

Chapter 23

Social responsibility

FAITH AND ACTION

- 23.01 Remember your responsibility as citizens for the government of your town and country, and do not shirk the effort and time this may demand. Do not be content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert and questioning mind. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear; try to discern the new growing-points in social and economic life. Work for an order of society which will allow men and women to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.

Advises, 1964

- 23.02 True godliness don't turn men out of the world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavours to mend it... Christians should keep the helm and guide the vessel to its port; not meanly steal out at the stern of the world and leave those that are in it without a pilot to be driven by the fury of evil times upon the rock or sand of ruin.

William Penn, 1682

- 23.03 We know that Jesus identified himself with the suffering and the sinful, the poor and the oppressed. We know that he went out of his way to befriend social outcasts. We know that he warned us against the deceitfulness of riches, that wealth and great possessions so easily come between us and God, and divide us from our neighbours. The worship of middle-class comfort is surely a side-chapel in the temple of Mammon. It attracts large congregations, and Friends have been known to frequent it. We know that Jesus had compassion on the multitude and taught them many things concerning the Kingdom. He

Faith and action

respected the common folk, appealed to them and was more hopeful of a response from them than from the well-to-do, the clever and the learned. Yet he never flattered the workers, never fostered in them feelings of envy and hatred, and never urged them to press for their own interests ruthlessly and fight the class war to the finish. He called them to love their enemies and to pray for them that despitefully use them. Yet the very fact that he appealed to the humble and meek leads up to ... 'the discovery that the blessing and upraising of the masses are the fundamental interest of society'. In brief, he makes us all ashamed that we are not all out in caring for our fellow-men.

H G Wood, 1958

- 23.04 The duty of the Society of Friends is to be the voice of the oppressed but [also] to be conscious that we ourselves are part of that oppression. Uncomfortably we stand with one foot in the kingdom of this world and with the other in the Eternal Kingdom. Seldom can we keep the inward and outward working of love in balance, let alone the consciousness of living both in time and in eternity, in timelessness. Let us not be beguiled into thinking that political action is all that is asked of us, nor that our personal relationship with God excuses us from actively confronting the evil in this world. The political and social struggles must be waged, but a person is more and needs more than politics, else we are in danger of gaining the whole world but losing our souls.

Eva I Pinthus, 1987

- 23.05 Evils which have struck their roots deep in the fabric of human society are often accepted, even by the best minds, as part of the providential ordering of life. They lurk unsuspected in the system of things until men of keen vision and heroic heart drag them into the light, or until their insolent power visibly threatens human welfare.

William Charles Braithwaite, 1919

- 23.06 'Politics' cannot be relegated to some outer place, but must be recognised as one side of life, which is as much the concern of

23: Social responsibility

religious people and of a religious body as any other part of life. Nay, more than this, the ordering of the life of man in a community, so that he may have the chance of a full development, is and always has been one of the main concerns of Quakerism.

Lucy F Morland, 1919

- 23.07 *The testimony of Marsden Monthly Meeting concerning John Bright (1811-1889), who was a member of parliament for over 40 years and held ministerial office, shows how he carried the calm strength of his religious faith into his political life.*

His deep sense of responsibility in the sight of God, and his intense human sympathy were the most powerful influences in drawing him from business into public life; and his natural nervousness was thus overcome by his sympathetic nature taking up the cause of the poor and the wronged. Of his public speeches it might be said, *he believed and therefore he spoke*. His aim was not popularity or party triumph, but the hope of advancing the cause of Truth and Right so far as he saw it...

Although at one time there were grave doubts in the minds of many Friends as to whether it was desirable for members of our Society to engage in active political life ... it has been evident in John Bright's case that he entered upon it under a deep sense of duty, and that he endeavoured to carry his Christianity with him into all his public life.

- 23.08 'Two sins have my people committed; they have forsaken me, a spring of living water, and they have hewn themselves cisterns, cracked cisterns that can hold no water' (Jer 2:13). I know of no better description of the world we live in than that. We have forgotten that we need the life-giving water of the holy spirit if the material element of the world in which we live is not, sooner or later, to turn into dust and ashes; and we have developed social institutions which cannot hold or channel the life-giving water anyway...

As Christians we need to see ourselves as God's plumbers, working on tanks and channels for the living water that can quicken the daily life of men, women and children... Jesus taught us about patterns of living that make for wholeness as we and our neighbours care for one

Faith and action

another and build one another up. And all the patterns that Jesus showed us of cisterns and channels of caring and service challenge the patterns of Mammon that offer quicker and more showy results, but that end in the debris of a possessive society that allows the living water to run away into the sand. Good plumbers build to last; they don't fall for fashions that rust and fade and crack.

Seventeenth-century Friends were good plumbers. In and out of season, in and out of jail, in and out of court, counting house and farmstead, our Quaker forebears challenged the conventions of the day – in politics, in commerce, in the law, in the established church, in social etiquette, in education, in attitudes to war, poverty and crime. In face of the sterile institutions of their day they found living answers about the ways in which men and women might go about their business of living together.

Roger Wilson, 1976

- 23.09 We are all the poorer for the crushing of one man, since the dimming of the Light anywhere darkens us all.

Michael Sorensen, 1986

- 23.10 We need both a deeper spirituality and a more outspoken witness. If our spirituality can reach the depths of authentic prayer, our lives will become an authentic witness for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, a witness which becomes the context for our prayer. Out of the depths of authentic prayer comes a longing for peace and a passion for justice. And our response to violence and injustice is to pray more deeply, because only God can show us the way out of the mess that the world is in. And only God gives us the strength to follow that Way.

Gordon Matthews, 1989

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

- 23.11 We are not for names, nor men, nor titles of Government, nor are we for this party nor against the other ... but we are for justice and mercy and truth and peace and true freedom, that these may be exalted in our nation, and that goodness, righteousness, meekness, temperance, peace and unity with God, and with one another, that these things may abound.

Edward Burrough, 1659

- 23.12 The word 'testimony' is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life. It is not a form of words, but a mode of life based on the realisation that there is that of God in everybody, that all human beings are equal, that all life is interconnected. It is affirmative but may lead to action that runs counter to certain practices currently accepted in society at large. Hence a pro-peace stance may become an anti-war protest, and a witness to the sacredness of human life may lead to protests against capital punishment. These testimonies reflect the corporate beliefs of the Society, however much individual Quakers may interpret them differently according to their own light. They are not optional extras, but fruits that grow from the very tree of faith.

Harvey Gillman, 1988

- 23.13 Seeking to live at all times in a divine order of life, Quakers have always counted social service part of Christianity. In fidelity to the genius of their inward experience, they have set themselves the task of developing their own spiritual sensitiveness to the light of truth; and have then resolutely confronted the unawakened conscience of the world with the demands of the new light, and have borne witness to it with undaunted patience. This has resulted in progressive enlightenment for themselves, and in the slow but sure triumph of many of the causes of which they have become champions. The reform of the criminal law, the improvement of prisons, the suppression of the slave-trade and of the institution of slavery, the

Corporate responsibility

abolition of the opium traffic, the protection of native races, the repeal of the state regulation of vice, the emancipation of women, have all been powerfully helped to victory – however incomplete – by Quaker action on these lines, side by side with that of other noble-hearted reformers. Other great ills, patent or latent in our civilisation, have yet to be overcome, perhaps have yet to be perceived; the old philanthropy has to deepen into something more vital if the full demands made by the teaching of Christ are to be obeyed; but the faithful following of the Light that illumines the alert conscience still seems to many of us the truest way for securing this deeper experience and for recognising and combating the evils that menace social and international life.

William Charles Braithwaite, 1919

SOCIAL JUSTICE

23.14 Our gracious Creator cares and provides for all his creatures. His tender mercies are over all his works; and so far as his love influences our minds, so far we become interested in his workmanship and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable, that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives...

Oppression in the extreme appears terrible: but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression; and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive. To labour for a perfect redemption from this spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Christ Jesus in this world.

John Woolman, 1763

See also 20.32 & 20.34

23.15 Reduce and simplify your material needs to the point where you can easily satisfy them yourself, so that those who live for the Spirit and

23: Social responsibility

claim to live for it do not correspondingly increase the material burden weighing on other people, cutting them off from the possibility or even the desire to develop their spirit also.

How will the world be better off if, in developing your spiritual life, you make the material life of others that much more burdensome, and if, like in the movement of scales, as you rise yourself towards the eternal, you make other people descend by the same degree, away from him, beyond him? You have only introduced or confirmed an inequality and an injustice, without increasing the total of the Spirit.

Pierre Ceresole, 1937

See also 25.13

23.16 *The war of 1914-18 made Friends more vividly aware of the close connection between war and the social order. Nine months after the outbreak of war London Yearly Meeting was impressed by the words of John Woolman: May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions. After three years' exercise of mind eight 'Foundations of a true social order' were adopted. They were not intended as rules of life but as an attempt to set forth ideals that are aspects of eternal Truth and the direct outcome of our testimony to the individual worth of the human soul. Though they proclaimed the ending of 'restrictions' of sex, they spoke of God as Father and human beings as men and brothers, as was conventional in their time.*

- i. The Fatherhood of God, as revealed by Jesus Christ, should lead us toward a brotherhood which knows no restriction of race, sex or social class.
- ii. This brotherhood should express itself in a social order which is directed, beyond all material ends, to the growth of personality truly related to God and man.
- iii. The opportunity of full development, physical, moral and spiritual, should be assured to every member of the community, man, woman and child. The development of man's full personality should not be hampered by unjust conditions nor crushed by economic pressure.
- iv. We should seek for a way of living that will free us from the bondage of material things and mere conventions, that will

Social justice

raise no barrier between man and man, and will put no excessive burden of labour upon any by reason of our superfluous demands.

v. The spiritual force of righteousness, loving-kindness and trust is mighty because of the appeal it makes to the best in every man, and when applied to industrial relations achieves great things.

vi. Our rejection of the methods of outward domination, and of the appeal to force, applies not only to international affairs, but to the whole problem of industrial control. Not through antagonism but through co-operation and goodwill can the best be obtained for each and all.

vii. Mutual service should be the principle upon which life is organised. Service, not private gain, should be the motive of all work.

viii. The ownership of material things, such as land and capital, should be so regulated as best to minister to the need and development of man.

