

Quaker Earthcare Witness

Earthcare for Friends

_____Unit 10_____

A Land Ethic and Land Conservation

by Ruah Swennerfelt

Purposes of this unit

1. To become better acquainted with the issues of care of the land and land conservation.
2. To explore the connections between the land and our spirituality.
3. To examine why conserving the land makes us better neighbors.
4. To look at ways we can be active in land conservation.

Sacred texts and other inspirational readings

To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.

—Deuteronomy 10:14

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and birds of the air and fish of the sea are dying."

—Hosea 4:1–3

"Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land."

—Isaiah 5:8

Hymns and songs

O God of All Creation. *Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal*, # 18.

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

Issue Presentations

_____Article 1_____

A Land Ethic

by Ruah Swennerfelt

OUR RELATIONSHIP to the land has changed dramatically over the last 100 years. Most people today do not have a personal relationship with the people who grow the food that they eat. Many of us do not even think about where our food comes from or how it was grown. Even fewer of us think about the health of the land as something that is affected by our own personal behaviors.

I feel lucky to have lived in the same place since 1991. That's the longest I've ever lived in the same home in all my life. And I don't think the fact that I lacked geographic roots for most of my life is unique. Increasingly in today's world, physical mobility is viewed as the road to financial success. Although during my youth I went camping in the summers, I didn't develop a

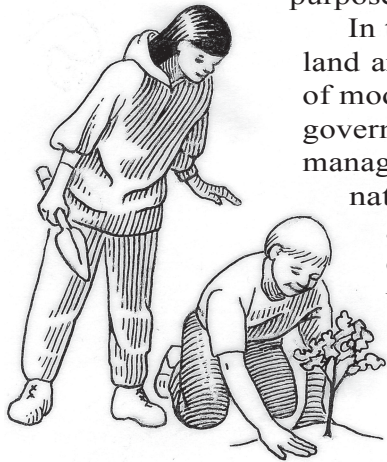
sense of personal relationship to the land. I loved the outdoors, but it still was a distant relationship.

Barbara Kingsolver says it so well: “Modern American culture is fairly empty of any suggestion that one’s relationship to the land, to consumption and food, is a religious matter. But it’s true; the decision to attend to the health of one’s habitat and food chain is a spiritual choice. It’s also a political choice, a scientific one, a personal and a convivial one. It’s not a choice between living in the country or the town; it is about understanding that every one of us, at the level of our cells is mindful of the distance between ourselves and our sustenance.”

Today I grow vegetables and flowers as much for the food and beauty as for the spiritual sustenance I receive from the intimate relationship I have with the wonderful place where I live. I care about the health of the soil. When I am feeding the birds and maintaining good habitat for wildlife, I feel a connection I never had before. I watch each season change with the length of day/night and angle of the sun. I have learned to identify many of the trees and wild flowers in my neighborhood by name. I spend time outdoors without a practical purpose, only a desire to take notice of what is around me.

In the first half of the 20th century, Aldo Leopold wrote of his love of the land and his concern for its future. Some have called Leopold the founder of modern ecology. In his early professional life, he worked for a government conservation program that practiced linear, scientific management of

natural resources. In time he came to realize that human interventions are very often more disruptive than helpful, because the extreme complexity and dynamism of the natural world cannot be adequately understood by the intellect alone. In his later years, he wrote *A Sand County Almanac*, a journal of his experiences and insights on a farm in Wisconsin, arguing persuasively for a land ethic based on a caring, rather than exploitative, relationship with the land. His prophetic writing foretold of the loss of habitat and soils that were then and now are occurring in North America:



Harmony with the land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left. That is to say, you cannot love game and hate predators; you cannot conserve the waters and waste the ranges; you cannot build the forest and mine the farm. The land is one organism.

Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of the land. We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics to this element in human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity.

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

This sounds so simple: Do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these ‘resources,’ but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state.

In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for fellow members, and also respect for the community as such.

Caring for the land and for the people

ANN KRIEBEL, a graduate of Westtown School ('73) and Earlham College ('77), traveled to Costa Rica in the early 1980s to live and work in the Quaker community in Monteverde. While there, she served as a volunteer in the San Luis Valley, a farming area about a one-hour walk downhill from Monteverde. Ann made this trek almost daily to help provide a community education program in literacy, health care, nutrition, and the environment. While working there, Ann died unexpectedly, but her life continues as an inspiration to so many today.

