

# A Quaker Declaration for Equality and the Common Good

In 1660 the Quaker Margaret Fell rode on horseback from Swarthmoor, in the county of Westmorland, to London to meet with the King and deliver '*A Declaration and Information from us, the People Called Quakers*'. At that time, Quakers were being 'stigmatised and persecuted' by the State for their religious beliefs, causing deep suffering. This declaration made clear that Quakers stood against all strife and were committed to fostering peace and unity. It claimed the right of Quakers to be permitted to live in peace.

Just over three hundred and fifty years later, inspired by the spirit of our Friend, Margaret Fell, we have been moved to leave our homes and families to ride from Swarthmoor to London and lay this Declaration before you. We give witness that we do not 'bow to nor own' the actions of Governments in promoting the marketplace narrative that people are only of value if they have economic value. We hold it has made permissible the stigmatisation and persecution of those who require the support of the Welfare State at times of need and made possible its systematic dismantling.

We make our Declaration on behalf of Quakers from Kendal and Sedbergh Area Meeting and others from across the country who have joined us.

## **What moves us to make this Declaration**

We do not know whether you 'are acquainted with the principles and practices' of the Quakers and so we want to be clear about the deep root of our concerns.

Gathering in stillness, we commit ourselves to a way of worship which allows that of God to teach and transform us. From this source have grown our Testimonies to equality and justice, peace, simplicity and sustainability, truth and integrity. The Friends who came before us have tilled and nurtured these Testimonies and built the ground that we now stand on. We have come to know this ground well and from it we have been moved to engage with and renew the world in which we live. Across time, we have ploughed our energies and endeavours into challenging the dehumanising and harmful effects of slavery, the prison system, poor housing, poor wages and poverty. All these offend our lived experience that there is 'that of God in everyone' and it is from this ground that we speak.

## **We challenge the false religion of the Market**

Margaret Fell challenged the follies and deceptions of the religion that drove the stigmatisation and persecution of the 'People called the Quakers'. In our time now, we challenge the false religion of the Market, which is driving the dehumanising narrative that people only have value in our society if they have economic value. This has obscured the world where each of us has worth because we are human, holding the 'spark of the divine' within us. So much in our world that is good, beautiful and true is being broken because it fails the final judgment of the Marketplace. We hold that we can afford to care for each and every person.

## **A warning about persecution**

In the face of persecution, the Quakers who came before us spoke truth to power. 'Now that you are in power, we caution you to act justly and with mercy and to prevent the persecution of innocent people'<sup>1</sup>. Oppression diminishes us all.

Over the past eight years particularly, we have seen how the policies of government have led to a re-orientation of structures, powers and resources to empower and enrich those who already have

economic wealth, at the same time disempowering and penalising those who are without. In honouring the creed of competition, we have seen how the safety net of the Welfare State has been unravelled, thread by thread, leaving our neighbours who are hit by 'the contingencies of life' to fall without the 'tender hand' of support. The fruits of this creed are manifest.

We have seen our friends and neighbours with disabilities stigmatised and denied the support once freely given; people coerced by hunger into the charitable arms of food banks; those in mental anguish struggling to navigate the maze of bureaucracy for the means to survive, only to fail and die alone and in distress; people sleeping in doorways speaking of being invisible and dehumanised and children exposed to the brutality of poverty. We declare that we are against these actions. They visit violence and havoc on people's bodies and minds at times of their greatest need. We give testimony and witness that we are against the narrative that lies behind it; that encourages our neighbours to be seen as 'Other', persecuted and cast-off. We hold that we can afford to care.

### **We follow those things that make for peace and unity**

We are a peaceable people and we are concerned for the good of all. We follow those things that make for peace and unity. However, we feel disquiet and 'dis-ease' when competition is cast as the defining characteristic of human relationships as it fosters the selfish part of the human condition and sets one against another. All of us are harmed when society is organised in this way. When the whole public realm and common good is not safeguarded and renewed, social and economic injustices usher in unrest and peace is undone.

We look to the renewal of the way our society is organised. The economy should serve the common good of all, recognise the fundamental of equality and seek to secure the enhancement of all life. In holding true to this vision, we desire that those who govern us work for the birth of an economy that embraces the 'Ten Principles for a New Economy'\* 2. One principle lays the foundations for a tax system that redistributes from richer to poorer. We value the payment of tax to provide resources for our neighbours, as this manifests our relationship of mutual support and enables participation in community life. We hold that such a New Economy will help foster the creative renewal of our society and ensure that the original purposes of the Welfare State are safeguarded. This would once again embody the truth that there is that of God in each of us and that we can afford to care.

*Drafted by the "Ride" For Equality and the Common Good Group - Kendal and Sedbergh Area Meeting*

\*1 From 'Margaret Fell 1660- A Modern English Paraphrase' Stuart Masters Woodbrooke Study Centre 2016/<https://aquakerstew.blogspot.co.uk/2016/07margaret-fells-tract-declamation-and.html>. \*2 'Ten Principles for the New Economy' [www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/economic-justice/new-economy](http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/economic-justice/new-economy)