

QUAKERS AND CONFLICT

A lecture by Alan Pleydell, Assistant General Secretary, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, given at the St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace on Wednesday 5 March 2003

The bombing of St Ethelburga's was related to the Northern Ireland dispute, so it may be appropriate to begin by saying that as Quakers we have been engaged in active peace work in Northern Ireland since the early 1980s. During the last 20 years or so, we have had a presence in Belfast, Quaker House Belfast, just behind Queen's University. This has been a centre during that time for the Quaker representatives, appointed by both Irish and British Friends, to work behind the scenes with people from both sides of the dispute. The most active time for that was before the talks between John Hume and Gerry Adams of eight to ten years ago, which eventually led to the settlement of five years ago. The function of Quaker House was to make possible conversations across the divide which might not have been able to take place otherwise because of the danger of being seen to meet with the other side at all, and the fear of attack from people of their own side on anyone seen to consort with the enemy.

I mention that story not only because St Ethelburga's suffered a bombing by the IRA which was connected with the whole history of Northern Ireland in recent decades, but because that style of work is central to the work for peace which Quakers have endeavoured to do down the centuries. What I'd like to do now is to revert to our own origin and say a little bit about where we are coming from. I suppose if we are known at all, Quakers are indeed known for our pacifism and peace work. But I should like to say a little bit to start off with about the theological roots of that. As you probably know, Quakers had their origin during the English Civil War in the mid 17th century, in particular in the visionary ideas of George Fox, who was essentially an itinerant preacher who spoke of the light of God as he saw and experienced it. He was part of a whole tradition of people in the 17th century who were deeply questioning of religious authority, especially those who saw legitimacy either in terms of ecclesiastical hierarchies or in terms of legitimacy or hierarchy derived from state authorities - and that applied particularly of course at that time to the Anglican Church. So he was involved in all sorts of polemics with church leaders up and down the country, and so were his followers, and so were his followers such as William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania. They were seen as an enormous threat to church establishments of every kind. Quakers were seeking to commune directly with God without any ordained priest or any other kind of intermediary. This is one of the central claims of George Fox, essentially that individual human hearts are open to being touched by God and that this applies to all human individuals.

This deep egalitarianism was at that time seen as very challenging to existing hierarchies, and that is why Quakers very frequently found themselves imprisoned for their professions of belief, and indeed for meeting to worship at all. It is out of that tradition, I think you could say, that Quakers have a special affinity for people suffering through imprisonment. This is one side of our social witness work. But the attachment to working for peace also goes back to the belief of George Fox in the 17th century that there is something of God in every man. He said in every 'man' rather than in every 'person', but in fact our form of worship allows for the equal

manifestation of the Spirit in women and children, going way back to the beginning, and I think that that is also a historically unusual feature of our origins.

As far back as the Civil War, the Commonwealth under Cromwell and subsequently the restoration of Charles II, Quakers refused to bear arms, and most have refused to bear arms ever since. The original formulation simply said it was contrary to the law of Christ to bear arms, and whatever anybody else might do, whether it were the magistracy or the forces of the state, they were not going to involve themselves in bearing arms themselves. That was simply contrary to the spirit of Christ. What I want to draw attention to is that this is not just a doctrinal matter for Quakers. We recognise that there are genuine dilemmas in conflicts in life which go on all the time. But the central position of Quakers has been that is not conflict that is the matter but the adoption of violent means towards the resolution of conflict. That is where the refusal comes in. It is wrong to bear arms, and in particular, it is wrong to violate the body and spirit of your brother and sister in God. This is what it all comes down to, since we all partake equally of that same spirit. And if it is wrong to use violent means, then we must endeavour however we can to resolve our conflicts by other means.