In her honor, and in the spirit of the 1992 U.N. Conference on the Environment and Development, Quaker Earthcare Witness is supporting a project in sustainable agriculture for land-less farmers living close to the Monteverde biological reserves—a blending of nature preservation, conservation agriculture, and human services.

Between 1993 and 1999, working with the Santa Elena Cooperative, Quaker Earthcare Witness members and other individuals contributed funds to purchase 122 acres called *Finca la Bella* (the Beautiful Farm).

Since 1995 a representative commission has established policy and provided oversight for the farm. Commission members now come from local groups, including the *La Bella* farmers' association, Monteverde Friends Meeting, and the Monteverde Institute, which is dedicated to education for a sustainable and peaceful future.

Finca la Bella has been busy over its short lifetime, inspiring all of us with a vision of environmentally sustainable and peaceful work. On these 122 acres, 24 previously landless families (called *parceleros*) have 25-year renewable leases on two-to four-acre parcels. About a third of the farm is preserved in forest. *Parcelero* farmers use hand cultivation, have minimized or eliminated chemical use, and have planted many windbreaks. Farmers have attended courses on organic agriculture, accounting and marketing, biodynamic agriculture, organizational dynamics, tourism, and guiding. A grant-funded nursery produces native fast-growing trees for wind-breaks, fruit trees, and forest trees for birds like the quetzal. These seedlings are primarily for on-farm use, but some are sold for conservation projects.

This is truly an example of caring for the land and for the people. Quaker Earthcare Witness hopes that *Finca la Bella* will be an inspiration for many more such projects.

In conclusion

HOW CAN WE develop a land ethic that becomes second nature to our daily thinking? We need to first develop a relationship with the place where we live, whether that is in the middle of the city or in the wild. The land is below us, supporting us, and we are in relationship with the land whether we acknowledge it or know it or not. We need to learn more about that land, how it was formed, what was there before us, and how it has changed. We can then ask what the land needs and include the land in our worship and prayers. In time, we may even come to know that we and the land are one. ❖

_____Article 2_____

Land Conservation—a Christian Perspective

by Kara Unger Ball

(Reprinted with permission, *Creation Care, A Christian Environmental Quarterly*, Summer 2003, Issue No. 22)

THOSE OF US in the United States have been richly blessed with an abundance of land. We have over 3.7 million square miles of land and water through which the Lord provides us with food, fiber, fresh air and water, and our understanding of who we are as a nation. It is also home to God's other creatures.

A majority of the land in the U.S. is owned by private citizens. However, we are all citizens of our communities and, as Christians, we are citizens of God's kingdom. How, then, should Christians respond to land-use issues and to our responsibility to steward the land under our care?

Each day in America we are losing 8.6 square miles of our finest lands—to development. At

this pace, many of the special places in America will be gone within 20 years. The conversion of farmland and other open spaces to development causes a host of environmental and fiscal problems. Since it costs \$1.04 to \$2.00 for every dollar of tax revenue brought in to provide services to a typical subdivision, current taxpayers end up subsidizing outsiders who typically bring increased traffic, crowded schools, and degraded environmental conditions.

The loss of habitat, habitat fragmentation, and introduction of exotic invasive species brought by development are the biggest causes of the loss of biological diversity in our country. We also hurt our neighbors by causing air pollution from driving more (see the Evangelical Environmental Network's "What Would Jesus Drive" website for the effects of air pollution on human health); polluting the water we send downstream to others through increased runoff and pollutants from construction sites, lawns, and impervious surfaces (hard surfaces such as parking lots and roads); and leaving fewer undeveloped places for others to enjoy. All of these diminish God's creation.

Land conservation organizations throughout the country work in response to these issues. There are over 1,200 land conservation organizations that have protected more than 6.2 million acres. As well, there are a host of land conservation organizations active abroad.