23.17 *Joseph Rowntree (1836-1925) was a cocoa manufacturer who studied the problems of poverty and of drink. He was in advance of his times in recognising the dangers inherent in sentimentally motivated charity. He devoted much of his own wealth to establishing three trusts to carry forward his concern for Quaker witness and for research and political action to make possible necessary changes in society.*

Charity as ordinarily practised, the charity of endowment, the charity of emotion, the charity which takes the place of justice, creates much of the misery which it relieves, but does not relieve all the misery it creates.

1865

23.18 Much of current philanthropical effort is directed to remedying the more superficial manifestations of weakness and evil, while little thought or effort is directed to search out their underlying causes. The soup kitchen in York never has difficulty in obtaining financial aid, but an enquiry into the extent and causes of poverty would enlist little support.

Joseph Rowntree, 1904

23: Social responsibility

- 23.19 Are you working towards the removal of social injustices? Have you attempted to examine their causes objectively, and are you ready to abandon old prejudices and think again? Do you, as disciples of Christ, take a living interest in the social conditions of the district in which you live? Do you seek to promote the welfare of those in any kind of need and a just distribution of the resources of the world?

Queries, 1964

Poverty and housing

- 23.20 It was an initiative by Harriett Wilson some twenty years ago that led to the formation of the Child Poverty Action Group. She brought her concern about poverty in Britain to the Social & Economic Affairs Committee (one of the predecessors of Quaker Social Responsibility & Education) who organised a meeting of about twenty concerned people at Toynbee Hall... During the meeting the decision to form the group simply made itself. I was then asked whether the Society of Friends would sponsor it. As I stood up to reply I was in a deep dilemma. I could not escape the awe-inspiring feeling that history was being made; it was right for the Society to have brought those concerned together, but it was not for us, as a small religious body, to undertake the political operations which would obviously be needed to achieve the group's objective.

In the event the CPAG was formed as a non-denominational charitable body. It has grown into one of the most effective pressure groups in the country, and one of the ways by which Friends could help to alleviate the undoubtedly increasing poverty would be to support the group.

Apart from campaigning for a better deal for the poor generally, the Child Poverty Action Group advises people on how to make sure that they get the welfare provisions to which they are entitled; and the group brings test cases to that end.

Richard Allen, 1984

Social justice

- 23.21 *A public statement by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain agreed in session at London Yearly Meeting 22-25 May 1987:*

Quakers in Britain have felt called to issue this statement in order to address a matter of urgent national priority to promote debate and to stimulate action.

We are angered by actions which have knowingly led to the polarisation of our country – into the affluent, who epitomise success according to the values of a materialistic society, and the ‘have-leasts’, who by the expectations of that same society are oppressed, judged, found wanting and punished.

We value that of God in each person, and affirm the right of everyone to contribute to society and share in life’s good things, beyond the basic necessities.

We commit ourselves to learning again the spiritual value of each other. We find ourselves utterly at odds with the priorities in our society which deny the full human potential of millions of people in this country. That denial diminishes us all. There must be no ‘them’ and ‘us’.

We appreciate the stand taken by other churches and we wish to work alongside them.

As a Religious Society and as individuals we commit ourselves to examine again how we use our personal and financial resources. We will press for change to enable wealth and power to be shared more evenly within our nation. We make this statement publicly at a time of national decision [a general election] in the hope that, following the leadings of the Spirit, each one of us in Britain will take appropriate action.

- 23.22 If we do not have the sense that selfishness is right, we may yet be carried along by the prevailing social currents to behave as though we do. More insidiously, we may seek material well-being for those we love, and thus achieve a sort of displaced selfishness. We may need to examine what we really believe, and in the light of that we can address questions about personal conduct. The main question for us

23: Social responsibility

who are comfortable is whether we use our positions of comparative power to arrogate to ourselves more than our reasonable share of the resources of the world. If so, we should try to redistribute what we can, to live in a more responsible way. For those who are poor, a different question arises: what is selfish materialism, and what is proper aspiration?

We cannot take more than our share of finite resources unless we have the power so to do. Poverty and powerlessness are bound up with each other. Poverty leads to powerlessness, and powerlessness leads to poverty.

Martin Wyatt, 1988

- 23.23 We need to see the problem of homelessness as only one end of a spectrum of evil that has the massive subsidies to owners at the other. It is a problem that will be as difficult and painful to solve as slavery. Slavery as an evil shared many of the qualities of the present housing situation – it benefited the wealthy, created an underclass and denied them human rights. The solution was painful, for abolition often required that slave owners abandon their investment with no recompense. To change our attitudes to housing will be no less of a challenge to us than slavery was for the reformers, not only because institutional evil is hard to recognise but also because so many of us benefit personally from the present situation.

We must first understand the present system and become clear about the extent of right and wrong that it contains. If we could achieve this, we could first work towards a consensus on goals and then, I hope with other churches, start on the secular arguments.

This is a challenge that the Society, and indeed other churches, must face. If we fail to address the roots of an issue in which most of us are unwittingly part of the problem, we will need to look very carefully at the claims we make about our contribution in the world.

Richard Hilken, 1992; 1993

Social justice

Slavery

- 23.24 It is the sense of this meeting, that the importing of negroes from their native country and relations by Friends, is not a commendable nor allowed practice, and is therefore censured by this meeting.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1727

- 23.25 *By 1772 the Yearly Meeting's concern had extended to the holding of slaves by anybody:*

It appears that the practice of holding negroes in oppressive and unnatural bondage hath been so successfully discouraged by Friends in some of the colonies as to be considerably lessened. We cannot but approve of these salutary endeavours, and earnestly intreat they may be continued, that, through the favour of Divine Providence, a traffic so unmerciful and unjust in its nature to a part of our own species made equally with ourselves for immortality may come to be considered by all in its proper light, and be utterly abolished, as a reproach to the Christian profession.

John Woolman was present at this Yearly Meeting. The experience which, sixteen years earlier, had led to his concern in this matter is described in 20.46

- 23.26 *Yearly Meeting 1822 accepted 'An address to the inhabitants of Europe on the Iniquities of the slave trade, issued by the Religious Society of Friends':*

The arguments of the Christian, like the religion from which they are derived, are plain and simple, but they are in themselves invincible. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a system of peace, of love, of mercy, and of good-will. The slave trade is a system of fraud and rapine, of violence and cruelty... That which is morally wrong cannot be politically right.

- 23.27 It has probably come as a shock to many Friends to learn that slavery still exists in many parts of the world, either in its usually understood form or as forced labour which is akin to slavery... The prime need, as a preliminary action, is the gathering together of accurate

23: Social responsibility

information on all aspects of this important problem... Though the powers of the British Government to deal with potential slavery or slave trading are now much more circumscribed, we would encourage any efforts they are able to make through international channels to bring to an end this deplorable traffic in the lives of members of the world family.

London Yearly Meeting, 1958

- 23.28 Quakers gradually led the way in the great reform which has now been largely achieved. A legal judgment of 1772 declared that if slaves arrived in England they became free. These pioneers against slavery were heretics, outside the normal confines of our great religious institutions, but what a debt we and the churches owe to these heretics who, nevertheless, liberated the spiritual wind which sent them forward to explore territories beyond the limited horizon of their age.

We are involved in an intense perpetual struggle within the mind of man. If wars begin in the mind of men, so does slavery. When I was in the Yemen some four or five years ago, before the present [1962-67] civil war began and before Egypt sent some 70,000 troops into that country, I talked at some length with the late Imam, the Crown Prince and others about the slavery I knew existed there, and I myself saw in the early morning the old women sweeping the streets and was told that they were slaves. I glanced up at the edifice at the top of the hill wherein there were scores of boys kept as hostages by the Imam. Again, a form of slavery.

When I was some years ago in Northern Nigeria I knew that those who could do so maintained harems, which surely is another form of slavery. When I read letters from time to time from a friend in South Africa who now finds every excuse for the permanent subjugation of black South Africans, I know that her mind is essentially still subscribing to slavery. When in South Carolina I talked to a Baptist deacon and he stated that all would be peaceful in his part of America were it not for 'darned agitators', I knew again that he was virtually, although a Christian, endorsing a form of slavery. Further, when we all remember the repression of human liberty in certain European states, then we know that the Anti-Slavery Society and its

Social justice

purpose, which is defined as the protection of human rights, has only partially fulfilled its mission...

[There] are indications of real advances. Let us take courage and inspiration from them, but let us also appreciate how much still has to be done.

Reginald Sorensen, 1966

- 23.29 In the 1970s children could still be found picking crops in pesticide-soaked fields of the USA, labouring on building sites in Mexico, in sweat-shops in the East End of London, being injured in factory accidents in Italy, making carpets in Turkey, assembling plastic toys in Hong Kong, labouring as unofficial sub-employees in Indian factories, and working in agriculture almost everywhere. Even the nineteenth-century chimney boy has his twentieth-century equivalent – boys employed on Saturdays to crawl through and clean factory air ducts...

The attitudes which have perpetuated child labour are likely to remain a fundamental problem; attitudes which treat particular groups, such as women and children, as subservient and expendable and which respond with violence even to non-violent movements towards reform... The all too frequent cruel exploitation of child labour is a scandal. It is doubly a scandal when it co-exists with massive adult unemployment. What is needed now is a concerted effort to launch a wide-ranging programme of reform.

James Challis, 1979

Torture

In 1961 Amnesty International was established on the initiative of a small group, which included a Quaker, Eric Baker, to take up the cause of prisoners of conscience: men and women imprisoned for their religious, political or other beliefs or opinions, who had not used or advocated the use of violence. It became increasingly evident that many such prisoners were being subjected to torture. In 1974, in Documents in advance and at Yearly Meeting, Eric Baker introduced a

23: Social responsibility

session on the subject, which was subsequently selected for special study at the Friends World Committee for Consultation Triennial meeting in 1976.

- 23.30 Can torture ever be justified? Once chattel slavery was considered an economic and social necessity; nevertheless it has now been abolished in most regions of the world. This has happened at least in part because of the revulsion which this offence to human dignity aroused. Should not torture arouse the same revulsion?