One of George Fox's statements, one of his claims to a team of inspectors from the Commonwealth authorities, was that he lived in 'that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars'. He was referring specifically to the witness and example of Jesus. So historically, we have as a body, as a church, down the 350 years that we've been in existence, been attempting in one way or another to live up to the implications of claiming to live in that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars. I think that particularly in modern times we would not necessarily claim in all instances that we know how to do that. We simply say that we try consistently to live within the spirit of that claim. So what does that involve? I think if you look at questions such as duties towards the state, or duties of citizens, what most Quakers would say is that if they are refusing to fight, they also have a corresponding duty to be working on behalf of peace and to take risks for it. That means that we have a very special duty laid upon us in consequence of our membership. Whether we are talking about things going on at the level of the neighbourhood, of the locality or at the county, or the country or the state, or internationally, the same charge is laid upon us, a duty to take away the occasion of all wars or to live in that life and power that does so.

This is very much affected by our form of worship, and what I was saying a little bit earlier about our attitude towards hierarchy. Our form of worship is designed to circumvent the need for hierarchy. Friends adopted a belief in the 17th century which was called the priesthood of all believers. This meant that all human beings, by virtue of being children of God, have equal access in principle, if they are prayerful and sincere enough, to the mind of God. Out of the priesthood of all believers comes our form of worship, particularly in the British tradition, which is shared in most of the Anglo-Saxon world - in large parts of North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Western Europe also. Most Quakers, who tend to be very small independent churches in those different parts of the world, adhere to this form of worship where there is no priest or minister, but rotation of the various administrative offices which you need in order to run a church. So basically there is no set hierarchy.

The other thing, which basically goes back to the beginning again, is that Quakers are not very hot on doctrine. Although George Fox set great store by the Bible, and was fond of quoting the Bible, and laid great weight on the person of Jesus, he really believed more in what came from the human heart. There is a quotation from him, which has to do with disputing theologians, saying: "Paul said this and another authority said that, but I say unto thee, what canst thou say?" This is an invitation by Fox, throwing the challenge back to Quakers, and saying that what you find in your own heart is what you should follow.

This is not just a counsel of individualism. Quakers have organised themselves down the centuries through a collective form of worship, which you probably know about. We sit in silence for an hour or so. When any of us feels moved, or thinks that he or she is moved, by the Spirit, we may stand and say what is going on in our mind. Sometimes meetings take place which are entirely silent, sometimes there is quite a lot of vocal ministry, other times something in between. It is not that all of these utterances have equal validity, but that there is a discerning prayerful mind which is upheld by the whole of the meeting – we speak of the gathered meeting. There is a kind of intuitive sense which Quakers use to know when they are in a gathered meeting, there is an evolving sense of the mind of what is being said.

In relation to that, we have something called the Quaker business method (this is quite a long way from the theme of peace, but I will come back to peace in a moment, because they are intimately related subjects). We have business meetings which are always preceded by a period of worship, indeed all of these business meetings are called 'meetings for worship for business'. The style in which we meet is physically somewhat like a seminar or ordinary business meeting, sitting around a table. We will have a clerk, and on occasion a chair, but not necessarily conducting the meeting, more trying to discern the common mind. The job of the clerk, contemporaneously with the meeting, is to discover what the mind of the meeting is, and to write draft minutes on the spot which are shared with the membership of the meeting until they have a common mind. If they are not agreed, a minute will not be recorded. All business minutes recorded in Friends' business meetings at whatever level have the authority of all the people gathered there, in the sense that not only are they all from the secular point of view of common mind, but also they believe themselves to be inspired by the Spirit, because what they are commonly entering into, through prayer at the beginning of the meeting, is seeking the will of God rather than seeking their particular point of view. They may have that particular point of view, but they are consciously committing themselves to the common will at the beginning of the session, and this is held throughout the session as well.

The style of worshipping lies at the centre of all Friends' deliberations, and the effect is to minimise conflicts based on the partiality of individual ways of looking at things. People are trying to see the common mind of God by adopting that form of worship. This goes into all of our ways of discussing things and all of our ways of taking decisions.

