

Quaker Earthcare Witness

Earthcare for Friends

Unit 1

Our Faith as a Foundation for Earthcare

by Ruah Swennerfelt

Purposes of this unit

1. To understand the spiritual foundation of our role as Friends, as Christians, to care for the many gifts of Creation.
2. To see where the Bible guides and informs our actions today.
3. To consider a Christian approach to Earthcare from the perspective of someone who is not a Friend.
4. To prompt spirit-led discussion about what our next steps might be in bringing our lives into right relationship with Creation.

Sacred texts and other inspirational readings

Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land! The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing: Surely many houses shall be desolate, large, and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah.

—Isaiah 5:8–10

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.”

—Genesis 9:8–10

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

—Exodus 3:4–5

It is often a challenge to put our beliefs and values into action. We all want to make the world a better place for future generations. But it feels like there’s so much to do, and we wonder if our efforts will matter. Individuals and small groups of people do have the power to make positive changes that benefit our neighbors, ourselves, and the planet. Communities of faith have an important leadership role to play on issues of environmental and social justice. With every purchase we make, every piece of junk mail we eliminate, and every ounce of pesticide we don’t use, we’re making important choices and sending messages of hope and change to the rest of the world.

—Betsy Taylor, Executive Director, Center for a New American Dream

Hymns and songs

Let All Things Now Living. *Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal*, #46. Earth

Was Given as a Garden. *Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal*, #307.

God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens. *Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal*, #309.

Issue presentations

Introduction

WHY HAVE WE WRITTEN a book on Earthcare from a Quaker perspective? It's with the hope that all Friends will be moved to work together to make the planet healthy for all its inhabitants. It's not about approving Minutes (though that is often a first step), and it's not about recognizing that Earthcare may be an emerging Testimony (though that may happen). It's about you and me heeding the call to make the necessary changes in our outlooks and our lives to reduce the stresses that humans are inflicting on the planet. It's about our twin understandings that care of the earth includes caring for the plight of humans (who are part of the Earth), and that we can't separate caring for humans from ensuring that the health of this living planet is not damaged by the way we draw on its resources.

Our foundation

WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION for our belief that we as Friends can and should make a difference in the world? How can Friends from the different traditions work together to secure a future for not only our children's children's children, but for all the lushness and for all the diverse beings on the planet?

One way is to meet under the umbrella of a strong Earthcare movement among Christians and other faith communities in the United States. The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group has brought many denominations together in action on the issue of energy use. In many states, groups have started "Interfaith Power and Light" organizations, emphasizing and supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy. Another way is to share our concerns and leadings with other Friends groups (including Quaker Earthcare Witness). Friends United Meeting and many Yearly and Monthly meetings have approved a variety of Minutes about Earthcare (see Appendix A). Beyond the approval of Minutes, many have been led to works of conservation, energy efficiency, use of recycled and recyclable products, and more.

The role of the Bible

THE TWO ARTICLES in this unit provide important general background information and ideas about spiritually-based Earthcare. Steven Davison worked with Quaker Earthcare Witness in its formation. His ideas and writings were helpful in bringing together differing views of our relationship with creation. Although the article by Larry Rasmussen was primarily written to support the Earth Charter (see Unit 15), his analysis of the Christian response to the environmental crisis is inspiring. Even if you are from a less biblically-based tradition, these articles have much to offer you. They inform us of a language that we may use to communicate our ideas and strengthen the foundation for what we will learn in the remaining units.

_____Article 1_____

Christian Earth Stewardship

by Steven Davison

(Reprinted from *Becoming a Friend to the Creation, Earthcare Leaven for Friends and Friends' Meetings*, Quaker Earthcare Witness, 1994 [out of print].)

Introduction

THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION has responded to the environmental crisis in a number of ways. The mainstream of this response has often addressed itself to a theology and practice of "earth stewardship." The heart of this approach has been a search for a new relationship with creation and with God in relation to Creation that shares the assumptions of the wider Christian tradition but challenges its environmental awareness and behavior. This essay is, first, an attempt to introduce readers to the assumptions and challenges of Earth stewardship, and, second, a very partial exploration of their usefulness through some personal observations and some queries

which might guide further discussion.