How do these organizations conserve land in the U.S.? Most important, they work with *willing* landowners on a voluntary basis. No land conservation organization can force a landowner to give up his or her land. A land conservation organization can focus on protecting habitat for God's other creatures, parks for human use, agricultural land, an historic feature, or a particular watershed. Whatever their objective, most [organizations] use the following basic protection methods:

- ❖ Own and manage—The land organization (also known as a land trust) buys the land and all the rights associated with it or accepts the land as a donation. The land trust then agrees to keep and manage the land in perpetuity (or "forever").
- ❖ Resell to a third party—The land trust buys the land, retains the development rights, then resells the land without the development rights to another buyer.
- ❖ Conservation easements—Owning land may be thought of as owning a "bundle of rights." A landowner may sell or give away the whole bundle, or just one or two of those rights. For example, a farmer might need his land only as a hayfield for cattle. A land conservation organization could then purchase the rights to construct buildings or subdivide the land, while the farmer keeps the land to use as a hayfield. The land organization would hold the development rights in perpetuity but never exercise them. The rest of the rights to the land would remain with the farmer, who can live on the land and sell it at will. The conservation easement would apply to all future owners, ensuring that the land will never be developed.
- ❖ Public policy—Land conservation organizations can promote public policies that support land conservation. For example, they can promote "smart growth" policies, tax incentives for land conservation, and education of citizens and lawmakers on the importance of their work. Many are also undertaking extensive community outreach and compatible economic development activities in order to reduce pressures on the land.

As Christians seeking to live out God's call to steward the land under our care and to love our neighbor through our land conservation choices, we can be active in several positive ways.



Support land conservation organizations

LANDOWNERS as well as those who do not own land have opportunities to support the work of land conservation organizations. Most of these organizations are secular, giving Christians a wonderful opportunity to witness Christian care for creation in their interactions with the land trust community.

- ❖ Contact a land conservation organization to support their work or potentially protect your own land. Learn more about the needs and issues important in your area. (See the website of the Land Trust Alliance to find a land trust in your state, and visit the websites of “A Rocha” and “Eden” conservation organizations to learn more about two Christian land conservation organizations).
- ❖ Learn more about organizations that protect public lands (such as the Wilderness Society, National Parks Conservation Association.)
- ❖ Make personal choices that conserve land and do not contribute to sprawl.
- ❖ When choosing a home or place to live, seek a place that will allow you to use public transportation, to bike, or to walk to work. Select a place that has been redeveloped, as opposed to new subdivisions built on former farmland or open space.

Be active in your local politics and zoning decisions

MANY LAND-USE DECISIONS are made locally throughout the country. Make your voice heard at local meetings. Support policies that curb “sprawl development.” Support creative options such as neotraditional development that concentrate housing on smaller lots while leaving open space for parks and habitat, as well as options that mitigate negative impacts, for example substituting impervious (hard) surfaces that cause polluted water to enter streams and rivers with more porous options [such as gravel and turf] that allow water to soak back into the ground.

Love and learn more about your neighbors

CHRIST COMMANDS US to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 13:31). Each of us affects people around us—our neighbors—by our land-use choices. Each of us can love our neighbor better by learning to make land-use choices that reduce harm to others. For example, by minimizing or eliminating the pesticides you put on your lawn, you can reduce the water pollution burden borne by those downstream. By reducing the amount of driving you do by living closer to where you work, you can reduce harmful air pollution. By refusing to buy a house that has displaced open space and by choosing instead a redeveloped or older neighborhood or a neo-traditional development, we help leave space for God’s other creatures and open space for people to see the beauty of God’s Creation.

Practice sufficiency and contentment in your land use and housing choices

EACH OF US is consuming more land per person than ever before. As we continue to use more and more land to make bigger and bigger houses and more roads, we displace more and more of God’s creatures. The Bible teaches that we are to practice contentment (1 Timothy 6:6–9, Hebrews 13:15) and provide for the creatures (Psalms 104:10–13). We can do this by seeking dwellings and lots no bigger than what we need.

Land conservation is a joyful way to glorify the Lord. Let us go forth and love God and neighbor by caring for the land.

Questions for reflection

- ❖ Do I honor the life of all living things, the order of nature, the wildness of wilderness, the richness of the created world? Do I seek the holiness which God has placed in these things, and the measure of Light which God has lent them?
- ❖ 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?

Earthcare for Friends—A Study Guide for Individuals and Faith Communities

- ❖ If I own land, do I respect the heritage of the land, exercising sound stewardship over its natural resources, so that they are maintained not just for my use, but for future generations?
- ❖ If a farmer or forester, do I seek to conserve and care for the soil, the water, and the wildlife habitat, so that my actions replenish, rather than deplete the land I work with?
- ❖ Do I treasure as sacred the whole of Creation?
- ❖ Am I encouraging my representatives and legislators—at the local, state and federal levels—to initiate programs and laws mandating appropriate land use?