Torture is not just a sporadic occurrence in this country or that, but a moral contagion which has spread throughout the world, even to governments which have been proud of their record of civilised behaviour. Torture is not only systematic physical ill-treatment but may also involve the misuse of psychology and other sciences and technologies.

Is this evil one that will arouse us to action as our Society was once aroused by the evil of slavery?

London Yearly Meeting, 1974

- 23.31 It is a matter of grave anxiety that torture and secret imprisonment are being used by many governments, anti-government groups and others to extract information, to suppress criticism, and to intimidate opposition, so that throughout the world countless numbers of men, women and children are suffering inhuman treatment. We believe in the worth of every individual as a child of God, and that no circumstances whatsoever can justify practices intended to break bodies, minds and spirits.

Both tortured and torturer are victims of the evil from which no human being is immune. Friends, however, believe that the life and power of God are greater than evil, and in that life and power declare their opposition to all torture. The Society calls on all its members, as well as those of all religious and other organisations, to create a force of public opinion which will oblige those responsible to dismantle everywhere the administrative apparatus which permits or encourages torture, and to observe effectively those international agreements under which its use is strictly forbidden.

Discrimination and disadvantage

23.32 I have never lost the enjoyment of sitting in silence at the beginning of meeting, knowing that everything can happen, knowing the joy of utmost surprise; feeling that nothing is pre-ordained, nothing is set, all is open. The light can come from all sides. The joy of experiencing the Light in a completely different way than one has thought it would come is one of the greatest gifts that Friends' meeting for worship has brought me.

I believe that meeting for worship has brought the same awareness to all who have seen and understood the message that everyone is equal in the sight of God, that everybody has the capacity to be the vessel of God's word. There is nothing that age, experience and status can do to prejudice where and how the Light will appear. This awareness – the religious equality of each and every one – is central to Friends. Early Friends understood this and at the same time they fully accepted the inseparable unity of life, and spoke against the setting apart of the secular and the sacred. It was thus inevitable that religious equality would be translated into the equality of everyday social behaviour. Friends' testimony to plain speech and plain dress was both a testimony of religious equality and a testimony of the unacceptability of all other forms of inequality.

Ursula Franklin, 1979

23.33 Guided by the Light of God within us and recognising that of God in others, we can all learn to value our differences in age, sex, physique, race and culture. This enables mutual respect and self-respect to develop, and it becomes possible for everyone to love one another as God loves us. Throughout our lives, we see ourselves reflected in the facial expressions, verbal comments and body-language of others. We have a responsibility to protect each other's self-respect.

Because of their commitment to social concerns, some Quakers may find it inconceivable that they may lack understanding of issues

23: Social responsibility

involving racism. Jesus stressed the unique nature and worth of each individual. It is unreasonable to expect assimilation or to ignore difference, claiming to treat everyone the same. This denies the value of variety, which presents not a problem, but a creative challenge to live adventurously.

Personality, sex, race, culture and experience are God's gifts. We need one another and differences shared become enrichments, not reasons to be afraid, to dominate or condemn. The media have increased our knowledge of the world, but we need greater self-awareness if our actions are to be changed in relation to the information we receive. We need to consider our behaviour carefully, heeding the command of Jesus that we should love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Meg Maslin, 1990

23.34 *Testimony concerning Dorothy Case (1901-1978):*

In the mid-50s, West Indians started coming to this country in great numbers, and Dorothy had more and more of their small children in her nursery. With two Friends from Streatham Meeting, Dorothy joined a Racial Brotherhood Association started by the Mayor of Lambeth and a West Indian Brixton resident. The Association could not find premises suitable for a community centre, largely because of colour prejudice, and, when the Mayor left the district, the once flourishing association nearly collapsed. But largely through the determination of Dorothy and the two Streatham Friends, it was revived, Dorothy agreeing to become secretary. To find premises was always the problem and in 1958 Dorothy wrote: 'Last year I felt that if we *didn't* function somehow, we'd had it, and as I'm keen on cricket, I booked a pitch on the Common and collected a few of the West Indian fathers of babies at my nursery, and their friends. It surpassed all our expectations and we had a wonderful season.' When winter came, although they only had two small basement rooms, they functioned as best they could as a true community centre. At this time Dorothy had helpful contacts with the International Centre and with Friends Race Relations Committee of which she was a member from 1964-1974, sharing her particular concerns for the West Indian community in Lambeth with it and, as race relations correspondent,

Social justice

with her meeting. A former member of Westminster Meeting recalls that Dorothy was a source of inspiration to her West Indian neighbours, standing by them in difficult situations, and offering them encouragement at all times.

Purley & Sutton Monthly Meeting, 1978

- 23.35 This year's Junior Yearly Meeting has made us hope that the concentrated love we have experienced could be spread over the world; but it has also alerted us to the harsh realities of racism.

We recognise that racism is more complex than simply black and white – it is part of a wider problem of prejudice involving sexism and religious bigotry. In this context, we were particularly alerted to the situation in Northern Ireland which, like racism, exhibits institutional and [personal] prejudice.

We urge Friends throughout the world to examine their responsibilities in this light.

Epistle from Junior Yearly Meeting, 1988

- 23.36 At the centre of Friends' religious experience is the repeatedly and consistently expressed belief in the fundamental equality of all members of the human race. Our common humanity transcends our differences. Friends have worked individually and corporately to give expression to this belief. We aspire not to say or do anything or condone any statements or actions which imply lack of respect for the humanity of any person. We try to free ourselves from assumptions of superiority and from racial prejudice.

We must constantly ask ourselves whether we are living up to these ideals, not only in international relations but also in our individual and corporate relationships within Britain – which has become and will remain multiracial and multicultural. To liberate ourselves from pervasive attitudes and practices of our time and social environment requires new perceptions and hard work.

There is incontrovertible evidence that people who belong to ethnic minority groups, especially those who are readily identifiable by their

23: Social responsibility

appearance, are subject to a variety of disadvantages. They face more obstacles than others, first, in gaining education commensurate with their abilities, and then in securing employment which reflects their qualifications. They are less likely to be promoted, and often earn less than others with similar abilities. As a result of legislation passed by both Labour and Conservative governments which restricts the right to live and work in Britain, people from ethnic minorities may be asked to justify their claim to equal rights by anyone in authority at any time. In addition to discrimination, intended or unintended, by employers and by the law, our fellow-citizens are often subjected to abuse, harassment and violence.

The Religious Society of Friends has a duty to play its part in ending these abuses. Being aware of injustice and doing little about it condones that injustice. Friends kept slaves until John Woolman persuaded them that it was wrong to do so. Should we not ask ourselves if we are in a parallel situation today?

Discrimination also takes more subtle forms. It may occur, and feelings may be hurt, by unthinking assumptions and lack of sensitivity. Being a Friend does not confer automatic protection against this, either as giver or receiver. In our dealings with members of minority groups in our daily lives and also within the Religious Society of Friends we may sometimes be less thoughtful and sensitive than we should be.

Meeting for Sufferings' Statement of Intent on Racism, 1988

The use of language in the passage above gives the mistaken impression that in 1988 all Friends in Britain were white. By 1994 we were aware that such usage was exclusive and were committed to inclusive expression, based on respect and celebration of diversity among Friends in Britain.

- 23.37 Having a severe disability in my experience meant almost total isolation from my peers during my teens and early twenties. I could not talk with them or go out with them and this had a drastic effect on my confidence and self-respect. I suffered agonies of repressed sexual longing.

Social justice

I was lucky. I had the means to recover unavailable to great numbers of young disabled people. As I found vehicles I could drive my contacts widened and I could exercise my freedom, responsibility and keen intelligence but it took long years of learning to catch up on normal life...

In some circles it is quite impossible for me to get an honest opinion about what I think and do. Any trivial achievement is regarded with awe and anything approaching normality is quite inconceivable. If I committed some frightful social blunder, they would nod their heads and make irrelevant excuses for me.

Enough of such things. You soon 'forget' them; but deep within you burns a clear impression of profound inferiority; of unacceptability; of a need to apologise for even being the miserable wretch that you are and for needing that minimum of help you dare to require. When all this is added to a very real and terrifying social immaturity, where can you begin to hope? ...

Many people, much less disabled than me, accept the role society imposes, hating themselves and their handicaps, hating to ask for help, hating friendly curiosity and concern, hating to admit to what they feel they are.

All this is a terrible indictment of society but it is not an indictment of the individual. Each of them, including myself, is only echoing the fear and hurt about disability and about their own minds and bodies that they received when they were young. Young children, left alone, will look, enquire, accept, and sometimes even care, without prompting.

Everyone must learn to be glad of what they really are and must feel able to ask for the necessary help to fulfil themselves. We are all in this together, handicapped or not. We all need help to be ourselves.

Jonathan Griffith, 1981

- 23.38 *Carol Gardiner has lived with multiple sclerosis for many years. In 1989 she wrote about her realisation that she did not have enough reserves of spiritual and*

23: Social responsibility

physical energy at that time to go to a residential Yearly Meeting, and so it was not accessible to her.

Our Religious Society includes a considerable number of people who to some degree live with disabilities, and we generally present quite a good record of considering their needs and attempting to cater for them – a consideration born of our conviction that there is ‘that of God’ in every person. But we should ask ourselves continually if this consideration is being maintained and whether it goes far enough. If we really mean that there is that of God in everyone, then it behoves us to look with creative, loving imagination at the condition of every human being. This includes listening to what they say, and the words they choose to say it, and also listening for what they do not or cannot say. It does not mean listening to what someone else says supposedly on their behalf.

- 23.39 Too long have wrongs and oppression existed without an acknowledged wrongdoer and oppressor. It was not until the slave holder was told ‘*Thou* art the man’ that a healthy agitation was brought about. Woman is told the fault is in herself, in too willingly submitting to her inferior condition, but like the slave, she is pressed down by laws in the making of which she has no voice, and crushed by customs which have grown out of such laws. She cannot rise therefore, while thus trampled in the dust. The oppressor does not see himself in that light until the oppressed cry for deliverance.

Lucretia Mott, 1852

- 23.40 We have been reminded vividly that women live under cultural, political, and economic oppression. All humanity is lessened by it; we are unwilling to tolerate its perpetuation, and must continue to work for justice and peace in the world...