The challenges which the Earth stewardship “movement” presents are largely informed by the revelation and perspective of the environmental movement; its *assumptions* are largely informed by the revelations and perspectives of the Bible and of the theological reflection which the Bible has inspired. Though it rarely addresses environmental issues *per se*, some Christian writers have held this biblical tradition up to the light of environmental concerns to see what principles might emerge. These writers have then applied these principles in various forms and combinations to the Christian community’s environmental behavior, though they have not necessarily expressed these principles in the forms given below. These efforts are beginning to define a more or less coherent theology of Earth stewardship, and they are beginning to affect the actions of churches, especially at the denominational level of organization.

In the next section, I offer a concise list and definition of *9½ Principles of Christian Earth Stewardship* which I have culled from my reading. This reading has included three sources: the Bible itself, contemporary Earth stewardship writers, and the writings of Friends, especially George Fox and John Woolman. Some I have found stated explicitly in the form I have given them. Each has been found in enough sources to seem worthy of inclusion.

I have gathered them into three groups: The first group of principles define God’s relationship with Creation. The second defines humanity’s relationship with Creation. The third defines our relationship with God in relation to Creation.

In the next section, entitled “Exploring Earth Stewardship,” I question these principles with some personal observations and then offer some queries, which are grouped in the same three-fold way. These observations and queries are offered as initial aids to a process of discernment: As Friends seek a faith and practice that will inspire, guide, and strengthen us in the face of an intensifying ecological crisis, new leadings will come. Our tradition is to test such leadings in the light of scripture, in the light of our Quaker history and tradition, and, ultimately, in the Light of the corporate body gathered in spirit-led worship. To be faithful in this process, we must know what our tradition is in order to use it as a benchmark. The present work is a contribution to this process.

9½ Principles of Christian Earth Stewardship

1. Creation is *good* but not *holy*.
Though its goodness is affirmed, creation is not holy in itself.
 2. God is *transcendent* and *Other* than creation.
God may be present in Creation by choice in specific places for specific purposes in specific moments, as when speaking through the Burning Bush. But God’s presence does not *live* in Creation in any way that might invite the worship of Creation.
 3. God is the sovereign proprietor of creation.
“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalms 24:1)
 4. The “purpose” of creation is to glorify God.
“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” (Psalms 19:1) By inference, then, the purpose of Earth stewardship is to glorify God.
 5. We have been given *dominion* over creation as God’s *stewards*.
“God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’” (Genesis 1:28) We have been put in the “garden” to “till it and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15) Conversely, we lose our right to dominion when we violate our responsibilities in stewardship.
- 5½. The privilege of God’s special favor extends beyond dominion.
We are created in God’s image, we enjoy exalted status (see Psalm 8) and God’s special favor (see Matthew 10:29–31). Thus, a principle of spiritual anthropocentrism is a corollary of our dominion.

6. The rightful context for stewardship is *covenant*.
With the covenantal promise of blessing and dominion comes responsibility, the obligation to steward the gifts God has given us according to God's will.
7. Irresponsible Earth stewardship is a sin.
This sin results from the fall and continues out of the same over-reaching pridefulness. Though "ecological sin" is never defined explicitly in the Bible, it is implicit, especially in the words of the prophets and the "stewardship" parables of Jesus. As with other sins, we will be held accountable for our ecological sins before God.
8. Because creation is a gift to all humanity which we only hold in trust, there is a social justice dimension to Earth stewardship.
This is most clear in the prophets, especially Amos and Isaiah. A great deal of contemporary Earth stewardship writing comes from Christians in the Third World.
9. We have been promised that harmony will be restored between us and creation when we are saved.
Put another way, obeying God's will as God's stewards will bring us into a "new Creation," for which the "peaceable kingdom" passage in Isaiah 11 is the most famous expression. "New Creation" imagery also figures prominently in George Fox's thinking; Fox seems to have derived this imagery from Revelations and the letters of Paul.

Summary

CONDENSED INTO A CONCISE STATEMENT, we might say that we have been given Creation in trust by God, its creator, sovereign, and true owner; that we are stewards of God's property; and that this dominion over Creation, which is only one of our blessings as God's chosen people, is to be tempered by obedience to God's will; and that ecological mismanagement is a sin. Through our covenantal right alignment with God's will, Creation will be included in our own ultimate salvation.