Queries from North Carolina (Conservative) Yearly Meeting

- ❖ Am I encouraging my representatives and legislators—at the local, state and federal levels—to initiate programs and laws mandating appropriate land use?
- ❖ Do we sincerely seek to understand our place in the universe and our purpose here on the earth?
- ❖ Are we willing to make sacrifices and to ask others to join us in changing the things we use and the way we use them in order to preserve life everywhere?
- ❖ Are we willing to persist gently in persuading others, not giving up, but being receptive to others' needs, as we strive to establish life-styles dedicated to the preservation of all life?
- ❖ Are we open to the strength, the purpose, and the joy and the desire within and beyond ourselves as a resource in truly living in and genuinely loving the world?"

Illustrative activities

1. Get to Know Your Neighborhood

1. Map out the land where your church or Meeting is. Is there land? Lawn? Flowers? Trees? What has your congregation done to be good stewards of that land? What more can you do?
2. As a group, take a walk around the neighborhood near your church or meeting. Take notes about what you observe. Are there open spaces? Will they be there a generation from now? Are there trees? Birds? Wildlife? Are there ways that your congregation can get involved to care for the land or neighborhood?
3. Locate land conservation organizations in your region and then find out what they are doing. Become involved with them corporately and individually.
4. Plant a garden. If you live in the city, try growing cherry tomatoes or herbs in a pot on your balcony or in a sunny window. Know the process of planting a seed and nurturing it and watching it grow.

2. Bioregional Quiz: Where Are You At?

(Reprinted from *Walking Gently into the 21st Century, a Sourcebook on Sustainability for Quaker Meetings*, compiled by the New England YM Friends in Unity with Nature Committee, July 2000.)

1. Can you trace the water you drink, from precipitation to tap?
2. What soil series are you standing on?
3. What was the rainfall in your area last year? (Guess within an inch and you get full credit.)
4. What were the primary subsistence techniques of the indigenous culture in your area?
5. Name five native edible plants in your region and their season(s) of availability.
6. From what direction do winter storms generally come in your region?
7. Where does your garbage go?
8. How long is the growing season where you live?
9. Name five grasses in your area. Are any of them native?
10. Name five resident and five migratory birds in your area.
11. What is the land-use history of where you live?
12. What primary ecological process influenced the land from where you live?
13. One point bonus: What's the evidence for your answer to 12?

A Land Ethic and Land Conservation

14. What species have become extinct in your area?
15. What are the major plant associations in your region?
16. What spring wildflowers are consistently among the first to bloom where you live?

Your Score:

0 to 4	Unlock your door and go outside.
5 to 8	You have a fairly firm grasp of the obvious.
9 to 12	You really pay attention.
13 to 16	You know where you're at (and where it's at).

Prayers and responsive readings

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord,
Praise, glory, and honor and benediction all, are Thine.
To Thee alone do they belong, most High
And there is no man fit to mention Thee.

Praise be to Thee, my Lord, with all Thy creatures,
Especially to my worshipful brother sun, the which lights up the day,
and through him dost Thou brightness give;
And beautiful is he and radiant with splendor great;
Of thee, most High, signification gives.

Praised be my Lord, for sister moon and for the stars,
In heaven Thou hast formed them clear and precious and fair.

Praised be my Lord for brother wind
And for the air and clouds and fair and every kind of weather,
by the which Thou givest to Thy creatures nourishment.

Praised be my Lord for sister water,
The which is greatly helpful and humble and precious and pure.

Praised be my Lord for brother fire,
By the which Thou lightest up the dark,
And fair is he and gay and mighty and strong.

Praised be my Lord for our sister, mother earth,
the which sustains and keeps us
and brings forth divers fruits with grass and flowers bright.

Praised be my Lord for those who for Thy love forgive
And weakness bear and tribulation.
Blessed those who shall in peace endure,
And by Thee, most High, shall they be crowned.

—from *The Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi*
translated by Father P. Robinson, 1906

*Creator of heaven and Earth,
We ask you to bless the land and all who dwell in it.
Open our hearts to see the love and beauty displayed in your creation.
Grant us wisdom in our stewardship of the land,
So that it can bountifully nurture all of your creatures.*

Born of Water by Jack C. Ross

We are...born of water—cleansing, powerful,
healing, changing. We are...