We hope that we will act as leaven in our local meetings, churches, and yearly meetings, so that Quaker women everywhere will be encouraged by our new understanding. As we grow in solidarity with one another, enriched by how we express our faith, we will all be enabled to surmount the cultural economic and political barriers that prevent us from discerning and following the ways in which God leads us. We honour the lives of our Quaker foremothers as patterns

Social justice

which help us recognise our own leadings. Their commitment, dedication, and courage remain as worthy standards. May our lives be used as theirs were to give leadership to women everywhere to be vehicles of the love of God. We share a deep love for all creation, and cry with the pain of its desecration. We must realise we are part of the natural world and examine our lives in order to change those attitudes which lead to domination and exploitation.

Friends, we are called into wholeness and into community, women and men alike, sharing the responsibilities God has given us, and assuming the leadership we are called to. We begin where we are, in our homes and meetings or churches, our work and communities, celebrating the realisation of the New Creation.

Epistle of the First International Theological Conference of Quaker Women, 1990

- 23.41 The oppression of the working-classes by existing monopolies, and the lowness of wages, often engaged my attention; and I have held many meetings with them, and heard their appeals with compassion, and a great desire for a radical change in the system which makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. The various associations and communities tending to greater equality of condition have had from me a hearty God-speed. But the millions of down-trodden slaves in our land being the greatest sufferers, the most oppressed class, I have felt bound to plead their cause, in season and out of season, to endeavor to put my soul in their souls' stead, and to aid, all in my power, in every right effort for their immediate emancipation. This duty was impressed upon me at the time I consecrated myself to that gospel which anoints 'to preach deliverance to the captive', 'to set at liberty them that are bruised.' From that time the duty of abstinence so far as practicable from slave-grown products was so clear, that I resolved to make the effort 'to provide things honest' in this respect. Since then our family has been supplied with free-labor groceries and, to some extent, with cotton goods untainted by slavery.

In 1840, a World's Anti-slavery Convention was called in London. Women from Boston, New York and Philadelphia were delegates to that convention. I was one of the number; but, on our arrival in England, our credentials were not accepted because we were women.

23: Social responsibility

We were, however, treated with great courtesy and attention, as strangers, and as women, were admitted to chosen seats as spectators and listeners, while our right of membership was denied – we were voted out. This brought the Woman question more into view, and an increase of interest in the subject has been the result. In this work, too, I have engaged heart and hand, as my labors, travels, and public discourses evince. The misrepresentation, ridicule, and abuse heaped upon this as well as other reforms do not, in the least, deter me from my duty. To those whose name is cast out as evil for the truth's sake, it is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment.

Lucretia Mott

- 23.42 I am still concerned that there are not many women exercising leadership in government, industry and education... However, this is not a straightforward issue for me. I want to see women fully represented at all levels of society, and yet I share the misgivings that many feminists have for the hierarchical way in which leadership is traditionally exercised.

The Society of Friends seems a good place to explore this dilemma since it has, since the early days, attempted a more truly democratic and participative way of working than has been customary in society at large. This was one of the factors that first attracted me to Friends, as it seems to be an expression of the recognition that we are all equal in our shared humanity. Sexism does violence to this important insight, as it does to individuals of either sex who are seeking to find themselves and express themselves in the world...

I am not saying that the oppressive effects of sexism are never felt within the Society of Friends, for we are all members of the wider society and affected by its attitudes. There are Friends who think that catering should be the preserve of women and that matters of finance are best understood by men. There have been times within Friends' circles when I have felt hurt by these attitudes, as I have no doubt unwittingly wounded others. But I have found the Society's commitment to truth an encouragement and challenge to my own strivings for integrity, and I give thanks for that.

Pauline Leader, 1986

Social justice

- 23.43 As male and female are made one in Jesus Christ, so women receive an office in the Truth as well as men, and they have a stewardship and must give an account of their stewardship as well as the men...

Elizabeth Bathurst, 1685

- 23.44 The language in which we express what we ... say is of vital importance; it both shapes and reflects our values. One result of the emphasis on plain speech by early Friends was to challenge the class hierarchy of the day. The emphasis on non-sexist language by present-day feminists is likewise a challenge to hierarchy, in this case the sex hierarchy, which women have brought into the Light by naming it – patriarchy... Our Quaker tradition enables us to recognise that our choice of language, and our reaction to the choice that others make, reveals values which may otherwise stay hidden.

Having in mind that much Christian teaching and language has been used to subordinate women to men, bear witness to our experience that we are all one in the Spirit and value the special characteristics of each individual. Remember that the Spirit of God includes and transcends our ideas of male and female, and that we should reflect this insight in our lives and through our ministry.

Are you working, in all aspects of your life, towards a better understanding of the need for a different balance between the sexes in their contribution to our society? Do you recognise the limitations which are placed on women and men by assigning roles to them according to gender, and do you attempt to respond instead to the needs and capacities of the individual? Do you recognise and encourage the many ways in which human love may be expressed?

Quaker Women's Group, 1982; 1986

- 23.45 All of us [Young Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns] have suffered discrimination or isolation because of our sexuality. We are all both angry and sad about the discrimination we face in everyday life, whether it consists of being unable to talk to work colleagues about a partner, or having to hide our sexuality in order to keep a job. The consequences of such necessary dishonesty can be very destructive both personally and for society.

23: Social responsibility

Tessa Fairweather, 1993

23.46 I have been greatly exercised for some time by the image we like to present of ourselves (albeit with beating of breasts) as a white, middle-class, well-educated group of heterosexual people, preferably in stable marriages with children that behave in socially acceptable ways. I do feel that this is a myth. The danger of such myths is that we exclude many potential Quakers who feel they cannot/do not live up to the image or who feel that such a group is not one with which they wish to be associated. Sadly, many of us within the Society who do not fit in feel marginalised and second-class.

Another effect is that many problems faced by a large proportion of people are seen as separate: people who are poor, facing oppression, living in poor housing, experiencing prejudice are the 'others'. This enables us to be very caring but distant (and sometimes patronising) and also makes it difficult to be conscious of prejudice behind some of the normally accepted assumptions of our society/Society, such as that people who are unemployed are a different group from those who have employment; that poor people are poor ... because they are not as bright or as able as the rest of us or because their limited homes did not give them the opportunities that a good Quaker home would have done; that children living in single-parent families are automatically deprived by that very fact.

Until we as a Religious Society begin to question our assumptions, until we look at the prejudices, often very deeply hidden, within our own Society, how are we going to be able to confront the inequalities within the wider society? We are very good at feeling bad about injustice, we put a lot of energy into sticking-plaster activity (which obviously has to be done), but we are not having any effect in challenging the causes of inequality and oppression. I do sometimes wonder if this is because we are not able to do this within and among ourselves.

Susan Rooke-Matthews, 1993

See also 10.13, 23.2, & 29.15

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COMMUNITY

23.47 Compassion, to be effective, requires detailed knowledge and understanding of how society works. Any social system in turn requires men and women in it of imagination and goodwill. What would be fatal would be for those with exceptional human insight and concern to concentrate on ministering to individuals, whilst those accepting responsibility for the design and management of organisations were left to become technocrats. What is important is that institutions and their administration be constantly tested against human values, and that those who are concerned about these values be prepared to grapple with the complex realities of modern society as it is.

Grigor McClelland, 1976

23.48 God comes to us in the midst of human need, and the most pressing needs of our time demand community in response. How can I participate in a fairer distribution of resources unless I live in a community which makes it possible to consume less? How can I learn accountability unless I live in a community where my acts and their consequences are visible to all? How can I learn to share power unless I live in a community where hierarchy is unnatural? How can I take the risks which right action demands unless I belong to a community which gives support? How can I learn the sanctity of each life unless I live in a community where we can be persons not roles to one another?

Parker J Palmer, 1977

23.49 Many of us live in the more prosperous areas of large cities, or within commuting distance of them. The accumulated decisions we make, together with the accumulated decisions of all our neighbours, help to determine what life is like for the people who live in the inner areas of those cities, and in the large isolated housing estates on their edges. Decisions about where to live, what forms of transport to use, where to spend money, where to send children to school, where to

23: Social responsibility

work, whom to employ, where to obtain health services, what to condone, what to protest about, business decisions, personal decisions, political decisions – all these have an effect. Our first and greatest responsibility is to make those decisions in the knowledge of their effect on others.

Nationally we have to face up to the fact that deprived areas are distinguished as much by personal as by collective poverty, and that the only way to tackle personal poverty is to let people have more money. More money for some inevitably means less for others. Are we willing to press for this?

Martin Wyatt, 1986

- 23.50 How can the people of Ordsall, where I work, become our neighbours, our sisters and our brothers, especially when we do not know them personally? It is only through prayer and political action that we can affirm our love and demonstrate in the flesh that we do see that of God within them...

We have a variety of strategies for passing by on the other side: we manage not to know about such things, by living elsewhere and averting our eyes and hearts from information which might trouble us; some of us imagine that Biblical morality only enjoins us to direct personal charity towards those we encounter, having nothing to do with justice, with political action to change unjust structures. (A strange love this, which would shelter a Jew but ignore the struggle to prevent the rise of Nazism.) More often we claim that whilst in principle love does also require us to work for the removal of the causes of injustice, such work is in practice so complex that Friends cannot become involved corporately; it should be left to Friends individually as they think fit...

Complexity, however, may depend on whether we are the well-fed or the hungry. Our delicate refusal to dirty our hands in political turmoil may itself be another way of passing by on the other side. Change seems most complicated and controversial to those who do not personally need it. Would we be so delicate if we were Black South Africans? But surely, you may say, we don't face such fundamental injustices.

Friends and state authority

No, we don't. And yet – come and meet the people in Ordsall with me. You will sense inequality tangibly; you will become aware of the huge range of opportunities which you have and they do not; you will understand the struggle to make ends meet, the problems of debt, ill-health, premature ageing and death, and the hopelessness which is the experience of many. The answers may not be simple: the bureaucratic welfare state did also create some of the problems. But to see the unbridled pursuit of individual self-interest as a solution is grotesque as well as immoral.

Jonathan Dale, 1987

23.51 *Testimony concerning Stephen Henry Hobbouse (1881-1961):*

He soon ceased to attend church services and resigned from the University Rifle Corps on pacifist grounds. He also resolved never to accept the position in the world to which he was the heir, that of a wealthy landowner and country squire...