Exploring earth stewardship: some observations

I HAVE PRESENTED these principles as expressing the "leadings" of the mainstream of the Christian tradition today on environmental issues. I think this is true, as far as any such broad generalization goes. Based on conversations in my own Yearly Meeting and especially at the Friends United Meeting Triennial in 1993, I believe they also speak for many of the Christian Friends, who are a clear majority in the Society worldwide.

By contrast, I know that many Friends in the "liberal, silent tradition" find these principles unsatisfactory in varying degrees. I do myself. [*Editor's note: Unprogrammed Friends do include many "liberal" and "conservative" Christians.*] Nevertheless, I believe that we must take them seriously and not reject them out of hand. I have two reasons for feeling this way:

First, it is something that we must do to be faithful in our search for an ecological faith and practice. As I said in the introduction, our processes of discernment require that we know what our tradition is as a starting point, and yet not take it for granted, that we hold our tradition in the same Light which inspired it in the first place and which guides us today. An honest, well-informed, spirit-led discernment of our own tradition is, it seems to me, a *sine qua non* for going forward. How can we go forward if we don't know where we've been or how we got where we are? How can we *all* go forward together, which is a central principle of Quaker governance, unless we learn to speak and to hear each other's language?

The second reason is that I believe there are powerful principles of truth at the core of each of these principles which have yet to be thoroughly developed. If we took full responsibility for them, they would take us a long way.

Let me give just one example, on land ownership. God's sovereign ownership of Creation is explicitly tied to the inalienable nature of land in [ancient] Israel's family-oriented land-tenure law, which explicitly prohibits the private and corporate ownership of land (see Leviticus 25, especially). This is potentially a radical platform for agricultural policy and land reform and a powerful prophetic challenge to corporate capitalism.

Nevertheless, Earth stewardship presents us with quite a lot of problems. In the next section, I take a very brief look at some of these, principle by principle. But first I want to look at two problems affecting the stewardship tradition as a whole:

First, historically, it is an abject failure. Some would even blame the Christian tradition for the ecological crisis itself, especially as it has shaped the assumptions behind our view of the world and our place in it. At the least, Christian leaders, writers, and communities have not stood in the way of the destruction of Creation until very recently. Why not, when virtually all of the principles of Earth stewardship are at least 2,500 years old?

The second problem is institutional, ecclesiastical, political. The Christian tradition has never created concrete institutions and processes by which the community might put these principles into practical effect. There has never been a way to bring the elements of our faith to bear on actual land management and development decisions.

I believe a thorough evaluation of the Earth stewardship tradition needs to keep the historical and practical in mind. It should seek rigorously the stops in the tradition which prevent its becoming practical. It also should reveal the implications and the positive potential of the principles of Earth stewardship if they were energetically applied.

The first step in our discernment process is to acquaint ourselves with our tradition. We should do this not just because it represents our roots in the past, but also because it is the measure of light given to the majority of Friends today. To help in this process of discernment, I offer some queries, which are excerpted from a much more extensive list. Perhaps I should call them just questions, because a query should invite an inward journey without suggesting direction, and some of the questions below are not so neutral.

Exploring earth stewardship: questions on God's relationship with Creation

CREATION IS GOOD, but not holy. God is other than Creation and beyond it and, by virtue of having created it, God is its sovereign owner. Creation's purpose is to glorify God.

For over 3,000 years, the tradition has feared and fought "Baalism," that is, the translation of the experience of God in the natural world into a worship of God *as* the natural world. How do we name our genuine experiences of the holy in Creation? How do we share and seek these experiences with others?

The Trinity and the presence of God in Creation: Has the Creator ever rested? Are we comfortable recognizing Christ in His creative and sustaining role in creation? Can creation be animated with life without the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Is creation more than just God's property? If we believe God is present in Creation, does *eco-cide* equal *dei-cide* (that is, the diminution of the presence of God itself)? If so, how does this affect our relationship with Creation?

For ancient Israel, God's sovereign ownership of Creation precluded its private or even corporate ownership. If we still accept the first principle, then how are we to treat land tenure today?

On humanity's relationship with creation

WE HAVE BEEN given Creation as a gift in trust; we have dominion over it, but in the spirit of stewardship. As God's stewards, we enjoy God's special blessing as a favored species.

