

# Study Booklet

Friends World Committee for Consultation

Finding the Prophetic Voice for our Time

**22nd Triennial**

Dublin, Ireland

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## How to Use This Booklet

*Finding the Prophetic Voice for Our Time* is the theme of the 22nd FWCC Triennial, with the text: 'it is love, then, that you should strive for. Set your hearts on spiritual gifts, especially the gift of proclaiming God's message.' (I Corinthians, 14:1).

This booklet is intended for the use of Friends who plan to attend the Triennial, for the groups of Friends whom they represent, and for Friends in meetings and churches everywhere. It contains a number of reflections on aspects of the theme by Friends from a variety of Quaker cultures. Each statement comes from the authentic experience of a member of our world-wide family of Friends, each seeking to be faithful according to his or her own light. FWCC triennials and world conferences provide precious opportunities for Friends from different cultures to meet face to face to worship together, listen to each other and share what it means to be a Friend. This booklet is a way to participate in that opportunity. As we learn about each other's experience of God, our task is not to judge, but rather to be open to truth as seen from the perspective of our sisters and brothers. Perhaps it will broaden our sense of what it means to be a Friend.

These essays are offered for reading and reflection on your own or in a group. David Blamires, editor of *Friends Quarterly* and Assistant Clerk of FWCC, has edited and arranged them for us. With the questions which follow them, we hope they will serve as a stimulus for personal and shared reflection. We suggest that you choose at least one essay which reflects a Quaker tradition different from your own. By participating in this study, Friends can have a share in the Triennial and help their representatives to prepare for the experience. Worship and sharing groups at the Triennial will be encouraged to spend some time working with the Triennial theme through the means of these essays and questions.

**International Planning Committee**  
February 2006

## Contents

Contributions from:	Page
1. Bainito Wamalwa	4
2. Ramon Gonzales Longoria	5
3. Konrad Tempel	6
4. Lon Fendall	7
5. Franco Perna	8
6. Mmereko Emily Mnisi	8
7. Julia Ryberg	9
8. Bridget Butt	10
9. Jan Arriens	11
10. T.S. Phori	12
11. Charles G. Lamb	12
12. Deborah Fisch	13
13. Elizabeth Duke	14

## **Introduction**

Several Friends from different Quaker traditions around the world have written short personal responses to the Triennial theme in order to help participants, and the Quaker groupings that they represent, prepare for the gathering. These responses reflect something of the variety to be found among Friends. The sequence of responses in the booklet has no purpose other than to offer stimulus through the juxtaposition of the individual pieces. The contributions are accompanied by queries to promote discussion.

**David Blamires, Editor**

*Assistant Clerk, FWCC*

### **1. Bainto Wamalwa (East Africa North YM)**

The Quaker movement, which began in the mid seventeenth century, was started on a strong prophetic foundation that has seen the Society of Friends grow around the world. The early Quakers, besides having a vision to find the truth, were called by God to steer the word of God by seeking to find the true pattern of Christ.

As the church is growing, more knowledge is getting into mankind through interpretation of the biblical truth found in the early church. We note that when God gets ready to do something new, He makes preparation in certain areas. He prepares a **people**, a **product**, and a **place** to perpetuate His plan. The Lord Jesus then raises a **man** with a **message** and a **ministry**, which produces a movement that further fulfils His will by various **means** and **methods**.

A prophet is one of the gifts of ministry that are given by Christ himself (Ephesians 4:11). This ministry majors in the Old Testament books and is also realised in the New Testament, especially in some of the Pauline epistles. Prophets in the New Testament church functioned in the following ways. (a) They were Spirit-filled proclaimers and interpreters of the word, called by God to warn, exhort, comfort and edify. (b) Like the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament prophets were called to expose sin, proclaim righteousness, warn of judgement to come, and combat worldliness and lukewarmness among God's people (Luke 1: 14-17). Because of their message of righteousness, prophets and their ministry can expect rejection by many in the churches during time of lukewarmness and apostasy. However, a church that rejects God's prophets will be a declining church, drifting toward worldliness and the compromise of Biblical truth (1 Corinthians 14:3).

