



Discussion: WHAT ARE 'SPIRITUAL' VALUES?

Do the shared spiritual values of Quakerism give us a common political outlook?

One of the aims of this project is to *"inspire reflection and debate among Quakers on the connections between the spiritual and ethical values of Quakerism and the 'European values' which underpin European governance"*. We want to find out whether Quakers hold similar views of European integration, or if our common spiritual experience and values allow us to diverge when it comes to the application of these values at the political level. The Convention on the Future of Europe (*see Briefing Paper 1: The Future of Europe Debate*) provides an opportunity for the reassessment and redefinition of the values which underpin the European Union. This opportunity is open to everyone in Europe; we, as European Quakers, have to tell the Convention what values we want our European society to uphold.

The 'spiritual values' in the name of the project are at the heart of the debate and reflection which we aim to encourage. What are the spiritual values of Quakerism? Consider the Quaker commitment to the testimonies of peace, equality, simplicity and integrity. It could be said that these are Quaker values, that Quakers believe in these values and try to be true to them in their lives. These are values that can be applied to governance; European institutions should promote respect for these values in all their work and policies.

The current values of the EU can be difficult to understand, as there is no single statement of objectives and values. However, this could change if the Convention comes up with a 'constitutional text' which may include such a statement. For now, the values of the EU are hidden away in the various Treaties (*see Briefing Paper 3: Aims and Values of the EU*). Historically, the EU was set up with the aim of preventing conflict in Europe, through the means of economic co-operation. Gradually, the EU has moved from being simply an economic community to what some have described as a 'community of values'. The most concise statement of these fundamental values can be in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights* of the EU, a document currently without legal force, but which could possibly be used as the basis for the potential 'constitutional text'. The Charter states that "the [European] Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law."

It can be seen that the EU is an organisation set up to create the conditions for peace and which claims to uphold equality. One of the aims of the Convention is to simplify existing EU structures and institutions, to make these easier to understand and interpret and more accessible to citizens; another aim is to make the EU more democratic, including greater accountability and transparency. So far it seems that the four Quaker values outlined above are to some extent incorporated into EU objectives.

However, there are problems with this analysis. The Quaker commitment to the testimonies is deeper than the simple affirmation that these values are important. It is not enough that the EU is a mechanism for the democratic and peaceful resolution of conflicts within and between member states; it must also work for the resolution and prevention of violent conflict elsewhere in the world, including in its trade and development policies. The commitment to equality expressed in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights* must be fully applied to all people resident within the EU, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, not just those who are citizens of the member countries. It must also influence policy towards the rest of the world.

These are just two areas where Quakers can and should push for a deeper application of the expressed values of the EU. However, while our commitment to the values of peace and equality comes from our spiritual experience, can these values really be called 'spiritual' values? Is the Quaker promotion of equality different to that of a secular NGO? If we are promoting similar values to other groups, why should we make such statements as Quakers, rather than simply as concerned human beings?

These are the questions that are fundamental to this project. We want to identify the values that are of importance to Quakers and to come up with concrete ways in which these values can be incorporated into the work of the EU. However, in addition to this we want to explore whether Quakers have a unique contribution to make. Does the spiritual source of our social commitments give these commitments more weight? Does it differentiate us from the many secular groups working for peace, equality and social justice?

Perhaps these types of questions miss the point slightly. Perhaps the unique Quaker contribution is not in the substantive values which we uphold. Of course, we should continue to push for these values to be respected and work together with other NGOs and other faith-based groups to do this. Perhaps we should focus more on processes. Quakers have always understood the connection between spiritual conviction and political action. It is not that we necessarily promote different values, but that the conviction to act has a different source.

To think about:

What is the role of religion and religious groups in the governance of a diverse, multi-cultural society?

“ ‘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, as quoted in BYM Quaker Faith & Practice, 23.06

“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.”

BYM Quaker Faith & Practice, 23.47