What are the limits of our dominion in stewardship? If we care for Creation on the Creator's behalf, at what point are we obligated to seek God's will on specific matters of stewardship before acting? How do we seek God's will? How do we recognize answers to this search and test them? To what degree do the principles of Quaker process represent a useful contribution to these problems of active, practical, spirit-led stewardship?

The roots of the word "steward" mean "ward of the sty," that is, the one given responsibility for the military protection of the lord's animal wealth and, by extension, for protection of the estate's continued sustenance. Does the hierarchical and military nature of the feudal vocabulary of *Lord*, *dominion*, and *steward* serve us well in the face of contemporary environmental crisis? Why would we retain such a vocabulary in our religious and "eco-religious" lives when we have abandoned it in our social and political culture?

On our relationship with God in relation to creation

COVENANT is the rightful context for Earth stewardship. In this context, irresponsible Earth stewardship is a sin for which we shall be held accountable by God. This understanding of righteousness and sinfulness as regards treatment of Creation also includes dimensions of gender, social, racial, economic, and political justice. We have been promised that harmony will be restored between us and Creation when harmony between us and God has been restored.

Covenant is a relationship of mutual promise and responsibility into which one enters consciously and voluntarily, as in a marriage or meeting membership. The original covenant between Israel and Yahweh included the land as a third partner. Can we extend our relationships with each other and with God to include the land as well? How?

Can we look to the principles of “deep ecology” to develop a “deep Quakerism,” a set of laws or principles that we would accept as binding in ways similar to the land management laws in Israel’s covenant with Yahweh? What do the spiritways of indigenous peoples have to offer us for our understanding of covenantal relationship with the land?

For Christians, the message and life of Jesus are a prescription for right living. Given that Jesus did not teach his community specifically on the topic of Earth stewardship, what principles do we find implicit in the teaching we do have?

Contemplating the end of the world: What are the implications for us of Christian eschatology, of a belief in the “end of the world” as God’s final saving act, in the face of the present ecological and nuclear proliferation crises?

To the degree that we are Christians concerned with sin and salvation, repentance and forgiveness, how do we confess our failure as Earth stewards and our oppression of land-based peoples, whose land and stewardship we have usurped? How do we repent, or turn around? Put another way: If irresponsible Earth stewardship is a sin, how and when will Christians and Christian communities be held accountable by God? How can we establish concrete forms of accountability that will actually effect community behavior to protect creation? Is salvation just for individual souls in some hoped-for future, or for bodies and communities in the here and now, as well?

To the degree that we are post-Christian, finding the Christian salvific paradigm unhelpful, what other tenets of faith and practice serve to guide the community in its practical land-use and development decisions? How do we incorporate constructive discipline and useful limits in the life of the community without “sin,” without some framework for naming and correcting wrongdoing?

Individualism and eco-religious life: To what degree do we understand salvation or wholeness as a matter for the human individual rather than for the wider human and non-human community? On the model of deep ecology, to what degree is the community more important than the individual? To what degree do Christian and Quaker culture suffer for unbalanced individualism?

STEVEN DAVISON is currently writing two books, a land-based reading of the gospel of Jesus, tentatively titled Good News for the Land: Economics, Politics and Community in the Commonwealth of God, and an economic history of Friends titled Quakerism and Capitalism. He is active with the recently formed Quaker Eco-Witness for National Legislation (QEW-NL), helping to develop Quaker Eco-101 (QE-101) curriculum materials. He is an avid student of the Bible and of Quaker history, faith, and practice. His ministries include Bible study and education, recovery of and spirit-led experimentation with the faith and practice of traditional Quaker ministry, and land-based spirituality. Steven is a member of Yardley Meeting, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.



