



Talking points

Quaker quotes

For this activity you should ask people to work in small groups. Give each participant a copy of the quotes on the following sheets. If you are able you could enlarge these so that each quotation was on an individual sheet, these could then be placed around the room and people could walk round reading the quotations in order to pick ones which they liked.

For each of the topic areas ask them to choose one of the quotes that they like, which (to use the Quaker phrase) 'speaks to them'. What is it that people like about it? What appeals to them? Is it the language or the way it is expressed? Does it reflect their experience or has it opened up a new insight for them?

Are there any of these quotes that they would like to see in the alternative *Quaker faith and practice*? If so please submit these for consideration for this publication.

Extension activity: Ask people to choose one or more of the topic areas. If they were writing about that for *Quaker faith and practice* what would they say? How would they express their understanding of Quaker practice or their spiritual experience? What from the experience of their life might they put in that could be of help to other young Quakers who were wanting to find out about that issue and what young Friends felt and thought and had experienced in relation to it. Submit any writing done for consideration for the alternative *Quaker faith and practice*.

List of topics:

- Worship
- God
- Friendships, Family and Relationships
- Death & Bereavement
- Drugs and Alcohol
- Peace & Conflict
- Faith in Action
- Equality
- The Environment
- Community
- Being a Quaker Teenager

Worship

To me, worship is recognising and communing with the divine, whether it is within myself, in others, or in the world. The pre-condition of worship is my belief in worship, my own and that of other people.

A member of the Quaker Women's Group, 1986 (Qf&p 2.08)

True worship may be experienced at any time; in any place – alone on the hills or in the busy daily life – we may find God, in whom we live and move and have our being. But this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a meeting held in the Spirit there is a giving and receiving between its members, one helping another with or without words. So there may come a wider vision and a deeper experience.

1925; 1994 (Qf&p 2.11)

God

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

John Woolman, 1762 (Qf&p 26.61)

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

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

Anonymous, 1970 26.75 (Qf&p 26.75)

Friendships, Family and Relationships

Where there is genuine tenderness, an openness to responsibility, and the seed of commitment, God is surely not shut out. Can we not say that God can enter any relationship in which there is a measure of selfless love? – and is not every generalisation we make qualified by this?

Towards a Quaker view of sex, 1963 (Qf&p 22.18)

Our name, the Religious Society of Friends, suggests that we think of ourselves not only as Friends in the Truth, which the early Quakers saw themselves to be, but also as a society of friends, prizing friendship highly and recognising its value for the religious life.

In our intimate relationships, as in the wider community of our meeting, openness to one another can open us to the Holy Spirit and enable us to acknowledge that of God in our own hearts and in those of our friends.

1994 (Qf&p 22.04)

It is the nature and quality of a relationship that matters: one must not judge it by its outward appearance but by its inner worth. Homosexual affection can be as selfless as heterosexual affection, and therefore we cannot see that it is in some way morally worse.

Homosexual affection may of course be an emotion which some find aesthetically disgusting, but one cannot base Christian morality on a capacity for such disgust. Neither are we happy with the thought that all homosexual behaviour is sinful: motive and circumstances degrade or ennoble any act...

We see no reason why the physical nature of a sexual act should be the criterion by which the question whether or not it is moral should be decided. An act which (for example) expresses true affection between two individuals and gives pleasure to them both, does not seem to us to be sinful by reason alone of the fact that it is homosexual. The same criteria seem to us to apply whether a relationship is heterosexual or homosexual.

Towards a Quaker view of sex, 1963 (Qf&p 22.18)

Is there a Quakerly way of coping with the strong feelings of anger and guilt that can be aroused by family relationships, particularly when they are going wrong? Just being able to admit to having angry feelings can be strengthening. Is there a Quakerly way of discussing difficult issues within the family and of reaching decisions, perhaps in a 'family meeting' set in the context of worship? The family is a system in which each member needs to be allowed to assert her or his needs and have them met in the loving interaction of family life.

Douglas and Jenny Butterfield, 1986 (Qf&p 22.65)

Death & Bereavement

Saturday morning, making chocolate clusters,
And you with chocolate
All smeared around your rosy mouth,
Looking very comical
Turned to me and said,

Will your body
Come back again, Grannie,
After you are dead?'

'No, not this body,' I reply,
Putting a cluster
Neatly shaped,
Upon the baking tin between us.
'But I'll be around all right,
Hovering somewhere, laughing with you,
Feeling quite near
As Grandpa does with me.'

Your thoughts had very nearly
Moved elsewhere but, satisfied,
'That's OK' you said.

Ruth Fawell, 1976 (Qf&p 21.53)

Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still. For they must needs be present, that love and live in that which is omnipresent. In this divine glass, they see face to face; and their converse is free, as well as pure. This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal.
William Penn, 1693 (Qf&p 22.95)

Drugs and Alcohol

Many yearly meetings hold very strong testimonies against any use of tobacco or alcohol. Within Britain Yearly Meeting some Friends advocate total abstinence from alcohol, others counsel moderation.

Those who smoke tobacco, drink alcohol or abuse other substances risk damage to their own health, and may hurt or endanger other people. Such use can deaden a person's sensitivity and response to others and to God.

Consider whether you should avoid these products altogether, discourage their use in others, especially young people, and refrain from any share in their manufacture or sale. Maintain your own integrity and do not let social pressures influence your decisions.

1994 (Qf&p 20.40)

In view of the harm done by the use of alcohol, tobacco and other habit-forming drugs, consider whether you should limit your use of them or refrain from using them altogether. Remember that any use of alcohol or drugs may impair judgment and put both the user and others in danger.