Thus down the centuries, Quakers have had this commitment to seeking peace, and they are trying to take away the occasion of all wars. This means operating in your particular locality, but it also means operating at any level of secular power within the world. And right back to the beginning, Quakers were astonishingly bold in

proclaiming their belief that they had seen the light. We are probably less bold now than we were in the 17th Century. Maybe we go through phases of becoming more respectable and then becoming less respectable again. Anyway, in the 17th century, Quaker missionaries, as they were called back then, went around the world, proclaiming the truth of their spiritual discovery and discussing it with anyone who would consent to talk with them. There was the famous example of a woman called Mary Fisher, who travelled all the way to Constantinople in order to persuade the Sultan of the error of his ways in following Islam, saying that she, or George Fox and his followers, had seen the light. This was the beginning of the Quaker tradition of speaking truth to power, in relation to potentates who might be using violence to pursue their ends. Another such woman was Mary Dyer, who went to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the late 17th century, and because of her persistence was hanged for proclaiming the truth as she saw it.

So there is a line of people who have been astonishingly bold, including those women at the beginning, in proclaiming what they saw to be the truth, and in working for what they understood to be peace. Another example, if I could move forward to the middle of the 19th century, was at the outset of the Crimean war. Two Quakers went to St. Petersburg to talk to the Tsar to try to persuade him to desist from attacking the Turks. It is this kind of example which we find in our historical record, and it is the same witness which we want to bring to the fore now.

Moving on to the 20th and 21st centuries, I should like to give some examples of the sort of things done by Quakers in pursuing our peace witness and our peace testimony. I should like to stress that the testimony is not a doctrine which is written in stone. As I said, we do not pay as much attention to doctrine as to practice. "What canst thou say, and what canst thou do?" The original formulation, the one which is often quoted, that Quakers utterly deny the use of weapons, was actually part of a loyal address to Charles II, saying that Quakers would not actually rebel against him. It is very historically specific. But right down the ages, we get formulations of Quakers' peace testimony which are attempts prayerfully to address specific sets of circumstances and dilemmas for the personal conscience in the context of responding to state power, particularly when that is expressed violently

These circumstances, I believe, are developed cumulatively, and I should like to draw your attention to something which is probably not well known outside the Society of Friends, namely our book "Quaker Faith and Practice". This is what is described in shorthand as the Red Book, rather like Mao's Little Red Book, but it is the authoritative cumulative record of the religious and spiritual experience of the Society of Friends in Britain as it stands at the moment. We do not have creeds because of what I said about hierarchy and authority. What we have is an evolving body of spiritual understanding and practice which is agreed by the Society as a whole. It always goes back to origins, but it evolves to define where the Society finds itself at the moment in relation to the religious and social questions of the day. So if you are interested, I should advise you to get a copy of "Quaker Faith and Practice", revised most recently in 1994. We revise it once in every generation. It sets out a series of statements made by various Quakers, either authoritative bodies or just individuals, setting out their understanding of what that calling to peace and other Quaker testimonies has involved for them, either personally or as a body.

Thus in the earlier part of the 20th century, British and American Quakers were very much involved in conscientious objection, refusing to bear arms themselves and fighting legal battles to establish the right to refuse to bear arms. You will find that Quakers have been very involved in movements to establish the right to exercise conscientious objection, and that goes on to the present day. As recently as the early 1970s, American Quakers were very prominent in establishing in the American courts the right not to bear arms for reasons other than religion, in other words for reasons of secular conscience. Quakers were very much involved in movements for the rights of those who said: “ I disagree with this war not because I am a pacifist but because I think this particular war is illegal or immoral.” Quakers were actually establishing that legal right in American courts and earlier in the British courts as well. So that was one kind of activity which goes back to the First World War.