Outdoor worship at a Friends gathering

 Article 2

The Whole of Earthly Life

by Larry Rasmussen

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IN ONE OF THE LATER LETTERS from prison [in Nazi Germany] in 1944, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes his closest friend and *alter ego*, Eberhard Bethge, and gently corrects him. Bethge, responding to Bonhoeffer's thoughts on the "this-worldliness" of faith, has registered the mistaken notion that "the Bible hasn't much to say about health, fortune, vigour, etc."¹ Bonhoeffer, who had earlier declared his deep love for the Old Testament and cautioned Christians about moving on to the New Testament "too soon," points out the Hebrew Bible's sturdy theme of God's blessing, "which includes in itself all earthly good." "In that blessing," he tells Bethge, "the whole of earthly life is claimed for God, and it includes all [God's] promises."²

The whole of earthly life, together with its as-yet-unrealized possibilities ["all God's promises"], was voiced by a theologian whose own life came to a premature and violent end well over fifty years ago: Isn't this an odd way to introduce the Earth Charter [*see complete text of the Earth Charter in Unit 17*], itself a not-yet-finished creation that Bonhoeffer might have welcomed but could not have imagined?

Let me explain. The genius of the Charter is that its scope, too, is the whole of earthly life. Its subject is not, say, "the environment" only, or "society" only, in the manner of past charters. "Respect and Care for the Community of Life" is its first section, "Respect Earth and life in all its diversity" its first principle. Furthermore, unlike most charters, it invites and embodies the spiritual wisdom of diverse religious traditions, Bonhoeffer's included. Religious values suffuse the Charter, even when great care is taken in this "people's treaty" not to "establish" any one faith. At the same time the Charter, in another mark of its genius, subtly prods all traditions to undergo the same conversion-to-Earth that Bonhoeffer himself did in his "this-worldly" Christianity. "Earth remains our Mother, as God remains our Father," he said in a 1928 address on "The Foundations of Christian Ethics," "and our Mother will only lay in the Father's arms those who remain true to her. Earth and its distress—that is the Christian's 'Song of Songs.'"³ "Earth and its distress" is the Earth Charter's burden, blessing and song as well.

This turn-to-the-earth—all of it, together, without exception—means that religious devotees don't exit the Charter and its ethos on the same terms they entered. There is, to be sure, sufficient common content, shared ethos, and "aha!" substance to confirm and anchor varied religious traditions anew, for an epoch of Earth-honoring faith. Yet the Charter is not a closed global ethic. It does not stipulate any single set of norms or endorse any particular worldview. It functions more like a moral "dome" or as moral "habitat," sheltering and nurturing the practices of plural peoples and plural values in the same moment that it confronts them in bracing ways.

But how might we further think about the Charter's embrace of Earth, in ways that also foster Christianity's own conversion to it?

The tack taken here is to hover around the theme of "Creation as community." Granted, that renders this a specifically Christian meditation, since "creation" is a theological word the Charter does not use. By contrast, "community" is the Charter's own language. "Creation as community" can thus pose the test: Can the Charter endorse our richest traditions of faith and understanding and at the same time ask more of them than we brought? Can its moral habitat form ours?

"Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life." These sentences from the Charter's Preamble are new and old, conserving and reforming, and both at once.

Old and conserving. From time immemorial religious traditions have made an audacious claim: The cosmos itself is a community. Christianity has certainly done so. All that exists, co-exists. All that is, belongs. "All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful"—to remember a hymn—have standing in, with, and before the great God who is their Source. Creation, under God and indivisible, is one.

Moreover, in some of the Christian sources—the Yahwist traditions of the Hebrew Bible and its Wisdom literature, for example, or the writings of numerous Christian mystics—no real distinction is made between the human, the socio-historical, and the natural realms. Within the vast gambit of life—all of it—are patterns that instruct and guide. Indeed, in all Christian sources creation is presented as an ordered totality that is intelligible, good, and a reflection of “the Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is” (Romans 11:36).

What we nonetheless did not expect is that we ourselves would ever become *unCreators* in this community. With an economic and moral swagger that is remarkable, we assume we can have a world of our own making and it can be good. We reduce all things, biotic and abiotic, living and non-living, to “information” and “resources” for a world after our own image and likeness. Ironically, then, the same species that is most responsible for knitting Earth together in the modern era as a single human social, biophysical, and technical sphere is the one that most threatens the global metabolism of the Community of Life itself, and puts the biosphere in plain jeopardy. Species-pride wed to the arrogance of addictive affluence has set us on a course of uncreation. To cite only one of the Charter’s descriptions: “The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species.”⁴