Although from childhood far from strong in health, Stephen Hobbouse was again and again led to take a difficult course required of him by his conviction of divine leading, whatever the cost to himself... Disturbed by the contrast between the luxurious comfort which he sometimes experienced in visiting the homes of wealthy Friends, and the hard lives of ordinary working people in those days (fifty years ago) he took a small flat in a block of workers' dwellings in a poor part of London because he felt that his discipleship of Jesus called him to share their life as much as he could, and also to open the eyes of his comfortable friends to the way in which the great majority of people had to live.

Hertford & Hitchin Monthly Meeting, 1961

See also 18.13 (concerning Mary Hughes) & 24.52 (concerning Douglas Smith)

23.52 I think I have wasted a great deal of my life waiting to be called to some great mission which would change the world. I have looked for important social movements. I have wanted to make a big and important contribution to the causes I believe in. I think I have been too ready to reject the genuine leadings I have been given as being

23: Social responsibility

matters of little consequence. It has taken me a long time to learn that obedience means doing what we are called to do even if it seems pointless or unimportant or even silly. The great social movements of our time may well be part of our calling. The ideals of peace and justice and equality which are part of our religious tradition are often the focus of debate. But we cannot simply immerse ourselves in these activities. We need to develop our own unique social witness, in obedience to God. We need to listen to the gentle whispers which will tell us how we can bring our lives into greater harmony with heaven.

Deborah Haines, 1978

Work and economic affairs

- 23.53 It was once possible to argue that economic affairs might, like total abstinence, slavery or spiritual healing, be a field of particular interest to groups of Friends. We can now see that the economic order is not a peripheral concern, but central to the whole relationship between faith and practice. This is not a claim that, say, the interest in peace and international relations ought now to take a secondary place in our thoughts and prayers. Still less is it a demand that the Society should cease to be first and foremost a religious body, or to say that it should in any way neglect its spiritual foundations in favour of more good citizenship. It is rather that economic affairs are now so central to our whole existence that no other aspect of personal relationships or individual life-styles can now be looked at without first understanding what it means in terms of our national wealth, incomes, and their distribution.

David Eversley, 1976

See also 24.50-24.52

- 23.54 Part of understanding life and one's place in life is to form a 'right' relationship with things. The philosophy of the industrial revolution is to 'direct the forces of nature for the use of man' (following the words of the charter given to the engineering profession in 1821). Now, to seek mastery is not to gain a 'right' relationship. The latter

Friends and state authority

requires sensitivity and yields wisdom along with an adequacy of power. The search for mastery alone yields a power that corrupts faster than it is mastered.

Jim Platts, 1976

- 23.55 When I was a teenager and beginning to think about a career, my father advised me to choose between working with people and working with things, and I sensed an implied judgment that working with people was more worthy.

In the event, the decision was made for me when I married a self-employed engineer with no interest in the record-keeping side of his business. We now work very happily together from home, designing and supplying special purpose machinery to the brush industry. We deliberately keep our business small and more or less manageable. We are not interested in the financial dealings, stocks and shares, investments and take-overs which the press seems to regard as the essence of business.

I see the basis of industry as being a global network of barter, a mutual dependency, a contract of trust for the supply of the necessities and luxuries of life. The opportunities of industry are as large as the needs of the world's people. Every object we use has to be designed, manufactured and sold by someone. It is an honourable occupation to apply one's talents to the marketplace. One person's need becomes another's opportunity, his livelihood, his dignity. 'Working with things' is not devoid of scope for a spiritual attitude...

Perhaps a function of industry is to reflect that of God that is creation and glory. We can be creative in our small way in God's image; we can work in partnership with God, combining natural and human resources; we can extract order from chaos.

Rachel Jackson, 1990

- 23.56 Employers today, more and more, are demanding total commitment from their employees, often to the detriment of the employees' health and ability to participate in family and community life. People are facing decisions about giving all their energy to their company

23: Social responsibility

and having nothing left for themselves or anyone else. Some have the courage to opt for a more balanced approach to life and work, where paid employment has an important place, but also allowing sufficient leisure time to be an active parent, to enrich family and community relationships and replenish their own spiritual reserves. I hope that meetings will support those who make such decisions and help them in any adjustments to their life that they have to make.

Jane Stokes, 1992

- 23.57 *In the aftermath of the Second World War, Quakers began experimenting with democratic forms of economic enterprise. The best known case is probably Scott Bader, a synthetic resin and polymer manufacturing company in Wollaston, Northamptonshire. The original company was founded in 1920 and organised along orthodox lines of corporate authority by Ernest Bader, who joined the Society of Friends in 1943. During the 1940s he and his family decided to re-organise his firm upon stewardship principles. In 1951 he and his co-founders gave 90% of their shares to the Scott Bader Commonwealth, a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, inviting employees to become members; in 1963 they gave the remaining 10% of their shares to the Commonwealth.*

Power should come from within the person and the community, and be made responsible to those it affects. The ultimate criteria in the organisation of work should be human dignity and service to others instead of solely economic performance. We feel mutual responsibility must permeate the whole community of work and be upheld by democratic participation and the principle of trusteeship.

Common-ownership of our means of production, and a voice in the distribution of earned surplus and the allocation of new capital, has helped in our struggle towards achieving these aims.

The Commonwealth has responsibilities to the wider national and international community and is endeavouring to fulfil them by fostering a movement towards a new peaceful industrial and social order. To be a genuine alternative to welfare capitalism and state-controlled communism, such an order must be non-violent in the sense of promoting love and justice, for where love stops, power begins and intimidation and violence follow. One of the main requirements of a peaceful social order is, we are convinced, an

Friends and state authority

organisation of work based on the principles outlined here, a sharing of the fruits of our labours with those less fortunate instead of working only for our own private security, and a refusal to support destructive social conflict or to take part in preparations for war.

Scott Bader Corporate Constitution, 1963

23.58 *Testimony concerning Arthur Basil Reynolds (1903-1960):*

Arthur Basil Reynolds ... had that strong sense of the indwelling spirit of God which perforce claimed kinship with everything good and of enduring value in other men and in the world at large. He worked for the continuity of the good life; and to preserve what was good from the past, to hold fast and perpetuate what was good in the present and to work for the hope of good in the future. He was a man of creative imagination, a craftsman with vision and courage who delighted in the work of his hands and was able to inspire others with the same spirit. He had the seeing eye and the unerring hand to translate the vision into actuality. As he walked the countryside a twig in the hedge would suggest a shape of grace and gaiety and his penknife would speedily produce a dancing figure of elfish beauty. All that he touched witnessed to this creative power.

His training as a cabinet-maker was put to use in the workshops at Brynmawr during the unemployment and distress of the depression, when he worked with Friends and others to provide employment and thus to bring renewed hope and self-respect to the mining community. He became manager of the Brynmawr Furniture Makers, an undertaking that successfully produced worthy and beautiful furniture.

Hereford & Radnor Monthly Meeting, 1961

23.59 *Testimony concerning Percy Cleave (1880-1958):*

By occupation he was a barber, and on moving into this district in 1937 from Swindon, he first took a shop in Wallington, and later one in a poor part of Croydon. Not all who went there did so for a shave or a haircut, but to enjoy its friendly atmosphere, and to talk to Percy. 'I am sure,' said a friend of his, 'that as Percy rubbed oil into a

23: Social responsibility

customer's hair, he blessed him.' This would have been natural, since he desired all his actions to be sacramental. He was very positive in his relationships with others, and took a lively interest in all their doings... He was a man whom adversity had refined. It was often surprising when talking to him, to hear of the multitudes of troubles he and his wife had borne. He had accepted the changes and chances of this life, but had not forgotten them, and so could sympathise with those who were still struggling. He had great insight, and was able to see to the heart of a problem. Since he was in a small way of business which barely brought in sufficient money, he had a hard time which persisted until his retirement, when he sought so to arrange his life, that others could speak to him at leisure and without hurry. It was then that he ministered to some families of Friends by going to their homes and cutting their hair. It was pleasant to see him starting on the littlest ones and proceed in order to the adults. To have Percy cut your hair was a grace.

Kingston Monthly Meeting, 1958

23.60 Testimony concerning Joan Frances Layton (1908-1990):

Her early education was unconventional and irregular. Nevertheless, she obtained a place at Bedford College, where she read English, French, Latin and Spanish. These stood her in good stead when she started work as a secretary in Covent Garden market. She then obtained a post in the City but, unable to reconcile her work there with her beliefs, she returned to the market amongst 'real people' whose admiration and respect she won, and remained with them for the rest of her working life.

Southampton & Portsmouth Monthly Meeting, 1990

- 23.61 It remains to speak of the Way of Service, as it concerns the conduct of our ordinary work and business. Nowhere is the practical working of our faith put to a severer test, yet nowhere is there a nobler and more fruitful witness to be borne. Business in its essence is no mere selfish struggle for the necessities and luxuries of life, but 'a vast and complex movement of social service'. However some may abuse its methods for private ends, its true function is not to rob the community but to serve it. But, in the fierce competition which is so

Friends and state authority

marked a feature of the present day, it has become very difficult, some would say impossible, for those engaged in business to be wholly faithful to Christ. Christianity is challenged in the shop and in the office.

We have been touched with keen sympathy for our friends, whether employers or employed, who find themselves in this strait. We cannot here deal fully with this question, but we are sure there is an answer to the challenge, and that the light which shines upon the Way of Life, and gives us the distinction of things inwardly, will guide us to the answer...

Christianity is tested, not only in the shop and in the office, but also in the home. In the standard of living adopted by the home-makers, in the portion of income devoted to comforts, recreations and luxuries, in willingness to be content with simplicity, the members of a household, both older and younger, may bear witness that there is a Way of Life that does not depend on the abundance of the things possessed.

London Yearly Meeting, 1911

- 23.62 The attempt to identify and apply Christian values in practice is a struggle laid upon each generation. As new knowledge, new methods, new technologies arise, so is the condition for the operation of conscience altered and advanced.

To list the attributes of Christian quality would be to repeat much of the Sermon on the Mount. They can be summed up as personal integrity combined with compassion. Such quality can shine out in the work situation as in the social and religious life... It is characterised by the refusal to put up with the second best; a capacity to take infinite pains with other people; especially is it shown in the constant effort to seek higher standards beyond the traditional practices or those provided for in regulations.