Another activity which dates from the First World War is relief work. In Germany from 1918 onwards, Quakers tried to intervene to forestall the famine which was threatening the country at the time of the armistice. A large amount of aid was organised, very much assisted by the fact that Herbert Hoover, the then US president, was a Quaker. Friends were able to gather very large amounts of money and material aid and deliver it to Germany. They opened Quaker soup kitchens and aid delivery points all over Germany at that time, which are remembered to this day. A similar effort was made again in 1945 in Germany and also in Poland and elsewhere, and again that remains remembered to down to the present. this day.

Another aspect worth remembering goes back to the notion of the duty to bear peace witness. The idea of bearing peace witness is not a soft option. Very many Quakers enlisted in the Friends’ Ambulance Unit in both World Wars, being there in the Front Line or in No Man’s Land, rescuing people under fire and bringing them back for medical attention, regardless of which side they happened to belong to. That is one way in which Friends have sought to carry out their peace witness.

Now I am going to come forward to the present day, to talk a bit about what I know from my own experience. I have been involved with Quakers for the last eleven years, since just at the end of the Cold War. Actually just three days after I arrived at Friends House to start my job as Europe Secretary, the Soviet Union collapsed. It was Christmas 1991. I had been hired to manage the Quaker programme in Russia, which was predicated on the assumption that the Soviet Union was going to continue, and that we were going to assist the process of peace with the Soviet Union. What we have in fact been doing is a style of work that we have been engaged in for at least twenty years, which consists of sending Quaker representatives to different parts of the world, to work in areas of civil conflict. So we have had representatives in Moscow since 1991. That was actually the **reestablishment** of a Quaker office there for the first time since 1936, because Quakers had been present in Russia from the famine following the Civil War there in 1921 right until the mid 1930s, when Stalin threw us out , our having had the last foreign non-governmental office to exist in Russia at the time. So the re-establishment of the office was a major achievement for us. It was just two people in a flat, and what they were doing at one level was supporting local people who were interested in Quakerism, in learning things about Quakers, and in their historical and contemporary practice. But they were also working in support of internal refugees in Russia, for instance those from the troubled areas of the Caucasus and working for the disabled, and on a whole variety of issues.

One of the main problems in Russia is recent legislation which has been very draconian towards foreign churches. One of the issues for Quakers is whether we are to be understood as a sect or whether we are registered as a church. So that is one particular issue of doing work there. Another example I could quote of our work there concerns a youngish Friend whose name is Chris Hunter, who was our representative in Moscow in 1994 and 1995, and who became particularly interested in the conflict in Chechnya. He was involved in supporting a group of women called the Soldiers' Mothers, who got together voluntarily, and was very closely associated with helping them to organise and undertake a march from Moscow to Grozny in April 1995 in protest against the war. It was a very successful march; it did not stop the war from continuing, but it was a protest against the attack on civilians undertaken by the Russian Army. It was protesting against war on both sides, because that is generally what Quakers do - we try to befriend people on both sides and move towards some form of accommodation. It did not work, in that the war persisted with devastating consequences, particularly for the deliberately targeted civilian population, but now what Chris and the secular organisation he has been working with for the last seven years have been doing is channelling humanitarian resources into Chechnya ever since. This has gone on right till the present day. At present Chris cannot get a visa to enter Russia, but they have two hundred local workers in Chechnya and in the neighbouring Republic of Ingushetia in Southern Russia, trying to work with people who have suffered profoundly as a result of violence. In particular there are thousands of people in tent camps all over Ingushetia, and in parts of Chechnya itself. As you know, Grozny has been levelled to the ground by indiscriminate area bombardment, and all the population are in a very dire situation. The work that Chris has done is to recruit local people, both Russian and Chechen, who are opposed to what is being done in their name, and who want to find common cause just to reduce the amount of suffering. He and those he has been working with have succeeded in bringing in a lot of foreign aid. They have brought in lots of artificial appliances for children who have lost their limbs, of whom there are many. They have opened up nursery schools and play schools in tent camps around that area. So that is a typical example in modern guise of relief work started by Quakers.