—sacred chant

born of water—

On the first day: God said, I think I shall put two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen together and see what happens. Hey, she thought, this is really cool. Then she made humans, and we messed it up.

July 8, 1921, my second day: blazing heat, bare hillside, Arizona sun. Mother kept me alive through the flu epidemic of 1921 with water-drenched blankets hung in the doorway.

Dad's job: chlorinate the Pasadena water supply; what caused my skin to bleach? Did cancer rates increase? I was proud to help Dad. He wouldn't do anything wrong.

I was baptized but I kept on sinning anyhow. Water was not enough.

cleansing,

Diapers hand-washed in an iron pail: Love cleanses, water its instrument.

Swimming my favorite sport; nearly drowned twice—water, a stern master.

Argenta Creek water: dirtier after bathing than before.

Roll on, Columbia, roll on—pick up lead at Cominco, silt, the stray isotope at Hanford.

Dams—where have all the fish gone?

Family hikes to a shady mountain stream. Mom made sandwiches. We got one quarter of a Hershey bar each. Cool, clear, fresh water. Downstream: chlorination. Memories of water. Cleansing, powerful. Toxic?

powerful,

I can organize plan meet write memos press releases accounts console facilitate lick stamps collect money tell jokes do a clown act when the cops close in.

Stand in solidarity with my brothers and sisters. Risk jail.

I rely on Gandhi, John Woolman, some of the Bible. I can help people learn nonviolence. I can face the violent ones sometimes and help absorb their pain. I gave up masculinity and changed to human. And now I know how to cry. I think of Eloise Charet, fasting in jail, and I cry.

I go to jail without remorse. I shall try to endure it without fear or hatred, for the sake of water.

I do not hate my opponents for long.

Martin Luther King spoke to me once. I knew A.J. Muste, Bayard Rustin, Brian Wilson, Muriel Lester. The great people of peace have lifted my soul.

healing,

I cause pain even to my friends and family that I do not know how to heal. How can I heal the Earth? Teach me, o river.

Singing builds community. I really can't sing, but thanks for asking.

Me heal the Earth? Start with Perry Ridge and go on from there.

Mother Earth says: "I am your mother and not your maid. Now clean up your own mess. When you get your homework done then we can talk about using the car."

The jailers will check my fingerprints. I shall check my footprint.

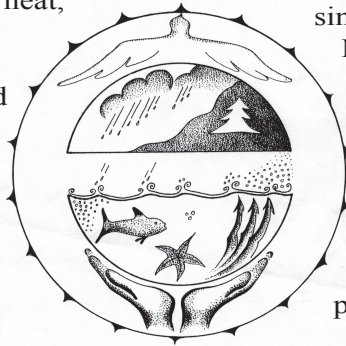
changing.

While in Her Majesty's penitentiary I shall consider personal change:

1. *Try to find something to be penitent about.* It may impress them.
2. *Embrace paradox.* As a child I stepped on ants. Now I like to lift up a rock and speak to them. Once the river in Cleveland caught fire. How did they put it out? Margaret Mead said that only small groups ever change anything. But everyone changes things. Start with self. Peace is every step, but watch where you put your foot.
3. *Celebrate successes.* In 1988 I got a legal stay on the use of herbicides on some Kootenay highways. I liked to point to the flowers by the road and proudly say, "Me and God did that." And the rain. He needed me. Try to get a competent co-worker when you set out to change things. My Argenta friends stopped herbicide use in Lardeau Valley by persistent nonviolence.
4. *Learn prayer.* Prayer changes things. Attention is prayer. Silence is the first step to simplicity; simplicity the first step toward wholeness; wholeness is peace. Celebrate silence, grow in it toward wholeness. Where does the inner Light lead me?

*We are...born of water—cleansing,
powerful, healing, changing. We are...*

A member of Argenta, B.C., Friends Meeting, Jack was arrested in 1997 during a nonviolent protest against logging road construction in a sensitive watershed area.



Unit 10. A Land Ethic and Land Conservation

Cronon, William. 1983. *Changes in the Land. Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. Hill

& Wang, New York.

Durning, Alan Thein. 1996. *This Place on Earth: Home and the Practice of Permanence*.

Sasquatch Books, Seattle.

Leopold, Aldo. 1986. *A Sand County Almanac*. Ballantine Books, New York.

Porter, Eliot, ed. 1962. "*In Wilderness Is the Preservation of the World*." Sierra Club, Ballantine Books, New York.