



A Call to Quakers for Stepped-Up Evangelism

Miriam Khamadi Were

Nairobi Yearly Meeting of Friends

FUM 2002 Triennial Sessions

July 10-15, 2002

Nairobi, Kenya

As we celebrate 100 years of the presence of Quakerism in East Africa, let me say to all who read this: *Mirembe muno* — much peace to you!

I am eternally grateful that Quaker missionaries left the comfort of their homes to come to East Africa and share the love of Christ in the early 1900s. I am eternally grateful they came where both my parents could hear about God as presented in the Bible and revealed in Jesus Christ; grateful that as youngsters our parents joined the Friends Church. I am eternally grateful the Light within them led our parents to live the Peace Testimony. In a community where training a wife by beatings was routine, my father, Joel Khamadi Murila, never laid his hand on my mother, Ziporah Vunoro Wingokho, in their 38 years of marriage until Mama went to be with the Lord. When we received our new mother, Jones Ingadi, the same principle applied.

Children in Friends villages did not experience brutality. While we were spanked and even occasionally caned, it was in a disciplined context, usually by a committee with clear explanations as to why it was being done. It was not the constant and haphazard brutality we saw others of our age subjected to as parents sought total submission of their children. Our Quaker parents recognized that of God in us, and discipline was through counseling us rather than haphazard parental rages. As for our family, my parents both saw value in their three sons and seven daughters, even though some in the world called us daughters "frogs," to imply that girls were of little value.

I am eternally grateful that the Word reached me at Kaimosi Girls' Boarding School. When I was 13 years old, I received Jesus Christ as my Savior, Lord and Friend.

Because of the influence of my parents and the direct influence from my personal relationship with God, my life has been far richer than it could have been, and this has helped me to enrich the lives of others. This is true of many Friends in Africa, the continent with the largest number of Friends in the world!

Imagine then, the amazement we experience when — even 100 years later — we hear of Quakers in the West still debating whether sending missionaries was a good thing! How limiting it is to connect the current difficulties in Africa to missionaries rather than to the larger historical reality! Even in these difficulties, we, African and other Friends, have had a moderating influence right from the time of transition from colonial to national governments. But in the manner of Friends, we do not advertise how the Lord is using many of us.

I am among those who firmly believe that with the enablement of the Holy Spirit, we in Africa are overcoming evil with good, because we are founded on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and guided by the Quaker peace testimony. Life on our continent is bright because the Light of Jesus Christ is shining in it! I thank each missionary who came and their descendants, I thank every family that allowed their members to be missionaries and thank those who have supported the work of missionaries with prayers, counsel and finances.

Three Fallacies at the Heart of Questioning the Evangelizing Work of Missionaries

In my travels in the West and also in some Quaker publications, it is sometimes implied that the evangelizing work of missionaries to the less industrialized countries was a "disturbance to the gradual evolution of societies."

1. The first fallacy is based in the false premise that societies in the West went through gradual evolution without interference from Christianity. Yet the West is one of the most Christianized parts of the world. Since Jesus Christ was not a native of the West, the Christian message got to the west through missionary evangelism!

No society has developed without rubbing shoulders with the values of other societies. This happening was not unique to missionaries working in our countries. Those who blame the work of missionaries forget that if they live in the West, they themselves have been influenced by values that have reached them from Christian evangelism; values that were internalized by their ancestors. This point is so often missed by those who say that "Africans should have been left alone to develop at their own pace" when their own societies were not left alone to develop at *their* own pace!

It is a fallacy to think that only Africans, Asians or Latinos have been influenced by Christian missionaries. Among the Quakers, how would you classify the work of George Fox in the New Colonies? William Penn? John Woolman? Wasn't one of George Fox's profound revelations seeing fields ready for harvest and working "to bring in the harvest?" Didn't he see, in the eye of his Spirit, an ocean of darkness that Friends needed to respond to — bringing the shepherdless to the Chief Shepherd, thus providing a way for people to walk through the ocean of darkness to the Ocean of Light? How could this happen without evangelism?