Having said which, most of what we do is not relief work. It is Christian Aid or Oxfam who do most relief work, although we have a hand in the origins of that sort of of such organisations, as we have in the origins of Amnesty International, Save the Children and of many other human rights and relief based organisations. We are very small; there are now about 16,000 Quakers, members of the Society of Friends, in this country. Proportionately, to use a slightly violent expression, we punch above our weight, in the sense that there are so many Quakers directly involved in peace work, I think proportionately more than from any other church in this country. The evidence of this is we maintain an office in Friends House which is specifically devoted to peace work on the ground, which is ongoing. We work in this country in support of Quakers who want to engage in peace witness, we support them in understanding the law and the tradition of non-violent dissent supporting Quakers and others to engage in non-violent direct action against the authorities where the law itself, or the position of the authorities is felt to be illegal in wider international law or just plain immoral. For instance, we have been engaged in training people who are opposed to the Trident missile programme, which Quakers think is contrary to international law. We train people in how to conduct themselves when having public protests, in such a way as not unnecessarily to antagonise the police.

Quakers tend to support acts of conscience which are illegal, but which are defined as non-violent, and there is a hard question as to what is non-violent, with a whole literature surrounding this question. That is one style of work we conduct in this country. We support like-minded people who want to engage in similar kinds of movement by training them. We work internationally at the grass roots – I have already mentioned Russia, but in the last eleven years we have also been working in former Yugoslavia - in Serbia, in Bosnia, and Croatia. In the programme I have been particularly associated with, we started by making small grants to anti-war groups in those three republics, helping them to get computers and enabling them to send emails, so that they could talk and give support to one another. After that, we became involved in sending international volunteers to work with small voluntary groups in those countries. Then, towards the end of the war in Bosnia in 1995, we looked at the possibility of supporting relief work, and work across communities which are completely divided – the fractured communities in central Bosnia. We helped to fund a particular small project in central Bosnia, where the fighting had stopped right in the middle of the town, in a small place called Gornji Vakuf, between Croats and Bosnian Muslims. There was a small civil war within the broader war, between the Croats and the Muslims, and here the fighting had been vicious. 80% of the housing had been destroyed and many people had been killed. The town had been completely divided down the central street. What we were engaged with was funding a youth centre, which was the idea of two local teachers from either side. The youth centre was to promote extracurricular activities for the children so that they would get to meet where otherwise it would be impossible. We helped to fund and to build of the youth centre and we sent volunteers there to work as language teachers and teachers of dance and so on. At first, children from the two sides, the Muslims and the Catholic Croats, would not meet at all. Their parents were too angry and afraid to let them meet. So what started was to have classes for children from the two communities on alternate nights of the week. Then after a year or so, the children themselves said that this was crazy, and asked why they could not get together in classes. So they got into classes together, but they still did not talk to one another. They sat on either side of the class, and talked to the teachers, but would not talk to one another. After another year or so, they started to talk to one another, but they only did it in the youth centre which is on the cease-fire line between the communities. But they would not visit one another's houses, nor would they want to be seen to be meeting in the street outside, again for fear of being seen to fraternise with the enemy.

So that is another style of Quaker work. We have had Quaker representatives in Bosnia for the last five years. But just for the last eight months, we have had in place some local representatives, all of whom are local people. We have two people from Bosnia, one of Croat origin and the other of Serb origin, both of whom were in Sarajevo throughout the siege. We also have one representative in Croatia whom we have known for the last ten years or so, who has been independently engaged with profound peace work of his own, and a representative in Serbia. So we have put together this inter-ethnic, inter-republic team, which believe me is no mean feat. We have enabled people from Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia to work together, who are now working on a programme called 'dealing with the past', which actually ultimately means truth and reconciliation. You have heard the phrase "Truth and Reconciliation" as applied to the Commission in South Africa, and in many other places in Latin America and so on. There is enormous fear in Bosnia about getting involved in truth

and reconciliation, because it does not only involve saying what the other side did to you, but also acknowledging and saying what 'we' did to 'them'. Acknowledging what we did to them is an extremely risky business, involving that same accusation of betrayal towards one's own community. Thus gradually we are working in these communities at local level, trying to encourage people to see the necessity of facing up to what their own community has been involved in, and helping and supporting them to engage in dialogue at the local level, and at a more senior political level – taking the local communities and more formal centralised politics in tandem, since neither can advance in any rooted way without remaining in tandem with the other.

