

## **Excerpts from Faith and Practice of Britain Yearly Meeting, 1995.**

### **Chapter 20 - Living faithfully today**

#### **Moderation and abstinence**

(Sections 20.37 through 20.40 skipped.)

- 20.41 For those trapped in substance abuse, such advice [as in 20.40] may seem hollow. Commonalities exist between addictive behaviours in these substances and other compulsive actions such as in the areas of eating disorders, gambling, overwork and physical abuse. The causes go deep and may not be fully understood, but the resulting pain, fear, desperation and denial, damaging the abuser and all around that person, need to be supportively recognised. A meeting community should be ready to listen non-judgmentally, offer information about sources of help, refuse to enable people to continue in harmful patterns, and continue to offer an environment free from addictive practices.

*Faith and practice*, Baltimore Yearly Meeting, 1988

- 20.42 Friends, whatever ye are addicted to, the tempter will come in that thing; and when he can trouble you, then he gets advantage over you, and then you are gone. Stand still in that which is pure, after ye see yourselves; and then mercy comes in. After thou seest thoughts, and the temptations, do not think, but submit; and power comes. Stand still in that which shows and discovers; then doth strength immediately come. And stand still in the Light, and submit to it, and the other will be hushed and gone; and then content comes.

George Fox, 1652

### **Chapter 22 - Close relationships**

#### **SEXUALITY**

- 22.11 Human sexuality is a divine gift, forming part of the complex union of body, mind and spirit which is our humanity. The sexual expression of a loving relationship can bring delight, joy and fulfilment. For many, a life-long faithful relationship gives the opportunity for the greatest personal development and for the experience of sexual love which is spiritual in its quality and deeply mysterious. Others may find fulfilment in different ways. Whatever the moral climate, a sexual relationship is never purely a private matter without consequences for wider human relationships. Its effect on the community, and especially on children, must

always be considered. Sexual morality is an area of challenge and opportunity for living our testimonies to truth, nonviolence, equality, integrity and love, In our *Advices* of 1964 we are reminded:

No relationship can be a right one which makes use of another person through selfish desire.

1994

22.12 Our sexuality is an integral part of our being human, giving warmth and power to all our loving. Yet it is difficult for us to love both fully and wisely; too easy often to be niggardly and cautious in giving of ourselves, or grasping and selfish in satisfying our desires, These failures will lead to stress and conflict; but painful as they are, such experiences can still be a means of growth in understanding and an eventual strengthening of a relationship.

Elizabeth Seale Carnall, 1981

22.13 No doubt from the earliest days of Christianity there have been men and women for whom the sexual relationship was illumined and deepened by the Christian message of love, for whom it expressed true equality, an equal-sided valuation and respect, for whom coitus was an expression of tenderness and unity, not merely the gratification of animal urges. But it is one of the great tragedies of history that not until recent times has this implication of Christianity found public expression... Sexual activity is essentially neither good nor evil; it is a normal biological activity which, like most other human activities, can be indulged in destructively or creatively. Further, if we take impulses and experiences that are potentially wholesome and in a large measure unavoidable and characterise these as sinful, we create a great volume of unnecessary guilt and an explosive tension within the personality. When, as so often happens, the impulse breaks through the restriction, it does so with a ruthlessness and destructive energy that might not otherwise have been there. A distorted Christianity must bear some of the blame for the sexual disorders of society.

*Towards a Quaker view of sex*, 1963

22.14 In the journey through life, as we grow and mature, live singly or in a relationship with others our sexuality will grow, develop and change. Our sexual needs, drives and fantasies will be different at different stages in our life – as a teenager, a partner, a parent, an older person. Our sexuality is, throughout, an expression of ourselves. It is an integral part of our humanity and as such is subject to the leadings of the spirit. We should therefore give thanks for our sexuality and seek to nurture it both within ourselves and in our loving relationships.

Bill Edgar, 1994

22.15 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*

22.16 We affirm the love of God for all people, whatever their sexual orientation, and our conviction that sexuality is an important part of human beings as created by God, so that to reject people on the grounds of their sexual [orientation] is a denial of God's creation... We realise that our sexual nature can be a cause of great pain as well as great joy. It is up to each one of us to recognise this pain, ... to reach out to others as best we can, and to reflect on our own shortcomings in loving others... We need to overcome our fear of what is strange or different, because we are all vulnerable; we all need love.

*Wandsworth Preparative Meeting, 1989*

22.17 I was once asked by a young man with end-stage AIDS whether he would be acceptable to God, since he was a homosexual. I shall never forget the look on his face. I could not answer that depth of despair with pious phrases about the inward light or that of God in everyone... It is impossible to address AIDS without addressing sexuality... Being taught that one's innate bodily responses and sexuality are sinful does not give one a good basis for building loving, creative, intimate relationships. This is a problem for some heterosexuals too. Very many people with illnesses such as HIV and AIDS feel, alienated, outcasts, cut off from normal human society. In the face of the losses, actual or potential, which pile up in the course of illness – loss of health, of strength, of work, of sex, of income, of friends, of home, of independence, of choice, of life itself – one can quickly feel stripped of everything that gives one any sense of selfworth. It is but a short step from this to feeling that AIDS is God's punishment. Yet the gospel (good news) is that enlightened Christian teaching is about a God who suffers alongside us, and helps us to transcend loss and suffering.

*Gordon Macphail, 1989*

22.18 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 selfless love? – and is not every generalisation we make qualified by this?

*Towards a Quaker view of sex, 1963*

22.19 The Yearly Meeting has struggled to find unity on this [subject of sexuality], which comes so close to the personal identity and choices of each one of us. We are still struggling for the words which will help us, so that we may come to know the balance which allows us both to deal with the personal tensions of our own response to sexuality and also to see ourselves as all equal in the sight of God.

The extracts in this section are an anthology of the evolving experience of Friends and meetings. While our own [individual] experience does not identify with every extract, we recognise, in love, the Friend whose experience is not our own. We pray for ourselves, that we may not divide but keep together in our hearts.

London Yearly Meeting, 1994

Note: No attempt was made to change British spellings to American.

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