Edward W Fox, 1969

- 23.63 One of the aspects of parenthood which I enjoy most is putting my mind to trying to solve all sorts of problems. I get a big thrill out of

23: Social responsibility

designing gadgets which will make life a little more comfortable. I love to get to work on a thoroughly neglected garden or room and put it right again. I find great satisfaction in being consulted about other people's problems and helping to sort them out. I have come to the conclusion, therefore, that this is the area in which I shall both find my main direction and satisfy my needs to be creative, practical and supportive. If, rather than concentrating on one particular job or career, I apply myself to tackling the many problems that come my way, I am sure that my life will be more than adequately filled with work that I 'most need to do and the world most needs to have done'. Thus I shall have found my vocation or mission. It will not mean that all the problems will get solved, of course, or that those which do will be solved satisfactorily every time, but I am sure that it will mean that my relationships with other people will improve and that both the giving and the taking of love will come easier to me.

Helen Edwards, 1992

- 23.64 There is much work to be done which is not paid, but which is vital, desperately undervalued and undertaken to a large extent by women. I refer, of course, to caring for children and/or elderly disabled relatives and homemaking. The work itself is often hard, stressful, mundane and repetitive, unseen and unacknowledged, with low status. We need a transformation of our attitudes to this work, giving it all the esteem it deserves. Experience of running a household teaches innumerable management skills, but these skills are often not perceived by employers as useful to them. Self-image is extremely poor in this group, not because they do not make a contribution but because their contribution is not appreciated.

Another reason for the low self-image of this group is one of the primary indicators of status in our society – income. Caring for a family is unpaid and therefore low status... We must value the work done by carers in a domestic situation because it is essential to the wellbeing of individuals and the community; bringing up the next generation should never be undervalued...

Related to the unpaid caring work carried out in many families is the voluntary work on which our communities depend which is, by

Friends and state authority

definition, unpaid. Without volunteers many of the statutory services would be overwhelmed...

Voluntary work gives the sense of being able to give something – whether in time, money or expertise – and that is precious to the person doing the giving. The feeling of having contributed, the satisfaction of a job lovingly done, is the reward. We should not regard voluntary work as of less value because it is unpaid and the rewards intangible, nor should we exploit the goodwill of volunteers...

Whichever sphere of activity we are involved in, we have to be responsive to the Spirit's leadings and try to put into practice our deepest beliefs, for our faith is a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week faith, which is not excluded from our workplace, wherever that may be. Everything in the end can be distilled to relationships – our relationships with each other and the earth. Our work must benefit our relationships rather than damage them, and we must ensure that neither the earth nor other people are exploited. Caring, not exploitation, is the key.

Jane Stokes, 1992

- 23.65 Large numbers of people desperately need not only the honest, just and sympathetic administration of material assistance, but counselling and caring from skilled but warm persons, who for the most part can only be provided through an institutional framework, whether statutory or voluntary. But social workers themselves often face an uphill struggle, working with people on whom society has imposed burdens which for one reason or another they have found too heavy for them. These burdens may be lifted or lightened by the social worker, but they might never have been imposed in the first place if we had better and wiser architects and town planners, legislators and civil servants, broadcasters and advertising people, personnel managers and supervisors, economists and sociologists.

Grigor McClelland, 1976

- 23.66 For some it is right to give their whole lives explicitly to concrete forms of service, but for most their service will lie 'in the sheer

23: Social responsibility

quality of the soul displayed in ordinary occupations'. Such ordinary occupations are sometimes an essential contribution to the liberation of another person for wider service, and in any case, the inspiration of a dedicated life lived in simple surroundings, though often untraceable, may be profound in its reach.

Gerald Littleboy, 1945

- 23.67 We can neither deny nor ignore the fact that our self-respect and our sense of being useful are closely bound up with the ability to hold down a job. Unemployment not only results in a lowering of living standards, it also induces a feeling of insecurity, of being unwanted, that we no longer have a place in the community. The fear of unemployment causes more unhappiness and does more to lower self-confidence than any other element in life. The sense of security, so necessary to inner well-being, will never be sustained by a welfare system or any society which ignores these facts. Any percentage rate of unemployment can never be other than an index of human misery and desperate uncertainty; this applies not only to the unemployed persons but to their dependants also. Thus any economic system which possesses an inbuilt tendency to reduce human involvement in its day-to-day engagements is both unnatural and unkind.

George Clarke, 1973

- 23.68 The poor without employment are like rough diamonds, their worth is unknown.

John Bellers, 1714

- 23.69 Unemployment is in truth an astonishing evil and calm acquiescence therein is discreditable... The stoic endurance of privation in times of shortage is noble, but poverty caused by enforced idleness, and in the presence of plenty, is so glaring an injustice that no man should accept it tamely.

Shipley N Brayshaw, 1933

Friends and state authority

- 23.70 We are in a new situation which demands new thinking. Advanced technology is producing techniques which will affect every field of human activity and can displace many people who at present have little opportunity of alternative work. We need to be far more ambitious and resourceful in our thinking. Technology alleviates the repetitive and mundane nature of many people's jobs. We need to approach the situation positively as an opportunity to promote new business and industrial ventures, to back initiatives from workers and trade unions, exploring alternative uses of the intricate technology of armaments to find ways of promoting service jobs related to inner-city renewal, or to help with unmet social needs. The solution of our energy problems may also serve to provide new opportunities for employment. We must look for revolutionary approaches which can promote the sharing of the gains and benefits of new technology and a far greater awareness of the need to accept the concept of equity.

We have been asked to see those in the midst of our community who are suffering from unemployment as well as to look for new solutions. John Bellers reminded Friends that God would not send his angels to solve our problems; it is we who must seek the solutions with God's guidance, and we who must do the job.

London Yearly Meeting, 1978

Education

- 23.71 Then I came to Waltham and established a school there for the teaching of boys, and ordered a women's school to be set up at Shacklewell to instruct young lasses and maidens in whatsoever things were civil and useful in the creation.

George Fox, 1668

- 23.72 This meeting do desire that, where Friends can, they would get such schools and schoolmasters for their children, as may bring them up in the fear of the Lord and love of his truth, that so they may not only learn to be scholars, but Christians also; and that all parents will take the same care at home that such reproof, instructions, counsel, and example may be constantly continued in their respective families,

23: Social responsibility

that so from the oldest to the youngest, Truth may show itself in its beauty and comeliness to God's glory and all his people's comfort.

Bristol Yearly Meeting, 1695

- 23.73 Our experience [is] that God speaks to and works through children as well as adults. Religious education needs to respect, affirm and value children's insights.

The Quaker understanding of Christianity includes:

The experience that it is possible to have both a strong faith commitment and an open mind, to take other positions seriously without trivialising them, and to value the people who differ from ourselves.

The belief that the same God known through Christianity is also present in other faiths. The study of other faith positions is therefore important, not only for its own sake, but as a contribution towards humility before the mystery of truth.

The experience that valuable worship can be held in a multifaith context, especially when silence is the basis for prayer. We would assert that school worship which shows respect for other faith positions by presenting them with accuracy and sympathy is, by our definition, Christian.

The belief in the equality of all human beings of whatever sex, race, class or age. This is firmly grounded in God's love for each individual, rather than in social fashion. This requires policies, not of equal opportunities (which redistribute inequality) but of equality, and implies that schools be reorganised for co-operation rather than competition, and for affirming people in their successes rather than their failures.

Janet Scott, 1988

- 23.74 The Quaker emphasis in education probably lies in non-violence, in participation, and in caring. Not only to run the school without

Friends and state authority

violence, but to produce young people who will feel a concern to reduce the level of violence in the world. Not to impose the aims of the school on the pupils, but to lead them to their own acceptance of these aims, to a share (however small) in its running, and a pleasure in its successes. To find that of God in every pupil.

‘This is the true ground of love and unity,’ wrote Isaac Penington in 1659, ‘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.’ This marvellous statement by an early Friend of the value of individualism surely commands our assent today. The school which respects every pupil as an individual will try to teach each one what he (or she) needs to learn, to draw out his unique talents, to understand his proper way, whether he is studying or misbehaving. ‘This is far more pleasing to me,’ Penington continues, ‘than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk.’

Quakers and their schools, 1980

23.75 To confirm the deepest thing in our students is the educator’s special privilege. It demands that we see in the failures of adolescence and its many confusions, the possibility of something untangled, clear, directed. It asks us to sustain that faith through a multiplicity of discouraging experiences and indeed to find within those experiences the grounds for hope. It requires us to love freely, readily, unconditionally but truly – without relaxing our standards or compromising ourselves – because to do that would be to disappoint and disillusion – a sure means of stunting the student’s growth. Above all, we must water the ground of the student’s being with faith in that deepest self – to do so constantly, tirelessly, patiently – and to love enough to know what one should demand from the student in response and how and when to ask it.

Barbara Windle, 1988

23.76 The capacity to listen is something which is greatly needed and is an important part of our education, something which has to be worked at constantly. We so easily fall into a pattern of imagining we know what someone else is going to say to us. Sometimes this is the case, but more often than not we have made up our mind, and received a

23: Social responsibility

message which may be completely erroneous and precludes a true understanding. We must have all experienced the circumstances in which a child tries to make himself understood and in which we have prejudged what is his meaning. In that case we never meet. There is one occasion which stands out very clearly in my life when a youngster kept coming up to me and I answered what I thought the question was going to be; at the end of a week she stood resolutely between me and the door clutching a piece of paper asking if she could discontinue my lessons. All that time I had been answering an unasked question and missing the point of contact. This is something which most of us do all too often in one way or another: we have a duty to try to help each other to communicate. We must endeavour to meet each other's minds and we must attempt to achieve not only sympathy but empathy.

D June Ellis, 1981

- 23.77 To 'know oneself' as a teacher implies acknowledging one's weaknesses, source of prejudices and tendencies to stereotype. It involves accepting one's effect on pupils and their parents. Diagnosing a child's learning needs involves risking being wrong. We can only see clearly and risk being wrong when we have a high level of self-esteem and when we love ourselves enough to be open.