We do similar work in East Africa, in northern Uganda, in fact today we are about to take a decision whether to allow our Representative to go with a group of people called the Acholi religious leaders, who are trying to be the go-betweens in with a group who call themselves the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). There is nothing much religious at all about the LRA, apart from their name, chosen for a reason that is fairly obscure. They are a group of the Acholi tribe in northern Uganda, mainly young people, who have banded together, basing themselves in southern Sudan across the border, and for the last fifteen years they have been conducting raids against their own people, the Acholi, in northern Uganda. They have been abducting children to be recruited into their army, or for the girls to act as sex slaves. This depredation is opposed by the Ugandan army because it reduces control from Kampala. Most of the population is now gathered in refugee camps, not allowed to till the soil, because the army want to control the whole area. So the whole community has been fragmented and it is very difficult for normal life to take place. Various tentative moves have been made towards a cease-fire, like the one that has just happened in the last five days or so, but they keep breaking down because of lack of trust on either side. So this is typical of the kind of thing that Quakers have been engaged with historically, working behind the scenes with people from either side, to find openings towards consistent mutual dialogue and engagement within as safe a setting as can be secured – where each side is deeply suspicious if it shows any weakness, of being ambushed or otherwise hijacked by the other.

Now we have just got two new replacement representatives there, in northern Uganda, who are working to support the Acholi religious leaders, who are themselves an ecumenical group involving Protestants, Anglicans and Catholics. What the religious leaders are trying to do is to open up space for dialogue between the Ugandan government and the army forces there on the one side and the LRA on the other. So what we are trying to look at today is to assess the security risk and the implications of our people going and being in the process as a kind of international guarantor to the process. That is a typical example of behind the scene Quakers' work.

We also have one interesting new programme just opening up in Israel and Palestine, where we are putting observers on the ground on both sides, reporting back on the reality of day to day circumstances on the ground. We are doing that on behalf of World Council of Churches, who asked us to run the British end of an ecumenical programme in Israel and Palestine. German churches, Swiss churches, and Scandinavian churches are already involved, and Quakers, because we already have a long historical background in the Middle East, going back to the 19th century, have been asked to run the British and Irish end of the operation, as far as recruitment of

staff is concerned, training them and then sending them into the field, then debriefing them when they come back, and arranging for them to talk to churches and community groups about the reality that they have found on the ground.

All of those programmes, I would say, are part of grass roots peace work overseas. But what I did want to talk about a little further is the fact we have representatives at much more senior levels, as well as working in solidarity and in support of people who are beleaguered in situations of conflict at the grass roots. In this country we have a parliamentary liaison officer, who expresses concerns to Parliament and lobbies parliament on particular conflict zones where we have experience. We have a similar office in Brussels, which talks with the European institutions on matters of Quaker concern. And we have two offices in Geneva and New York, each accredited with the United Nations. The Geneva office, run by British Quakers, and the New York office, run by American Quakers, are under the auspices of a body called the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). Of course, given what I have said about our governance, all of our Quaker bodies and churches around the world are on an equal footing, none of them has seniority over any of the others, and that is why we only have a consultative body to work between Friends. The office in Geneva carries out long-term work on international relationships. So we work with the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, we work on issues of disarmament - our particular mission there concerns the proliferation of small arms, and working for a legal regime to restrict the lethal world-wide trade in small arms.