This means it is well past time to vigorously reclaim creation as comprehensive community. As noted, “Creation” is not the Charter’s term. It is a specifically theological signal about origin and ordering in God and not, say, a science word, or even a synonym for “nature.” It is, in fact, first of all a doxological word about the Maker of Heaven and Earth who is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all that is, and who is as radically close and incarnate as the Breath of Life itself. It is also, from its early days in Genesis, a word that presents life as a gift, grain by grain, cup

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by cup, sip by sip; and a word about the One who holds us accountable for all life within our reach. In some eras the Christian doctrine of Creation has been used precisely to declare that the world is not God and nature is not divine, and that neither is to be worshiped. But in the great work before us, its message is that, while the universe is not divine, it is sacred and not utter utility. And we are accountable to its Source for passing on that portion of this sacred trust that is home to the planetary Community of Life.

In different words, Creation as community means seeing the magnificent diversity of geological and biological formations caught up in a single existence. It means seeing ourselves as integral members of this existence, and it means seeing this in ways that reaffirm the old communitarianism: an ontological covenant binds the well-being of each member of Creation to the well-being of the other members.

New and reforming. The ancient religious claim of Creation as cosmic community is not a spiritual vision alone. Nor is it only the occasion for praise and the palette of artists. The great discovery of recent science, from physics to ecology to evolutionary biology, is that the *material* universe—“nature”—is also a community. All that exists, co-exists. All that is, belongs. All things great and small, from atoms to galaxies, share a common history and a common, if unfinished, story. It turns out that [the statement] “humanity is part of a vast evolving universe” is scientific and empirical, as well as religious, truth.

Sages have long observed that human beings dream dreams of community on a grand scale because of some restive, irrepressible stirrings deep within their wee little souls. We have always wanted to belong to the same order that hurled the planets into orbit and sent the stars singing on their way. We have always wanted to align our mortal lives with a community that far surpasses them. We have, in fact, built empires and enslaved peoples and ruined lands in the wayward quest to do so, just as we have composed music and crafted masterpieces and raised children in our striving to belong and to be remembered. Now it turns out we *do* belong to the cosmos, not by virtue of longing or desire alone, but literally, because we *are* stardust. The yearning in our *solar plexis* that seems to tell us the universe itself is “home” is physically correct, we discover. We belong to Creation in every transient cell of our bodies, in DNA and mitochondria that are millennia deep. The image of early Christian theologians that we are

microcosms of the macrocosm is now underwritten by a science they did not have. What they did not know is that in its own quirky way, everything else is microcosm, too. All of them are the relatives. Creation is one.

When the Charter places *Homo sapiens* firmly at home in the cosmos as part of the 13– to 15-billion-year drama-to-date, something new is offered that exceeds most Christian imagination. Even the free-range vision of psalmists and prophets was not ready for the detail, the dynamism, and the utter strangeness of a universe infinite in all directions on a scale that we do not yet fathom. Poets and mystics, or a humble cell biologist or astrophysicist, may break through here occasionally, but only in wonder. The charming arguments of Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine that not all species of plants and animals could have been created by God but must have evolved from other of God’s creatures, since Noah’s Ark could not have borne that load, are utterly quaint now, the stuff of children’s stories. So even if those 4th century arguments had a sense of evolutionary development that later and long-held Christian notions (nature as balanced, harmonious, and anthropocentric) hardly allowed, they belong to cosmologies that no longer serve us well. We frankly do not yet know what the statement, “Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe” means for our daily habits. We sense that we rightly affirm the dogged communitarianism of Christian confessions and sacramental practices. But what does that mean for obligations that extend to the whole community of life within our reach for generations to come in a material community that is cosmic? When neighbors are no longer only nigh, but afar as well, in time and space, and when neighbors are not only human but other-than-human in the fifty million odd ways of Creation, what is the justice due them? How ought we to live? The accountability is old. The demands are new.

Yet the Earth Charter is not the Universe Charter. Earth, its wonder and distress, is the presenting subject. Creation as community now, in a humanly dominated biosphere on a planet in plain jeopardy, is the besetting issue.