To acknowledge those aspects in ourselves and our own practice which hinder an understanding of the learner's needs is difficult. Yet when we can do this, we are given the strength to respond lovingly to others, recognising that of God in everyone, which for Quakers, is what meeting the needs of the individual is all about.

Sarah Worster, 1988

- 23.78 We seek to affirm in each child at school, each member of the meeting, each person we meet in our daily lives, the person that he or she may with God's help grow to be. We are all the merest infants in God's world, struggling to stand upright and walk unaided, trying in vain to articulate our halting thoughts and feelings. We stumble and fall. We give way to self-pity and shame. God hauls us to our feet again and makes sense of our childish babble, never ceasing to believe in what we may ultimately become. Do we do the same for

Friends and state authority

our children and one another? We have a responsibility to follow Pierre Ceresole's dictum: 'Speak to every child as if you were addressing the utterly truthful upright individual which under your guidance he may one day become'. Our Quaker witness demands of us that we 'respect children very much more than they respect themselves'.

When we find ourselves teaching – as we all do in our relationships within meeting – can we draw upon that respect for one another and faith in one another's potential that will enable the other to feel taller and more capable? At Rufus Jones's memorial meeting one of his students simply said: 'He lit my candle'. That is a high aim for us all to aspire to in educating ourselves and our young people.

Barbara Windle, 1988

23.79 I may reach God through Keats, you by Beethoven, and a third through Einstein. Should not education to the Christian mean just this – enlarging and cultivating the country of God; and the subjects on any school timetable be thought of as avenues to an increasingly fuller life in God, or, to change the metaphor, windows, each of which gives a new view of the Kingdom of Heaven? ... This may seem a fantastically idealised view of what happens in a school, especially in these days of examinations, but is there any other open to the religiously-minded teacher? Is the commercial side of school and college life, the exchange of intellectual wares for examination results, so many facts and opinions for so many marks, which is so terribly dominating nowadays, to be allowed to weaken the allegiance of the young to knowledge and beauty as bringers of God to mortal men? No examination has yet been devised the passing of which will guarantee wisdom or culture. For these are slow-growing breeds, matters of character as well as of intellect and sentiment, the outcome of long exposure to the influences of truth and beauty.

Caroline C Graveson, 1937

23.80 Increasingly we see education as part of living rather than as preparation for living, and the motivation for educating ourselves and others grows more intrinsic than extrinsic. At Woodbrooke, which in some respects I still think is a prototype for much modern

23: Social responsibility

adult education, we have tried to build a small community to which people come in response to their own need for reflection or new skills or time to read; where proper attention is paid also to the needs of the neighbourhood; where staff and students and domestic workers and gardeners address each other without titles; where teachers and learners often exchange roles; where qualifications for entry are the ability to follow some courses, the wish to study, and the will to make community work; where the tasks are largely self-chosen; where conversation is expected between all age-groups between 18 and 80; where differences of nationality are seen as enrichment rather than as barriers (for one of the tasks of education is the enjoyment of diversity); where the rewards are existential, being visible chiefly in renewed courage or energy or the ability to re-launch oneself or to perform more adequately some of those unpaid services that make up the fabric of society. Of course we do not succeed all the time. But failure is also what we have to educate ourselves for – the humiliating, stimulating experiences of failures that we and our students must learn to use as stepping-stones rather than to deplore as obstacles.

William Fraser, 1973

- 23.81 To watch the spirit of children, to nurture them in Gospel Love, and labour to help them against that which would mar the beauty of their minds, is a debt we owe them; and a faithful performance of our duty not only tends to their lasting benefit and our own peace, but also to render their company agreeable to us. A care hath lived on my mind, that more time might be employed by parents at home, and by tutors at school, in weightily attending to the spirit and inclinations of children, and that we may so lead, instruct and govern them, in this tender part of life, that nothing may be omitted in our power, to help them on their way to become the children of our Father who is in heaven.

John Woolman, 1758

- 23.82 When I taught my children how to do many things I ensured that they would have skills to give them abilities, enjoyment and health. What I think I chiefly taught them was that I was right and they were wrong. When I hear them teaching their friends how to play games I

Friends and state authority

realise just how much I bossed them around. In seeking to pass on our values to our children I think we largely waste our time. They will pick up our values from us by the way we live and the assumptions that underpin our own lives.

John Guest, 1987

- 23.83 If children are to be instructed in the groundwork of true religion, ought they not to discover in those placed over them, a lively example of its influence? Or ought they to see anything in the conduct of others, which would be condemned in them, were they in similar circumstances? Of what importance, then, is it for guardians of children, to rule their own spirits. For when their tempers are irritable, their language impetuous, their voices exerted above what is necessary, their threatenings unguarded, or the execution of them rash, however children may for a time suffer under these things, they are not instructed thereby in the groundwork of true religion.

Friends Educational Society, 1841

- 23.84 Friends' peace testimony challenges us all to be peace educators. We may not all be teachers, but we are all communicators, and we all need to be learners. Peace education should be seen as an integral part of our peace testimony. But it is essentially something one does, and not something one talks about... Learning, to be educated, means changing one's behaviour, and peace education therefore aims at changing our own individual behaviour... We communicate our values by the manner of our lives, but how many of us negate the peaceful attitudes we fervently profess by our own aggressive behaviour?

Eva I Pinthus, 1982

- 23.85 I feel peace education is about teaching children to discover that they have the power to change things they see are wrong and developing the imagination to find alternative responses to conflict. This is not an objective for a course called 'Peace' on the timetable. It must permeate all our teaching. For we cannot teach one thing and act another. If we teach children to feel their own power we must be

23: Social responsibility

ready for them to criticise the school itself. In order to survive we must begin to teach them to challenge authority, our own included.

This means that there are likely to be conflicts. And conflicts are to be welcomed as opportunities for growth. Too often conflict leads to violence and aggression because we are trapped in a mentality which expects every conflict to be resolved by a victory for one party. But victory for one implies of necessity defeat for the other and therein lies the seed of further conflict.

Teachers are optimists. We would not be teachers if we did not have confidence in the future and in humankind. We trust that given the right opportunities children will grow up into responsible adults capable of making good choices and of saving the world from disaster. Perhaps the most important thing we can do today is to transmit to our pupils that sense of hope. The prevailing mood is one of pessimism and despair. 'Why should I work hard when I won't be able to get a job anyway?' 'Why should I plan for a future which may never happen?' 'What difference can I make to decisions of governments?'

The two qualities which are most important to children of today are hope and imagination. Hope to believe they can change the world they live in and imagination to find ways to do so.

Janet Gilbraith, 1986

See also 24.54

FRIENDS AND STATE AUTHORITY

- 23.86 For conscience' sake to God, we are bound by his just law in our hearts to yield obedience to [authority] in all matters and cases actively or passively; that is to say, in all just and good commands of the king and the good laws of the land relating to our outward man, we must be obedient by doing ... but ... if anything be commanded of us by the present authority, which is not according to equity, justice and a good conscience towards God ... we must in such cases obey God only and deny active obedience for conscience' sake, and

Friends and state authority

patiently suffer what is inflicted upon us for such our disobedience to men.

Edward Burrough, 1661

- 23.87 *After the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882, John Bright, in explaining his resignation from the Government, said to the Commons:*

The House knows that for forty years at least I have endeavoured to teach my countrymen an opinion and doctrine which I hold, namely, that the moral law is intended not for individual life only, but for the life and practice of States in their dealing with one another. I think that in the present case there has been a manifest violation both of International Law and of the moral law, and therefore it is impossible for me to give my support to it.

- 23.88 We have ... in our Quaker history a lesson for our own lives of the meaning of Christian citizenship. You can see there a two-fold strand constantly interwoven: one, respect for the state as representing authority in the community: and the other, desire to serve the community through the state and in other ways, but along with that, the desire above all to serve the Kingdom of God: this means that we must be willing, when loyalty to the Kingdom of God demands it to refuse the demands of the state and show the highest loyalty to the state and the best citizenship by refusing demands that are wrong, because it is only in that way that the conscience of our fellow citizens can be reached, and in the end a better law come into being.

T Edmund Harvey, 1937

- 23.89 *From a statement presented to London Yearly Meeting by a committee appointed by young men of enlistment age present at Yearly Meeting 1915:*

Christ demands of us that we adhere, without swerving, to the methods of love, and therefore, if a seeming conflict should arise between the claims of His service and those of the State, it is to Christ that our supreme loyalty must be given, whatever the consequences. We should however remember that whatever is our

23: Social responsibility

highest loyalty to God and humanity is at the same time the highest loyalty that we can render to our nation.

23.90 *Statement issued by Meeting for Sufferings in 1917, after the issue of a regulation requiring the submission of pamphlets to the Censor during the World War:*

The executive body of the Society of Friends, after serious consideration, desires to place on record its conviction that the portion of the recent regulation requiring the submission to the censor of all leaflets dealing with the present war and the making of peace is a grave danger to the national welfare. The duty of every good citizen to express his thoughts on the affairs of his country is hereby endangered, and further we believe that Christianity requires the toleration of opinions not our own, lest we should unwittingly hinder the workings of the Spirit of God.

Beyond this there is a deeper issue involved. It is for Christians a paramount duty to be free to obey and to act and speak in accord with the law of God, a law higher than that of any state, and no government official can release men from this duty.

We realise the rarity of the occasions on which a body of citizens find their sense of duty to be in conflict with the law, and it is with a sense of the gravity of this decision, that the Society of Friends must on this occasion act contrary to the regulation, and continue to issue literature on war and peace without submitting it to the censor. It is convinced that in thus standing firm for spiritual liberty it is acting in the best interests of the nation.

23.91 We are deeply uneasy about the increasing secrecy which permeates our process of government. We see this in the 1989 Official Secrets Act, which no longer allows the defence of the right of disclosure in the public interest. We have been led to the conviction that, despite a culture of state secrecy, we must strive to bring about openness in our country. Secrecy bolsters power and leads to deceit and the abuse of power. At times a sensitive reticence is required but, in working in the spirit of love and trust rather than fear, we seek to discern the boundary between that reticence and secrecy.

