

YOUTH AND PROPHECY: Awakening to a New Creation
By Anthony Manusos

This weekend I had the opportunity to speak briefly about the spiritual dimensions of Quaker prophetic witness, as I have experienced it. When I heard that the theme of this year's PYM annual session was "Youth and Prophecy: Awakening to a New Creation," my heart leaped for joy. I coordinated a Quaker youth service program for many years, and I am deeply impressed by the youth program that our Yearly Meeting started several years ago. Youth and the prophetic spirit often go together.

I invited Cody Lowry to read a hymn called "Young and Fearless Prophet" that appears in a Quaker hymnal. I chose Cody because he is a young Friend (28 years old) who took part in the AFSC youth service projects I coordinated in Mexico and elsewhere, and he recently took part in the delegation I led to Rep Judy Chu's office to urge her to support the repeal of the Authorization for the Use of Military Force. Cody also showed up when a group of 6 Orange Grove Friends along with other community leaders went to the Pasadena City Council to urge them to start a Housing Commission. On that occasion, Cody spontaneously composed a poem that captured the attention of the City Council members. He read the following poem with deep conviction that moved us so much we entered into a period of silent worship:

O young and fearless Prophet
of ancient Galilee
thy life is still a summons
to serve humanity;
to make our thoughts and actions
less prone to please the crowd,
to stand with humble courage
for truth with hearts unbowed.

O help us stand unswerving
against war's bloody way,
where hate and lust and falsehood
hold back your holy sway;
forbid false love of country
that blinds us to his call,
who lifts above the nations
the neighborhood of all.

Create in us the splendor
That dawns when hearts are kind,
That knows not race nor station
As boundaries of the mind;
That learns to value beauty
In heart, or mind or soul,
And longs to see God's children

As sacred, perfect, whole.
Stir up in us a protest
against unneeded wealth,
for some go starved and hungry
who plead for work and health;
once more to hear thy challenge
above our noisy day,
again to lead us forward
along God's holy way.

(From the Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal (FGC, 1996), #98, revised from the original by S. Ralph Harlow)

“Young and Fearless Prophet” beautifully captures the spirit of Quaker prophetic witness. When George Fox began his ministry, he was young and fearless, willing to speak truth to power, no matter what the personal consequences. Early Friends, like early Christians, called not only for personal transformation, but also for a society free from war and violence, and free from economic injustice.

Today’s Religious Society of Friends, and Pacific Yearly Meeting, are heirs to that liberating legacy. We are known as a Peace Church, and we have a reputation for being “quiet rebels,” on the forefront of movements for social change. During the past decade, Friends have worked for immigration reform and have sought to end indefinite solitary confinement and torture. We have protested the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and many of us are working with FCNL on its nation-wide campaign to “end endless war” by repealing the Authorization for the Use of Military Force, which was passed after 9/11 and gives the President carte blanche to do virtually anything he wants to “combat terrorism.” We have called for an end to drone warfare, and FCNL has made this the focus of its Young Friends Lobby Day, which is taking place in DC this spring. It is encouraging to know that FCNL and AFSC are involved with youth empowerment and leadership development as well as lobbying and working for peace and justice.

We have accomplished much, with Divine assistance and grace, but our work is not over. We need to ask ourselves tough questions, such as: how are we responding to the injustices and suffering in today’s world? Are we fearless prophets, or have we become somnolent? How do we become fully awake and fully alive?

As we open our hearts, and surrender our lives, to the Inward Light, we enter into a practice that can be painful and difficult. We allow ourselves to feel our own pain, and the suffering of the world, without the defenses of ego and the distractions of everyday life. When we see our own hurts, and the world’s pain, in the Light of Divine Love, we become “broken and tender.” If we surrender to that love, we experience inward healing, and inward peace, and we are able to share that peace with the world.

The world desperately needs peace makers and many look to Friends to point the way.

It is good news that Pacific Yearly Meeting is taking steps to empower youth and help them to grow in their faith. For their sake, as well as our own, we need to reclaim our prophetic voice. We need to find the courage and faith to speak out with authority, with love, and with honesty, whenever we witness injustice and suffering in the world. We need to take action, however small initially, trusting that Way will open if we are faithful to the Inward Light. If we are faithful, and fearless, we can move forward with loving hearts and open minds and make a difference in the world.

I began my message with a song about a young and fearless prophet. I'd like to conclude with a song about the new creation, written by a Baptist, and attributed to Quakers and popularized by Pete Seeger. This beautiful song reminds us that the new creation we seek is a world free from tyranny, and overflowing with inward peace and love.

My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, tho' far-off hymn
That hails a new creation;
Thro' all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul--
How can I keep from singing?

What though the tempest loudly roars?
I hear the truth, it liveth.
What tho' the darkness round me close,
Songs in the night it giveth.
No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that rock I'm clinging;
Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?

When tyrants tremble, sick with fear,
And hear their death-knell ringing,
When friends rejoice both far and near,
How can I keep from singing?
In prison cell and dungeon vile,
Our thoughts to them go winging;
When friends by shame are undefiled,
How can I keep from singing?

I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin;
I see the blue above it;
And day by day this pathway smooths,
Since first I learned to love it;
The peace of God makes fresh my heart,
A fountain ever springing;

All things are mine since I am his—
How can I keep from singing?

(Rise Up Singing, p. 43, revised from the original version in Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal, #245)