy burden, so that I went greatly bowed down; sometimes ready to say, 'If it be thus with me, O Thou who hast given me a being, I pray Thee take away my life from me'... In the year 1801, I wrote thus: 'O heavenly Father, Thou hast seen me in the depth of tribulation, in my many journeyings and travels... It was Thy power which supported me when no flesh could help, when man could not comprehend the depth of mine exercise... Be Thou only and for ever exalted in, by and through Thy poor child, and let nothing be able to pluck me out of Thy hand.'

Sarah Lynes Grubb, 1832

See also [2.55](#)

[28.05](#)

An apprehension has seized upon my mind this morning, that after having finished the little books I am preparing for the children of Sierra Leone, it will be my duty to attempt the introduction of them myself into that country and the neighbourhood, and even to attempt the reduction of unwritten languages. I would not go merely under a profession of opening a school or schools, but to proceed to the religious instruction of the children, for my heart feels an engagement towards them that cannot possibly be fulfilled without going there.

Hannah Kilham, 1817

[28.06](#)

Jesus saw the truth that men needed and he thought it urgent that that truth should be proclaimed. That trust is handed on to us, but it is a responsibility from which we shrink. We feel that we have a very imperfect grasp of the meaning of the Gospel. Perhaps, after all the earnest seeking of the Church, we are only beginning to see the tremendous implications of it. We dimly see that this Gospel, before it has finished with us, will turn our lives upside down and inside out. Our

favourite Quaker vice of caution holds us back. We have much more to learn before we are ready to teach. It is right that we have much to learn; it is right to recognise the heavy responsibility of teaching; but to suppose that we must know everything before we can teach anything is to condemn ourselves to perpetual futility.

George B Jeffery, 1934

[28.07](#) 'Have you anything to declare?' is a vital challenge to which every one of us is personally called to respond and is also a challenge that every meeting should consider of primary importance. It should lead us to define, with such clarity as we can reach, precisely what it is that Friends of this generation have to say that is not, as we believe, being said effectively by others.

Edgar G Dunstan, 1956

[28.08](#) We live in a rationalist society that has shed the security of dogmas it found it could not accept, and now finds itself afraid of its own freedom. Some look for an external authority, as they did of old; but in this situation there are many who cannot just go backwards. They ask for an authority they can accept without the loss of their own integrity: they ask to be talked to in a language they can understand... With these people our point of departure is not a mighty proclamation of Truth, but the humble invitation to sit down together and share what we have found, in the spirit of Woolman setting out on his Indian journey, 'that I might feel and understand their life, and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them.' We approach them without pressure to accept a statement, or with proselytising zeal, but with 'love as the first motion'.

Harold Loukes, 1955

[27.02](#) gives a fuller version of John Woolman's account

[28.09](#) Outreach is for me an invitation to others to join us in our way of worship and response to life which are so important to us that we wish to share them. At the simplest level this means supplying information about meetings, Friends to contact, and basic beliefs, all of which should be given accurately, clearly and if possible attractively. In the second stage outreach offers to others, through meetings, personal contact and literature, the experience and truth which Friends have found for themselves through three centuries and which impel us just as strongly today. It is different from some forms of evangelism in that it does not use mass emotional appeal, idiosyncratic demands or autocratic compulsion but only the persuasion of insight, humanity and good sense. It does not depend on rewards or threats, but on the active acceptance of those who see it as truth.

Edrey Allott, 1990

[28.10](#)

Many of the people who come to us are both refugees and seekers. They are looking for a space to find their authenticity, a space in a spiritual context. It is a process of liberation. Some discover what they need among Friends, others go elsewhere. This gift of the sacred space that Friends have to offer is a two-edged sword. It is not easy administratively to quantify; it leads to ambiguity. It demands patient listening; it can be enriching and challenging to our complacency. It is outreach in the most general sense and it is a profound service. It may not lead to membership and it may cause difficulties in local meetings. But if someone comes asking for bread, we cannot say, sorry we are too busy discovering our own riches; when we have found them, we'll offer you a few. Our riches are precisely our sharing. And the world is very, very hungry.

Harvey Gillman, 1993

[28.11](#)

Only such writings as spring from a living experience will reach the life in others, only those which embody genuine thought in clear and effective form will minister to the needs of the human mind. A faith like Quakerism should find expression in creative writing born of imagination and spirit, and speaking in universal tones that will be understood by many who fail to understand the common presentations of Christianity. It is no disrespect to truth to present it in forms that will be readily understood.

1925

[28.12](#)