London Yearly Meeting, 1990

Friends and state authority
See also 29.11

Conscription

23.92 *On the passing of the Military Service Act 1916, London Yearly Meeting minuted:*

We take this, the earliest opportunity, of reaffirming our entire opposition to compulsory military service and our desire for the repeal of the act. War, in our view, involves the surrender of the Christian ideal and the denial of human brotherhood; it is an evil for the destruction of which the world is longing; but freedom from the scourge of war will only be brought about through the faithfulness of individuals to their inmost convictions, under the guidance of the spirit of Christ.

Our position is based upon our interpretation of the teaching of Jesus Christ. We regard the central conception of the act as imperilling the liberty of the individual conscience – which is the main hope of human progress – and as entrenching more deeply that militarism from which we all desire the world to be freed... Our lives should prove that compulsion is both unnecessary and impolitic. They should manifest a sense of duty not less strong than that which has driven many whom we respect (and some even of our own members) into the fighting forces. We can identify ourselves to the full with the griefs of our nation in which few hearts are not torn by suffering or harrowed by suspense. We pray that in steadfast conformity to the path of duty we may be set free to serve – to give to the community the fullest service of which we are capable – each one in the way of God's appointing.

23.93 Compulsory military service is sometimes claimed as a duty attaching to citizenship. But it is not true social service. On the one hand it is part of the attempt to maintain peace by force, and on the other it is training in methods that are contrary to the highest moral standards recognised by man... The training of men to kill each other is a violation of the sacredness of personality for it is a crime against that of God in every man. It requires an inhumanity and a blind obedience that is a negation of responsible service to our fellow men.

23: Social responsibility

It demands much that in private life is recognised as anti-social and criminal... Christ bids us love our enemies; governments bid us kill them. The conscript is, in effect, required to endorse war in advance.

Meeting for Sufferings, 1945

See also 24.14-24.16 Conscientious objection to compulsory military service

Crime and punishment

23.94 The terrible sufferings of our forebears in the prisons of the seventeenth century have given us as a people a special interest in the management of prisons and the treatment of crime. George Fox protested to the judges of his day ‘concerning their putting men to death for cattle and money and small matters’; and laid before them ‘what a hurtful thing it was that prisoners should lie so long in jail’; showing how ‘they learned wickedness from one another in talking of their bad deeds’.

There is, however, much work still to be done, in creating a right understanding of the nature and causes of crime, and in emphasising the need for redemptive treatment rather than retributive punishment. Society is in measure responsible for the criminal, a fact which emphasises the duty of meeting moral failure by redemptive care. Evil can only be finally overcome by good.

1911; 1925; 1959; 1994

23.95 The essential idea behind these first tentative criticisms [of early prison conditions by George Fox and William Penn] was a completely new one: that imprisonment should be looked on as a means of reforming criminals and not merely punishing them. No man is ever utterly lost, and however deep he is sunk in evil, the only just approach to him is to work for his recovery. This principle led John Bellers, the earliest Friend to pay serious and systematic attention to social reform, to plead for the abolition of the death penalty [in 1699]. Society had done enough for its own protection, he

Friends and state authority

argued, when it had rendered a murderer harmless by putting him in prison; if it did more it was acting in a spirit of revenge.

Harold Loukes, 1960

- 23.96 The real security for human life is to be found in a reverence for it. If the law regarded it as inviolable, then the people would begin also so to regard it. A deep reverence for human life is worth more than a thousand executions in the prevention of murder... The law of capital punishment while pretending to support this reverence, does in fact tend to destroy it.

John Bright, 1868

- 23.97 *At a time when a Bill was before Parliament for the abolition of the death penalty for murder:*

We feel that we should at this time declare once again our unwavering opposition to capital punishment. The sanctity of human life is one of the fundamentals of a Christian society and can in no circumstances be set aside. Our concern, therefore, is for all victims of violence, not only the murderer but also those who suffer by his act.

The sanctioning by the State of the taking of human life has a debasing effect on the community, and tends to produce the very brutality which it seeks to prevent. We realise that many are sincerely afraid of the consequences if the death penalty is abolished, but we are convinced that their fears are unjustified.

London Yearly Meeting, 1956

- 23.98 *Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) was born into the Gurney family in Norwich. She committed herself to a religious life following the visit of William Savery of Philadelphia when she was seventeen. She devoted herself to work for prison reform (see 18.08 & 26.40). In 1827 she wrote of this work:*

Much depends on the spirit in which the visitor enters upon her work. It must be in the spirit, not of judgment, but of mercy. She

23: Social responsibility

must not say in her heart *I am more holy than thou*, but must rather keep in perpetual remembrance that 'all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God'.

23.99 There was no weakness or trouble of mind or body which might not safely be unveiled to [Elizabeth Fry]. Whatever various or opposite views, feelings or wishes might be confided to her, all came out again tinged with her own loving, hoping spirit. Bitterness of every kind died; when entrusted to her, it never reappeared. The most favourable construction possible was always put upon every transaction. No doubt her failing lay this way; but did it not give her and her example a wonderful influence? Was it not the very secret of her power with the wretched and degraded prisoners? She always could see hope for everyone; she invariably found or made some point of light. The most abandoned must have felt she did not despair for them, either for this world or another; and this it was that made her irresistible.

Priscilla Buxton, 1847

23.100 In the evening Martha Savory, my mother [Mary Dudley] and I went to Newgate [Gaol], where we met Elizabeth Fry, Peter Bedford and Edward Harris. We saw about fifteen poor men under sentence of death, who soon collected round us and stood with the most becoming and quiet attention, whilst my mother was engaged to preach the gospel of reconciliation... The two especially who had but a few hours to live, were encouraged to cast themselves upon the mercy and forgiveness of an all-gracious God whose power and goodness are the same as when they were manifested to the thief upon the cross... They wept freely, and though not able to say much, we fully believe they *felt*. It was difficult to tear ourselves from such a scene, and we turned from these poor sufferers under the feeling of indignant repugnance to the sanguinary nature of those laws which put so little value upon human life, and adjudge punishments so disproportioned to and so unlikely to prevent the renewal of crimes.

Elizabeth Dudley, 1818

Friends and state authority

- 23.101 Imprisonment ... offers some protection to society by removing the offender. But consider how limited that protection is compared to what it could be. It puts the offender against property into a place where he is deprived of opportunities to practise the social rules about property; it puts the violent man into a subculture which is governed by violence; it puts the defrauder into a power system where corruption is rife; it puts the sexual offender into a place where sexual relief is only obtainable by substitutes; ... it puts those who need to learn to take control of their lives into a situation where all significant choices are made for them; and it puts the offender who is likely to reform into a milieu where most of the influences on him or her are criminal ones.

John Lampen, 1987

- 23.102 We believe in overcoming evil with good. We must speak and act from our own inner light to the inner light in all others as Jesus did. He showed and taught love, respect and concern for all, particularly those rejected by others, reaching out to the good in them.

Causing deliberate hurt to another person because that suffering is thought to be of benefit in itself, we believe is not a Christian response. Punishment in this sense not only harms the punished but also degrades those who inflict it, and is a barrier to the working of God's love within us.

Whether it be in the family, the school, the workplace or the wider community the intentional use of pain and suffering cannot be the best way to resolve differences, or gain the cooperation of people or restrain those who harm themselves or others.

To do away with punishment is not to abandon safety and control or to move towards disintegration, disorder and lawlessness. A non-punitive approach will not remove the need in some circumstances for restraint or secure containment, but it does mean that restraint and containment should be carried out in a life-enhancing spirit of love and care.

Nor in general does this loving approach have lesser expectations or demand less responsibility than does the infliction and acceptance of

23: Social responsibility

punishment. In personal relationships and in the broader context of community and international affairs a positive response to aberrant or destructive behaviour through reconciliation, restitution and reparation may take longer but it will be more likely to encourage the good in all parties, restore those who are damaged, reduce resentment and bitterness, and enable all those involved to move towards fuller integration.

Six Quakers, 1979

- 23.103 Reconciliation in its basic form occurs between two people face to face... But we must be clear that reconciliation, in the sense of meeting, comprehending, and working to prevent the future following the pattern of the past, is not always possible. The demand for justice, the desire for revenge, may prevent it. Quakers in particular seem to have a horror of revenge as a motive. We need to remember that, in the interests of social harmony, law-abiding citizens have voluntarily surrendered their rights of retaliation to the state. It may be true that when the state takes revenge, nothing constructive has been achieved. But it is also true that if not even this is done, the hurt remains with the person who has been wronged. Where the burden of suffering is clearly on one side, the burden of wrong-doing on the other, it is a kind of insult to tell the victim that he or she should be reconciled. We are told that there is no peace without justice. How are we to meet the claims of justice without forging the next link in the chain of hurt?

Restitution ... accepts the reality of what has happened and the right of the sufferer to 'have something done about it'. It accepts that the perpetrator is in most cases feeling guilty, or at least humiliated to have been detected. But it offers him or her an opportunity to regain the good opinion of the sufferer and the community, and to be seen as a person who can give as well as take away, who can right wrongs as well as cause them... When I was working with deviant and deprived children, and almost all disciplinary matters were decided by the whole community on a basis of putting things right, I was able to see how the victims feel supported and protected by this approach. It was moving to see how much they wanted to accept the evidence of contrition, how much they wanted to forgive. Provided that we could ensure that it worked effectively, those who had been hurt were

Friends and state authority

satisfied; it was outsiders, not directly involved, who became angry and told me that this was a sentimental option which did not face the realities of injustice. They were afraid of pain, hurt, violence, and the breakdown of order; and their fear made them violent. Those who had already experienced this breakdown recognised that restitution offered them a way out.

John Lampen, 1987

Those who have looked for a more forthright statement of a Quaker view on a subject which concerns them deeply, may experience some disappointment at not finding it here. However we hope that Friends will appreciate that this may be because Friends are still searching for a corporate view, or because we have not been able to find a suitable extract, or because this book cannot hope to cover every aspect of human affairs.

Some individual Friends have provided the challenge which has led the Society to consider a subject more deeply. Often we have been able to make corporate statements on issues such as war and poverty which challenge ourselves as well as the larger society. Sometimes we can suggest how we should set about seeking a remedy, but often we have to realise that in such a book as this we cannot hope to provide detailed consideration leading to any definitive statement. Indeed we have to beware of putting forward our corporate findings too dogmatically. We must humbly admit our own failings, and then work and pray that we may be led to find a way forward.