Here the Earth Charter embraces “the whole of earthly life” in a remarkable way and without remainder. After the Preamble, four lead principles, expressing “Respect and Care for the Community of Life,” govern the subsequent sections: “Respect Earth and life in all its diversity”; “Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love”; “Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful”; (and) “Secure Earth’s bounty and beauty for present and future generations.” These are concretized in gratifying detail in interlocking sections on Ecological Integrity, Social and Economic Justice, (and) Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace. So interwoven are these with one another that Earth Charter educators find it necessary to prepare materials which display the Charter in multiple ways. The present, very charter-like linear text is vital, but it is not a form that readily captures the integral functioning of the economy of Earth. Perhaps a mandala might. In any event, how to combat as both wrong-headed and destructive the dualisms of humanity/nature, society/environment, wealth/poverty, and spirit/matter, as well as gender inequalities and a present that always trumps the future, and how to show instead the complex metabolism of “the whole of earthly life,” is the demanding task. Earth is one.

In 1650 Andreas Ehrenpreis, an Anabaptist Christian of Hutterite persuasion, wrote this in his “epistle on brotherly community”:

True love means growth for the whole organism, whose members are all interdependent and serve each other. That is the outward form of the inner working of the Spirit, the organism of the Body governed by Christ. We see the same thing among the bees, who all work with equal zeal gathering honey.⁵

Whatever the validity of the bees-and-honey analogy, recent science qualifies Ehrenpreis markedly, at least if Ehrenpreis’ image is community as a harmonious organism. “Evolution loves death more than it loves you and me,” to remember Annie Dillard and Tinker Creek. Real-life community has never been a synonym for harmony. The worst happens there, as does the noblest. And for creation as community, it frequently happens large-scale. Yet the Earth Charter is correct that the functioning of planetary systems is incorrigibly interdependent and interactive and that the human failure to align its own designs with the rest threatens the whole. And for their part the Christian confessors of Creation are correct that a fierce communion

binds all God's creatures in a single, if ever-renewing, covenant. The message from both is clear: Earth's requirements for its own regeneration and renewal are foundational; ours, precisely because we belong here and are home nowhere else, are derivative. Thus the Charter can only pursue ecological integrity (Section ii) together with social and economic justice (Section iii) and democracy, nonviolence, and peace (Section iv). All follow from Respect and Care for the Community of Life (Section i) in a gathering that Ehrenpreis conceived as "bodily" and "the outward form of the inner Spirit." It's very old and very new, both at once.

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Questions for reflection

1. Do I honor the Life of all living things, the order of nature, the wildness of wilderness, the richness of the created world?
2. Do I seek the holiness which God has placed in these things, and the measure of Light which God has lent them?
3. Do I, in all my proceedings, keep to that use of things which is agreeable to universal righteousness? [John Woolman]
4. Do I accept personal responsibility for stewardship of Creation? Does my daily life exemplify and reflect my respect for the oneness of Creation and my care for the environment?
5. As a member of my Friends' community, as well as my work and home communities, do I seek guidance in the Light for ways that I may lead and participate in actions which both heal the earth and inspire others regarding the urgency of this healing?
6. Is my Meeting aware of the spiritual basis of our concern for the environment?
7. Do we seek to be aware of God's love and energy in all of Creation?
8. Living in that spirit, do we strive to relate with love and respect to ourselves, other people, other creatures, all living and inanimate objects, and materials that we meet each day?
9. Are we aware of and sensitive to our present consumption patterns?
10. How do we identify, understand, and resolve our fears of what we might lose with a change of our present life-style?
11. Are we formulating and implementing an ethic for responsible stewardship of our planet?
12. Does the scope and immediacy of the current threat to life on Earth call for the formulation of a clear Quaker testimony on unity with nature, and for the dissemination of that testimony with the vigor that has marked Quaker testimonies on peace and slavery?

Illustrative activities

1. Form an Earthcare study/support group to help clarify the spiritual questions which may linger after reading the materials in this book.
2. Make all issues personal ones. Ask yourselves how this knowledge may change your life.
3. Look to the Earthcare resources in Appendix B and research the issues further.
4. Read the Earth Charter and compare it, point for point, with the advices and queries in your Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Letter of 18 July, 1944," *Letters and Papers from Prison, The Enlarged Edition*, Eberhard Bethge, ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 374.

² Bonhoeffer, "Letter of 18 July, 1944," *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 374.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Grundfragen einer christlichen Ethik," *Gesammelte Schriften* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1966), 3:56; translation mine.

⁴ From the Preamble to the Earth Charter.