In order to have the prophetic voice sounded in the church, the church today needs to identify and empower this ministry from among the membership. This ministry being one of the major ministries given by Christ, it seems to be a forgotten ministry in the church.

In regard to all these, the prophet's messages are not to be regarded as infallible. Their messages are subject to the evaluation of the church, other prophets and God's word. The congregation is required to discern and test whether their witness is from God (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

### **Queries**

Do we have prophets in our meetings and churches today?

How can we identify the true prophets in our meetings and churches today?

How useful is the prophet ministry in our meetings and churches today?

## **2. Ramon Gonzales Longoria (Cuba YM)**

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” God asks of Isaiah (6:8) and also of us. Here we see clearly the prophetic call. So we receive at the same time the message and the job to be done. We have to fulfil a mission given us by God. It is not our mission, our idea, our plan, our project, our word, but that of God for our world today, our world in crisis.

We must be attentive to hear the voice of God and share it. Our prophetic mission is not something to be represented in silence nor to be proclaimed only in sermons. The power of the Word of God is most effective when we “gossip the gospel (the ‘good news’) to our neighbour” as something which we live out within our specific group, not as external spectators; that is what it means to be committed. But it is not just a question of speaking, because if, for example, we had to raise our voice in the face of every violation of human rights we should be living in a permanent state of protest. It is a question of what we are told in 1 John 3:18: “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” It is to display “signs of peace”, to be instruments in the hands of God for establishing *shalom* (peace) in the world. It is going up to the world's carriage and climbing on board to express our solidarity today through a sincere effort to share the world's destiny by taking it God's message of liberation, love, peace, justice and hope, and to evoke from the world a loving response.

**Queries**

What are God's challenges to me?

What role can FWCC, your Yearly Meeting, your Meeting, or your church play in our response?

How can I contribute to the response to those challenges through those organisations?

What is the prophetic role of FWCC in the world today?

**3. Konrad Tempel (German YM)**

On one occasion I felt driven to confess in front of sixty young teachers for whom I was responsible that on the same afternoon I would take part in a civil disobedience campaign at a nuclear site. Not knowing why, I trembled while following the inner voice. A few days later one of the teachers told me that he felt challenged by this information. He said that because of it he had been able to overcome his fears and follow his conscience in another important matter. Truly, it wasn't me who had encouraged him.

Similarly in our meeting fifty years of joint efforts to become a Quaker have led my wife and me to the certainty that this search will never end. We are fortunate to have experienced inspiration and spiritual empowerment in many different ways. We feel we continually need to receive guiding messages from the world around us. So we strive to allow ourselves to be reached when a Friend feels called to speak in the meeting for worship. More and more, I have gained clearness about how to cope with such pieces of ministry, and I try to respond to this demand.

Don't take upon yourself to judge whether the divine is shining through your words when you minister. Don't pay attention to those who show off and suppose that they themselves are feeling a divine command. Turn instead to those who are frightened to speak in meeting at all and thus stumble and tremble while speaking spiritually, rather like the early Quakers quaking. No one knows at the time to whom this piece of devout ministry is directed and who will be touched by it.

**Queries**

Have you personally had the experience of being driven to act in response to a divine command or leading?

What are your own expectations in regard to vocal ministry in meeting for worship?

#### **4. Lon Fendall (Northwest YM)**

Fascinating stories from dozens of prophets are recorded in Scripture, most of them in the Old Testament. While their vocation of proclaiming God's message seems harmless enough, most of the prophets were expected to do so in dramatic and confrontational ways.

One of the prophets whom I admire the most was directed to proclaim God's truth to David, the Hebrew king at the time. The prophet's name was Nathan, and his assignment was what Friends have called "Speaking Truth to Power".

Nathan's message to David was a devastating one, something like hitting him between the eyes with a large stick. The message began with a harmless-sounding story about a much-loved pet lamb owned by a poor man. His rich neighbor received unexpected company and grabbed the nearest animal for the barbecue, the poor man's lamb.

When David heard the story he didn't get the point. It seemed heartless and greedy to make a lovable companion into roast lamb. But David himself has been cruel and greedy in sleeping with his neighbor's wife and then arranging for the husband's death in battle.