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Peace & Conflict

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

George Fox, 1651 (Qf&p 24.01)

Meeting at a time when the nations of Europe are engaged in a war of unparalleled magnitude, we have been led to recall the basis of the peace testimony of our religious Society. It is not enough to be satisfied with a barren negative witness, a mere proclamation of non-resistance. We must search for a positive, vital, constructive message.....

Issued by London Yearly Meeting 1915, during the First World War (Qf&p 24.08)

The peace testimony is about deeds not creeds; not a form of words but a way of living. It is the cumulative lived witness of generations of Quakers... The peace testimony is not about being nice to people and living so that everyone likes us. It will remain a stumbling block and will itself cause conflict and disagreement.

The peace testimony is a tough demand that we should not automatically accept the categories, definitions and priorities of the world. We look to the Spirit, rather than to prescriptive hypothetical statements. The peace testimony, today, is seen in what we do, severally and together, with our lives. We pray for the involvement of the Spirit with us, that we may work for a more just world. We need to train to wage peace.

London Yearly Meeting, 1993 (Qf&p 24.11)

Faith in Action

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

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)

For a Quaker, religion is not an external activity, concerning a special 'holy' part of the self. It is an openness to the world in the here and now with the whole of the self. If this is not simply a pious commonplace, it must take into account the whole of our humanity: our attitudes to other human beings in our most intimate as well as social and political relationships. It must also take account of our life in the world around us, the way we live, the way we treat animals and the environment. In short, to put it in traditional language, there is no part of ourselves and of our relationships where God is not present.

Harvey Gillman, 1988 (Qf&p 20.20)

Are you honest and truthful in word and deed? Do you maintain strict integrity in your business transactions and in your relations with individuals and organisations? Are you personally scrupulous and responsible in the use of money entrusted to you, and are you careful not to defraud the public revenue?

Queries, 1964 (Qf&p 20.43)

Is our concern for simplicity relevant to our concern for the national economic situation? If we think of simplicity in terms of doing without certain things, of voluntarily reducing our standard of living, I believe this is almost irrelevant at the economic level in view of the scale of the world's need.

If we think of simplicity as a spiritual quality which incidentally simplifies our life styles then I believe it has relevance. This kind of simplicity goes straight to the heart of things and puts first things first, is needed to rectify our distorted values, to help us accept changes in our pattern of living. As this simplicity grows in our hearts and bears fruit in our lives, we may learn and help others to learn that the really abundant life is not to be found in the clutter of material complexity, but in simplicity.

L Hugh Doncaster, 1976 (Qf&p 20.35)

Equality

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 23.24 (Qf&p 23.24)

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 (Qf&p 23.35)

The belief in the equality of all human beings of whatever sex, race, class or age... 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 (Qf&p 23.73)

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 (Qf&p 23.32)*

The Environment

The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age. *John Woolman, 1772 (Qf&p 25.01)*

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

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

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

London Yearly Meeting, 1988 (Qf&p 25.02)

Community

In a true community we will not choose our companions, for our choices are so often limited by self-serving motives. Instead, our companions will be given to us by grace. Often they will be persons who will upset our settled view of self and world. In fact,

we might define true community as the place where the person you least want to live with always lives! *Parker J Palmer, 1977 (Qf&p 10.19)*

Junior Yearly Meeting gave us the opportunity to step back and look at our lives from a different perspective. As Quakers we are often preoccupied with global issues and as young people we are only too often preoccupied with the pressures of work. We had the space to stop, to listen and to think about ourselves...

Through our discussions we recognised our anxieties and fears. We realised that we are individuals and that we are alone but, as part of a loving community, to be alone does not necessarily mean to be lonely. We discovered that it is acceptable to have confused feelings, to be different, to do things our own way. We should not feel guilty when we are wrong, and appreciate that there must be room for mistakes. There are people who want us to be exactly as we are.

Epistle of Junior Yearly Meeting, 1991 (Qf&p 21.06)

One of the unexpected things I have learnt in my life as a Quaker is that religion is basically about relationships between people. This was an unexpected discovery, because I had been brought up to believe that religion was essentially about our relationship with God.

If we are sensitive, we find that everything that happens to us, good or bad, can help us to build a vision of the meaning of life. We can be helped to be sensitive by reading the Bible and being open to experience of nature, music, books, painting, sport or whatever our particular interest may be. It is in and through all things that we hear God speaking to us. But I do not think I am alone in my certainty that it's in my relationships with people that the deepest religious truths are most vividly disclosed.

George Gorman, 1982 (Qf&p 10.20)

Being a Quaker Teenager

It was only after working with 'Questabout' that I realised how hard it is to be a Quaker teenager. Young people are thrown together at school with all sorts of people, whereas their parents may well be able to move in a selected circle. The rules of social intercourse in schools are usually not as refined as in the office. While Dad and Mum may work beside people with whom they disagree, politeness will prevent too much overt friction; the boy or girl from a Quaker family in an area where the majority of people have more conservative attitudes may be made to feel very isolated. Not many people will be challenged to a fight at the office, but many Quaker teenagers have to defend daily a peace testimony which they may not yet have worked through for themselves. It is here that support from older Friends not in the immediate family can be vital.

Hugh Pyper, 1986 (Qf&p 22.68)

[Our] work is based on the thought that 'What you have inherited from your forefathers you must acquire for yourselves to possess it'. That is to say that each generation of young Friends by its experiments must discover for itself the truths on which the Society is built if it is to use those truths and to continue and enlarge the work of the Society. Hence the occasional separate meetings of younger Friends and our desire to have means of expressing corporately our own experience.

Young Friends Committee, 1926 (Qf&p 21.04)