⁵ Andreas Ehrenpreis and Claus Felbinger, in *Brotherly community—the highest command of love: Two Anabaptist documents of 1650*, Robert Friedmann, ed. (Rifton, N.Y.: Plough Publishing Co., 1978) 11.

Prayers and responsive readings

Open, O Lord, the eyes of all people to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works, that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, they may honor thee with their substance, and be faithful stewards of thy bounty.

—*The Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church

Leader Holy God, creator of all,
we rejoice in the gift of ever-growing light
as the earth in this season leans closer to our daystar.

People O Creator, hear our prayer.

Leader As our ancestors of old
lit festing fires and banished the darkness
and called forth the fire of the sun,
may our hearts be kindled with
the flame of new life.

People O Creator, hear our prayer.

Leader Your gifts ride on the springtime air,
carried aloft upon the wind,
filling field and forest, city and town,
with the incense of gladness.

People O Creator, hear our prayer.

Leader With awe-filled wonder
we sing praise with all creation:
tree and bush, flower and plant;
animals of the air, land and waters.

People O Creator, hear our prayer.

Leader Loving and generous are you, our God,
who has given us the rich variety
of ecosystems and ever-changing seasons.

People O Creator, hear our prayer.

Leader Accept our repentance, O God,
for our waste and pollution of your creation,
and our inadequate concern for those who come after us.

People O Creator, hear our prayer.

Leader Have mercy on us, Lord God,
for we have not loved you with our
whole heart, and mind, and strength.
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

People O Creator, hear our prayer.

Leader Almighty God, our Creator:
The morning is yours, rising into fullness.
Eternity is yours, dipping into time.
Gladly we live in this garden of your creating.
Accept and fulfill our petitions, not as
we ask in our ignorance, nor as we deserve in our unfaithfulness,
but as you know us in the love of your Son Jesus Christ.

People Amen

—from *Earth Mass, Caring for Creation Conference*
Kansas City, Mo., April 1994

Memory

by Ingrid Fabianson

At the heart of vengeance
is memory
We carry the past within us.
Put it down.
Forgive.

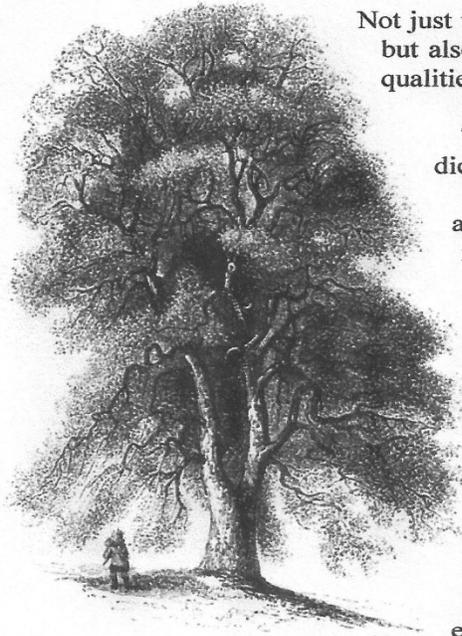
There is contention
over dwindling re-
sources
and difference.
Scarcity makes the
crowd's
mood ugly.

The stakes are profound.
Starvation. Or stealing.
Poor versus Rich. Us versus
them.
Revolution and killing.
Again.

The highest stake of all
is us, our
soul connection
to others severed,
our humanness diminished
by hate and envy.

Yet, the still voice of the
world speaks to us,
Waits for our response.
How do the world's
creatures view our legacy?
How does the wild speak?

Peace and reconciliation come
when we know each others'
stories.



Not just tales of human lineage
but also the accounts of
qualities of place.

Try not to create
dichotomies
Remember there is
always
more than your own
miseries.

Be open to all ways
of knowing.
See with the eyes of
the animals
and the thin splinter
needles
of the redwood glens.
Take time to love the
world.
Find meaning in the
every day.

Though the velocity of today's change
has frightened you
Do not retreat into vengeful memory.
The patterns of your familiarity
have become dislocated
but not your deep connection
to the living earth.

Search for innovation
through loving action
and respect for life.
Dull the edges of your own
savagery
and seek, in wild joy, a deeper
understanding of this world.

Unit 1. Our Faith as a Foundation for Earthcare

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