

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, *Qf&p* 23.14

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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 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, *Qf&p* 23.15

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*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, *Qf&p* 23.17

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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, *Qf&p* 23.18

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Session 2 Activity Sheet 2 – *Cut out the slips along the bold lines*

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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, *Qf&p* 23.19

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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, *Qf&p* 23.47

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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, *Qf&p* 23.48

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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 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, *Qf&p* 23.49

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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.

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, *Qf&p* 23.50

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*Testimony concerning Stephen Henry Hobhouse (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 Hobhouse 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, *Qf&p* 23.51

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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 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, *Qf&p* 23.52

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

Edward Burrough, 1661, *Qf&p* 23.86

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*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.

*Qf&p* 23.87

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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, *Qf&p* 23.88

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

*Qf&p 23.89*

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*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.

*Qf&p 23.90*

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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, *Qf&p 23.91*

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