Nathan connected the story with King David's wrongdoing, using a short and powerful phrase: "You are the man!" This was the work of the prophet in its most powerful and frightening form, for David could not escape the truth in the story and the evil in his own actions.

May we be given a little of the courage of Nathan.

#### **Queries**

How do we respond to this story of Nathan and King David?

What other stories of prophecy challenge us?

## **5. Franco Perna (International Member, Italy)**

The Bible speaks of the gift of prophecy in proclaiming God's message, but it also warns against false prophets, operating in all fields of life. Here I shall rather seek the signs of prophecy in our time, expressed through the love for humankind.

I have often come across ordinary people and situations, which later became milestones along my life path. Were they the quiet, humble prophetic voices, never complaining or expecting acknowledgement that I did not grasp at the time? Friends' involvement in the wider society helps to spot such signs, wherever they may be.

People with a deep spiritual concern – not only among Friends – normally feel they have to obey their inner voice, follow the Light that gives us energy to strive for love in action, not proclaiming solutions to world problems, although in the process they may contribute to improving society.

Many such people work in conflict areas, and I have met some especially in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia, often under very difficult conditions. Sustaining them in practical ways, for me, meant acknowledging their action and witness as the prophetic voice operating in our time. Carl Jung wrote, "We do not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious." I continue to draw inspiration from this statement.

### **Queries**

How can we best recognise the signs of prophecy in our midst?

How can we enhance the fruits of the prophetic voice today?

## **6. Mmereko Emily Mnisi (Central and Southern Africa YM)**

I was recently invited to facilitate a workshop organised by the Anglican Church in Grahamstown, South Africa. This struck me as an opportunity to convey God's specific and relevant message for Christians today by expressing the connection between living your faith and non-violence. In my search I remembered a Sabeel document I had read whilst serving as an Ecumenical Accompanier in Palestine-Israel, *Faith and Struggle* by Jean Zaru. Her response to the oppression in her country uplifted by spirit because she used loving

words when referring to the oppressive systems and the enemies they created. The volatile situation in Palestine could easily drive a South African to relive the atrocities of Apartheid and the results of structural poverty that remains in a country for decades after freedom. I experienced difficulty in finding loving words to describe my enemy. This was my barrier to having a stimulating and encouraging voice in our time.

I embarked on a process described by George Fox as standing still in the Light within – until the Light reveals whatever is opposed to it. I had to bring a great deal of consciousness and forgiving love to bear on these parts of me in order to limit their damage. I then found the prophetic voice, lying within.

Proclaiming a message of God is not something we are required to do but are enabled to do – this requires exercising a choice, not only to accept the message but also to accept the great responsibility of being the messenger.

### **Queries**

What barriers do you experience to proclaiming God's message?

How would you personally deal with being oppressed?

### **7. Julia Ryberg (Sweden YM)**

When asked, "Who are you?" I will respond, "I am a Quaker." I am a life-long Friend, a public Friend, a Quaker employee and a Quaker seminary student. My days are spent interacting with my Quaker context – How to serve it? How to describe it? How to advocate it?

Recently, however, I have been feeling restless. What am I really called to do? Certainly, I am to continue with this work. Yet, I remind myself that it is serving God, advocating God, speaking for God that is my true calling – though I do it in the context of being a Quaker. That must make me a prophet: one who speaks for God. *I am a prophet!* The prophetic message of Jesus is also mine to proclaim.

I have just completed a paper on Rufus Jones. His life and ministry help me understand what it is to be a Quaker prophet. Fully grounded in his Quaker heritage and context, he reached out to a wide audience with a call to what is vital: God is reaching out to us constantly, and our deepest impulse as humans

is to reach back. That divine-human meeting, available to us all, is powerful enough to transform the world. Now, *that* is what I would like to voice in my lifetime!

Yes, I am very proud of my Quaker tradition, yet I want to remember that the first Friends were not “on fire” for Quakerism, but for the transformative experience of prophetic calling.

### **Queries**

How do we answer the question “Who are you?” and what do we understand as our calling? (This question can be dealt with both individually and on a corporate level.)