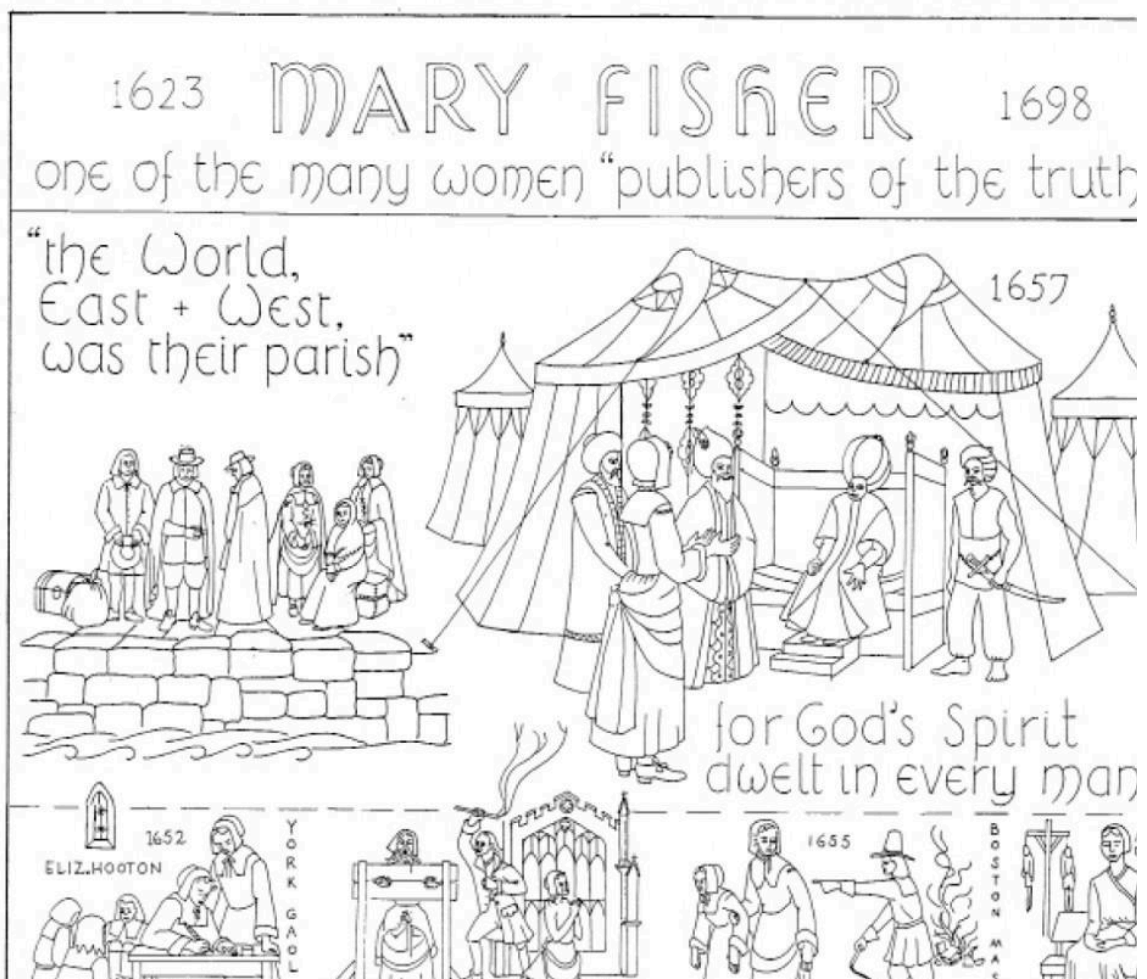
Sharing the Quaker message today does not mean sharing it [only] in English. It means carrying it in French, from Burundi Yearly Meeting to Madagascar. Or standing in Kenya, telling of your faith as a Bolivian Friend in Aymara to be translated into Spanish and then into English and then whispered into Luragoli for the old Friend in the back row! Those who carry the Quaker message today are not only those who worry about whether sanctions against South Africa are right or wrong. Quakers today are the victims of violence and racism in Soweto. Quakers today are not simply watching pictures of famine on their televisions; they are farming the inhospitable altiplano in Bolivia; they are facing drought in Turkana.

Val Ferguson, 1987

The Quaker Tapestry is a series of over seventy embroidered panels illustrating the history and experiences of Friends. It sprang from an idea in a children's class in a Somerset meeting in 1981, and has been made by many hands in many meetings. It is a new way of sharing Quaker insights through exhibitions in Britain, Ireland and other countries. It is now on permanent exhibition at Kendal Meeting House.

The following line drawing is a reproduction of one of the cartoons used to plan the tapestry panels.

[28.13](#)



This panel, *Mary Fisher*, illustrates the work of the 'first publishers of truth', as the first Friends who left home to witness to the Light were called. (For an extract from the writing of Mary Fisher, see [19.27](#).)

Our book of discipline tells how Friends try to live by the leadings disclosed in worship and prayer. The early Friends believed that they had rediscovered true Christianity and that they had a duty to tell the world. They travelled widely, 'publishing the truth', first throughout Britain and then overseas, even approaching the sultan of Turkey.

Now, however, most of the journeys from Britain Yearly Meeting are to do service work: teaching, reconciling, helping with development. There are many small groups of Friends who owe their origin to the spirit reflected in those doing such work, who 'let their lives speak'. Evangelical meetings in some parts of the world lay great emphasis on missionary work, as British and Irish Friends did in the past, and as a result there are many thousands of Friends of the programmed tradition in countries such as Kenya and Bolivia. It is part of our service to try to communicate the faith that we have tested in experience. We long to reach out to those who may find a spiritual home in the Society; we do not claim that ours is the only true way, yet we have a perception of truth that is relevant to all if, as we believe, the light to which we witness is a universal light. Each meeting must find its own way of sharing the Quaker experience, each Friend remember 'that we are each the epistle of Yearly Meeting'.

practice (ujima)

annual calendar

1 Jan - unity week

21 March - M4Biz

21 June - M4Biz

21 September - M4Biz

22 December - M4Biz

26-31 December - unity week

-maybe a crash course to ramadan & reading the quran page here?

weekly meeting structure

- the world is wide enough to have things we call worship groups and other stuff too
- a worship group by any other name still meets every week
- discord servers=weekly meetings
- include other short-term weekly meetings like workshops, book clubs, and other small gatherings; any may submit minutes to the Business meeting as led
- support for starting a weekly meeting/promoting hybrid events / nyc inperson

ministry & advisory groups

- similar to membership, committee designation has been abused not in keeping with the stewardship & e3 testimonies
- owing to the usefulness of the term, 'committee' is used by the Monthly Meeting for time-limited task specific convenings
 - ongoing work is supported by advisory groups

clearness committees

- for clarity in the Business of Spirit
- commitments
- life transitions
- relationships
- Friends nikah

letters of discernment for Friends concerns (religious gathering days, affirmations, peaceful demonstration, plain observances)