



Thinking about a true social order

Quaker faith & practice 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 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.