## **8. Bridget Butt (Burundi YM)**

Traditional warriors, fighting for their seat in a new parliament, using mobile phones to coordinate ambushes on Landcruisers travelling remote jungle roads; Uruguayan, Canadian, Pakistani (United Nations) peacekeepers carving out little pieces of “home” as they struggle to adapt to postings in foreign countries, protecting fragile peace accords. These are some of the “signs of the times”, where globalization meets the struggle to define ourselves in a poignant encounter where complexity is the order of the day.

Close friends from Burundi recently experienced the joy of the birth of their first child, Timothy. “Parents who love their child must prophesy,” they told me. “We must tell him what to avoid and when to avoid it, and help him to know what is good, because we love him!” They will speak to Tim telling him to share his toys with all Burundians, to resolve conflicts without resorting to physical force, to avoid sexual promiscuity, to worship God and not mammon. They will help Tim see that God is in control and able to break Burundi’s choking cycles of violence and poverty.

And where is this loving voice that will prophesy to us, in this world where the complex conflicts of poor African countries are the televised backdrop to the evening meals of small-town America?

The loving voice is that of the God of Creation, and the Word of prophecy is Jesus Christ, because statistics show that most of our wars, big and small, are

fought in the defence of the ones that we love. But Jesus says, “Love your enemies as well.”

### **Queries**

How do *you* see the role of parents in expressing prophecy?

## **9. Jan Arriens (Britain YM)**

What is the love that we should strive for? Why is love the greatest of the triumvirate “faith, hope and love”? How, we may even ask, do we have the capacity to love?

Plato described love as “the desire and pursuit of the whole”. This came from the Greek notion that humans had originally being double in size, with four limbs and two heads and so on, but were then cut in half. Ever since they had striven for completeness.

The love that Paul is talking about is also about completeness, about returning to the source. We face two ways at once in life: we are individuals who need to function; and somewhere deep inside us we carry a sense of connection with the great beyond. Our aloneness is, ultimately, illusory. We did not spring from aloneness and do not return to it. Our world is full of unseen connections and connectedness. That is the bridge we know as love; love is what transports us beyond the self to the greater whole, it is the gateway to and from the sublime.

In living our lives out of that spirit of love, we live in the Inward Light: a light that then becomes an outward one. The “spiritual gifts” are the silver cord of love: by entering deeply into that connectedness where we merge into the divine we cannot but help proclaim the message of the Mystery, as our testimony, without thought of reward, immersed in the present moment.

### **Queries**

What is your understanding of “wholeness” or “completeness” for your spiritual life?

How would you answer the questions that open this contribution?

## **10. T. S. Phori (Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting)**

The experience of the World Gathering of Young Friends held in both Lancaster, UK, and Kenya nourished my spiritual being incredibly. A challenge that I had to face when starting to think of the theme for the 2007 FWCC Triennial was in no way different from the challenge I had faced at WGYF – a challenge of experiencing God’s love from the diverse backgrounds of His people.

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy!” As differently shaped branches of the one True Vine, we will definitely absorb the prophetic voice of this message in different ways. And our perceptions on this will probably be influenced by our different understandings of the love of God itself.

However, we are all reminded of our continuing spiritual journeys to seek that divine guidance towards understanding God’s love. I believe that if we continually seek God’s love He will reveal to us His truth by which we should live and find peace in it. If we all tell ourselves that truth and live by it, we will be at peace with ourselves and with the world, and the world will see in us, through our works and God’s inspired deeds, “the way of love that we should follow, and the spiritual gifts that we should always desire.”

May we continue to seek to live our lives in the spirit of Love, Truth and Peace so that the world may know the Love, Truth and Peace of God!

### **Queries**

What experiences do you have of learning of God’s love from the different backgrounds of God’s people?

How can we share the spirit of Love, Truth and Peace throughout the world?

## **11. Charles G. Lamb (Ireland YM)**

Today, as at the start of George Fox’s ministry, God’s message to the world seems to be lost (see Fox’s *Journal*, ed. John L. Nickalls, pp. 34-39), hence the vision (Proverbs 29:18) and the call of Fox to turn people from “death to life, darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God again” (p. 283). Love is so important, as demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 14, but today we have got

neglectful in the preaching of God's message, which also includes redemption, regeneration, salvation, deliverance, etc., and the word "sin" is seldom used.