2. The second fallacy is that if missionaries had not come, things would have moved on blissfully as societies evolved at their own pace. This point of view is based on naiveté and ignorance. Before Quaker and other missionaries set foot in Africa, traders were already there from across the Atlantic, the Arab world and the Indian Ocean. Among these were slave traders who destroyed physical and community life beyond recognition. African societies were not being left alone to gradually evolve into excellent societies; there were already violent external forces tearing societies, communities and families apart.

From the 1500s to the 1900s, many violent external forces impinged upon Africa. The 1884 Berlin Conference on the Scramble for Africa heightened the competition between colonizing powers who applied greater brutality to Africans they claimed for themselves while at the same time ensuring their Africans toed the line and did not defect to the competitors.

This is the context and environment into which the early missionaries came with a counter message: the message of one God who created and loves us all and who desires all people to live like family! What a fantastic message in the midst of the madness that had been happening for years! Because missionaries are just people, they sometimes confused their cultural preferences, i.e., the piano, for holiness while associating what was not familiar, i.e., a drum, with evil. But given the central message they came to give, those misunderstandings have now been corrected and are fairly trivial in the sweep of history.

3. The outstanding contribution made by George Fox and other Friends was to recognize that even though evil was rampant, still, there was that of God and the Light Within all people. I think the mistake among many Quakers who oppose evangelism is they have misinterpreted this revelation to imply that The Light Within and that of God in everyone are the only influences in human beings! How can we continue to think this way given the holocaust of World War II, the blatant efforts of some to disinherit others of the resources of this earth, the openly practiced corruption that makes some people wealthier while others on their doorsteps live subhuman lives? How can we expect that silent meditation will lead everyone to the right answer when The Way has not been revealed? Even Jesus had to preach!

I am fully persuaded that recognizing in ourselves and in others both that of God as well as the evil force in operation is the way to peace. When we ignore this, we open ourselves to unlimited destruction from within and from without. Goodness is gentle and waits to be invited and nurtured. Evil is brutal and forcefully invades our spirits, our minds and our bodies. When we are not deliberately nurturing holiness as the basis for goodness and as the means of resisting evil, we give a free hand to brutal forces to invade and snuff out the Light Within, both in ourselves and in others.

Quakerism offers the most humane way for stepped-up evangelism. While carrying out the Great Commission, we still relate to people with that of God in them, people with the Light Within, even though the evil one may have dimmed the Light. We should then have more humane and gentler dealings with other human beings on issues of culture when sharing the central message of Jesus Christ at the heart of which is love, peace and right sharing of resources. Let Quakers proclaim the message to the whole world that there is one, even Christ Jesus who can speak to their condition. Let there be more Quaker missionaries proclaiming this message of love and peace in a troubled world.

Lord, let this realization touch me now. Amen.

About the Author

Miriam Khamadi Were is a Kenyan Quaker, a wife, mother and grandmother. She has a Medical Doctor's degree from the University of Nairobi and a Doctorate in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University. She wrote this article for the July 2002 issue of *Quaker Life* magazine, in honor of the centennial of the arrival of Quaker missionaries in Kenya.

About the Wider Quaker Fellowship

Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas, works to facilitate loving understanding of diversities among Friends while we discover together, with God's help, our common spiritual ground, and to facilitate full expression of our Friends' testimonies in the world. Friends World Committee's Wider Quaker Fellowship program is a ministry of literature. Through our mailings of readings, we seek to lift up voices of Friends of different countries, languages and Quaker traditions, and invite all to enter into spiritual community with Friends.

Copyright © 2002 Friends United Meeting

Reprinted, with permission,

from the July 2002 issue of *Quaker Life*

by the

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP

a program of Friends World Committee for Consultation,

Section of the Americas

1506 Race Street

Philadelphia, PA 19102-1498 ■ USA

Tel: 215-241-7293 ■ Fax: 215-241-7285

E-mail: Americas@fwccamericas.org