The other area in which we are working at that sort of level is to try to assist people from the third world in strengthening their lobbying position with the international financial institutions in Washington – the IMF and the World Bank. The particular strength that we have is that we work in different localities around the world, and we work at the diplomatic level, like with the UN. We are one of the very few NGO groups that has consultative status at the UN and which can also call on experience on the ground, and say that this is what it is like. For instance in South Africa or Nicaragua we can say, ‘This is what IMF policy is doing on the ground in this particular farm.’ So we try to work at all levels.

And the final thing I should like to say is that we do not want to see ourselves only as a crisis response organisation. In the gathering of the clouds of war against Iraq, there are many groups that protest against war and what is being undertaken by the British and the American governments currently. Quakers are part of that movement that, but it is also important that we are seeking to take away the occasion of all war. We are working continuously for the long term, we work before wars break out - when the storm clouds are looming, we try to talk with people on all sides. We work during war, when in some circumstances we can, when people want us to be there because they know about us and trust our solidarity towards all those in all communities who work against bigotry and violence. And we work in the aftermaths.

Working in the aftermaths, which is what I have been particularly involved in over the last eleven years, is not only ‘sticking plaster stuff’. It is also preventative work for the next generation. That is why it is absolutely vital for us to be doing this work on dealing with the past in former Yugoslavia, because the situation remains as dry as a tinderbox, and the international forces which intervened in 1995 are slowly withdrawing. The idea was that they were supposed to broker a viable political

settlement between 1995 and now, but the fact is that the forces are withdrawing and going off to the next crisis, wherever it happens to be, but they have not achieved a political settlement at all. They have cobbled together various kind of institutions. We have at the moment Paddy Ashdown in Sarajevo for example, who is the head of the international effort as High Representative, but he is ruling by decree. And the more he rules by decree, the less popular he is. He is very unpopular at the moment. It is very interesting because there has been a series of international diplomats in Sarajevo, dealing with the very thorny problem of how to get some system of government together, just in Bosnia. And it has proved to be almost entirely intractable. That is one of the big dilemmas we are wrestling with the whole time. Our own intervention is very tiny, and it comes in this case on the back of a large international military intervention. So you could say that we are compromising ourselves by doing intervention in a place where there is a whole international military structure which for better or worse sets our context of operation, and which will withdraw sooner rather than later. What we are attempting to do is to help the locals to face such a withdrawal, and to establish the basis of some kind of political self-sufficiency. It is an ongoing problem which is not easy to resolve.

International intervention may save casualties at the time, and I would not argue that the intervention in Bosnia in 1995 did not save lives. It may have well saved tens and thousands of lives, because without it the fighting would have simply continued for another year or so, maybe longer, until it came to a complete standstill. But because of the intervention, the parties have been held in a forced stalemate. When the international forces withdraw, the stalemate will remain unstable and the fighting is highly likely to break out again. That is the big dilemma about military intervention from the outside. It is the same also with the current situation in Iraq. It is all very well to say you can move in and remove a present danger and expect things to be all right after that, but if you are an international peacekeeper, you are likely to find you have to be there for the duration, possibly for decades, because the cost of withdrawal is the falling back into anarchy again. Anyone who knows the detailed situation on the ground in Bosnia or Kosovo knows that despite the spin on behalf of the alleged efficacy of 'humanitarian intervention', the political prospects are grim. Still more so in the far bigger and more complex situation of Iraq.

So the work that we are trying to do is actually very tiny, but we are trying to give resources to local people to gain the confidence to learn to govern their own affairs and to do as much as possible towards this in as short a time as possible. In conclusion, pacifism for Quakers, or peace witness for Quakers, is **never** about saying, 'We are pacifists; we know better than you'. Its essence is being visibly in solidarity with people who find themselves apparently inextricably embroiled in violent conflict, and trying to assist and encourage them to find their own ways out of it in a variety of different practical manners.