Is the word "Friend" a good description of where we stand now, gentle, accepting, tolerant, forgiving, etc., but soft on the preaching of the scriptures and proclaiming the truth as found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

In daily life sin now abounds all around us as related by every form of news media. Yes, John 3:19 is a present-day reality. So what is the call to the Triennial on its seventieth birthday? Have we got the voice? Have we got the call? Have we got the message? Have we got the vision? Or do we need to climb Pendle Hill again and see the fields white unto harvest?

Are you prepared to be a harvester and in obedience say, "Here am I, send me"?

Fox writes: "And I saw the harvest white, and the seed of God lying thick on the ground, as ever did wheat that was sown outwardly, and none to gather it, and for this I mourned with tears" (p. 21).

### **Queries**

Do you see Friends as "soft on the preaching of the scriptures and proclaiming the truth as found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ"?

What do you understand by the words "redemption, regeneration, salvation, deliverance"? How relevant are they to you in talking about your spiritual journey?

## **12. Deborah Fisch (Iowa Yearly Meeting)**

Finding the prophetic voice for our time could indicate that Friends still hear a call by God to proclaim a message to the world, but we don't necessarily know what it is. And indeed that is what I hear as I travel among Friends in the United States and Canada. There is a sense that God is calling us to carry something into the world that can speak to the condition of the world at this time. Our question seems to be, "What is it"? The first sentence of the passage from 1 Corinthians 14 answers our question. Friends, the prophetic message of God *has not* changed through the years. The message that Christ came to teach his people himself is *Love*. The unasked question today is, "How do we take the message of Love into our particular time?" We must first find that answer among ourselves. We must become intentional in rebuilding our beloved

communities, because the only way to take a message of love into the world is by first learning to live it ourselves. Fox admonished Friends: “Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people.” To find the prophetic voice for our time we must learn first to follow Fox’s advice in our own meetings. We must learn to love as Christ loves us, and, *as* we learn, venture with that love into the world.

### **Queries**

Do we share the joys and stumbling blocks we experience in our individual journeys with members of our own meetings or churches? Do we encourage each other and help to hold each other accountable in how we are living what we profess to believe?

How do we practice bridging the different understandings we have within our own meeting or church; between meetings within our yearly meetings; between the different branches of Friends? Do these opportunities provide us with lessons of how to live Love into the world?

What kind of patterns and examples are we individually, as meetings and churches? As Friends, are our lives outward evidence of Love, of Christ’s message?

### **16. Elizabeth Duke (Aotearoa/New Zealand YM)**

God’s prophetic voice speaks yesterday, today and tomorrow - repent, reconcile, renew.

Friends at the 2005 Asia-West Pacific Section Gathering gathered in Seoul Meeting House, Korea. During the worship Japanese Friends sorrowed for the crimes committed by their nation in Korea and elsewhere. Korean Friends responded in reconciling love.

The Biblical prophets speak of sin, punishment, and repentance; does this hard message deny our God-given capacity for good? I believe that repentance involves goodness. If we have done wrong, or profited from past wrongs, we have an inner sickness. Ignored, it poisons us. By working to right the wrongdoing we become healthy.

Metanoia, repentance, means transformation of the mind. By recognising our wrongdoing, we transform our relationship with others. The good which God has given us meets the good in them. If we have been wronged, we can welcome the healing in others and be reconciled; as we forgive, so are we forgiven.

The Maori people of Aotearoa New Zealand recognised Biblical prophets as spiritual leaders like their own. As colonialism took their land and livelihood, Maori prophets arose speaking to their times. Two prophets, Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi, committed their village, Parihaka, to non-violence, the villagers offered flowers and food to invading soldiers. The land was lost but the vision continues. Peace groups, including Friends, gathered at Parihaka in March 2006 for a Peace Festival, a sign of honour and renewal.

By repenting and accepting repentance, by being reconciled, we are renewed. We can walk and work as partners in God's new creation.

### **Queries**

What reconciliation may be needed in our lives, in our meetings or churches, or our Yearly Meetings?

Can we accept the repentance of others as well as repenting ourselves?



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