

Quaker Earthcare Witness

Earthcare for Friends

Unit 2

Earthcare and Friends Testimonies

by Louis Cox

Purposes of this unit

1. To explain the development and purpose of a Quaker testimony.
2. To show how a Quaker concern for the environment is a radical response to the shortcomings of 19th and 20th century conservation and environmental movements.
3. To show how a Quaker Earthcare testimony serves to integrate all of the Quaker testimonies, reaching back to historic roots and fundamental principles of Quakerism.
4. To show how a Quaker Earthcare testimony, as an example of “continuing revelation,” fits into a broader spiritual ecology movement that reflects knowledge and perspectives that are different from those of previous generations of Friends.

Sacred texts and other inspirational readings

The spirit of the Lord is upon me; because of this he has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; and he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, and to proclaim release to the captives and sight to the blind; to strengthen with forgiveness those who are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

—Luke 4:18–19

For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me, I was in prison, and you came to me....Truly I tell you, inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me.

—Matthew 25:35–40

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures buried in the ground, a place where rust and moth destroy and where thieves break through and steal.

—Matthew 6:19

'Tis a dangerous Perversion of the End of Providence to Consume the Time, Power and Wealth He has given us above other Men, to gratify our Sordid Passions, instead of playing the good Stewards, to the Honor of our great Benefactor, and the Good of our Fellow-Creatures.

—William Penn, *More Fruits of Solitude*, p. 26

Christ did not come to rescue a handful of believers from this world. He came to renew creation, to restore humanity and nature to full communion with God.... In Christ, redemption is environmental. The health of one relates to the health of all. ...Apart from the earth there is no salvation.

—Richard Cartwright Austin, *Hope for the Land—Nature in the Bible*

Bible references in this unit are taken from George M. Lamsa's translations of the ancient Eastern Aramaic text. This is the Bible translation from the language that Jesus spoke.

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

...The concern for the care of God's creation has long been implicit in our Christian testimony. We recognize that our historic peace testimony is a testimony to living in harmony with the world in a covenant among God, humanity, and the creation (Gen. 9:8–13), a covenant the renewal of which was foreseen by the prophets as in Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom (11:1–9), by Paul (e.g., Romans 8:12–17), and in the great commission, when the risen Christ told the eleven, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15 NRSV, the AV has "all creatures"). Implicit in our testimony on simplicity is the understanding that we will not take more than we need, particularly (and here we move into the testimony on justice) if it means depriving others, including future generations, of their basic needs....

—Friends United Meeting Triennial 1999
from the Minute on Care for God's Creation

Hymns

Let All the Earth Sing Praises. *Worship in Song, a Friends Hymnal*, #17.

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

Spring Forth a Well/I've Got a River. *Worship in Song, a Friends Hymnal*, #151.

I've Got Peace Like a River. *Worship in Song, a Friends Hymnal*, #246.

Issue presentations

Article 1

"Truth Is Something That Happens"

by Louis Cox

"DO YOU SWEAR that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?..."

Early Quakers were known for their refusal to take such oaths in a court of law (often at the risk of fines and imprisonment). Sometimes they justified their stand by reference to the Bible: "But above all things, my brethren, do not swear, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your words be yes, yes, and no, no, lest you fall under condemnation (James 5:12).

However, these Friends were not just obeying written commandments. Oath-refusal and other distinctive practices came to be known as "testimonies" because these actions were *bearing witness* to a deeper spiritual Truth. The Kingdom of God is not an abstract ideal or hope projected into the future. It is emerging here and now, through our actions and examples.

Gray Cox put it this way in his Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *Bearing Witness—Quaker Process and a Culture of Peace*:

"...Quakers view truth as something that happens, it occurs.... Truth is not a dead fact which is known: It is a living occurrence in which we participate....

"The guiding concern of people bearing witness is to live rightly, in ways that are exemplary. Insofar as they have an end they aim at, it is perhaps most helpful to think of it as the aim of cultivating their souls and converting others....

"Quakers are convinced that genuine leadings all proceed from a common ground, spring from a unity which we seek and find...."

So with the understanding that testimonies are inward but corporately tested leadings, not outward, fixed rules, let us turn to a relatively recent leading among Friends regarding the looming global environmental crisis. This is part of a broader movement within many faith traditions, based on the growing conviction that the deteriorating health of the planet has profound moral and spiritual implications that science and public policies alone cannot address.

Some Friends understand this new concern in terms of historic testimonies of simplicity, peace, equality, and integrity. Others see it as the emergence of a new Quaker testimony that incorporates modern worldviews.

Earthcare and Friends Testimonies

Marshall Massey, speaking at a Friends gathering in 1987, summarized the mounting and disturbing evidence that human activities are causing major environmental disruption. But, he noted, the world by and large is not responding to scientists' warnings at the level that minimally would be needed to avoid ecological collapse. It is obvious that knowledge alone is not enough. One reason for our denial and inaction as a faith community, Massey said, is that we have not yet gotten in touch with the spiritual core of this concern. Only when we have penetrated to the heart of a concern (as early Friends did when they finally came to terms with the slavery issue) can we tap its power to transform our lives and significantly alter our destructive personal and corporate behavior.

Since then, numerous Friends Meetings and organizations around the world (including Quaker Earthcare Witness) have tried to discern the connection between their environmental concerns and the "spiritual core" of their Quaker faith. Here is part of what a group of British Friends came up with recently:

A Quaker Testimony on Earth and Environment

...New testimonies emerge as the reasons for them and the underlying spiritual basis of action becomes clarified. One such area concerns our stewardship of the environment. For many Quakers what has been an "emerging" testimony to the environment has now become an established one, with close links to the peace testimony and the testimony of simplicity.

The world is a wonderfully rich resource for our material and spiritual needs. We should treasure it and preserve its capacity to sustain and inspire. That, in turn, calls for a creative responsibility towards the earth we have inherited and for proper sharing. It means seeing "that of God" in the natural world around us, and being moved by considerations other than commercial gain. Habitats and species are sacrificed to products and services which are often far from essential. The future is constantly sacrificed to the present and the needs of others to the wants of the self. It cannot be right to leave the world poorer than we found it in beauty or in the rich diversity of life forms, or to consume recklessly in the knowledge that our actions are bound to lead to future tragedy.

...Quakers recognize that their testimonies go against many of the current strands of economic, social, and political change. ...We may be called to a style of living and generosity of giving that we cannot yet attain. But we seek to engage with others and the natural world as part of a wider spiritual consciousness. In the depths of our silent waiting we find the place where words and deeds are one; our faith and our action are indivisible.

—from *The Quaker Testimonies*,
Testimonies Committee of Quaker Peace & Social Witness,
Friends House, London, England.

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IN DISCUSSIONS around the question of whether a Quaker Earthcare testimony is emerging, some Friends have pointed out that testimonies tend to be more *descriptive* than prescriptive; and so before considering this leading a new "testimony" they would like to see more Quakers begin conducting their lives accordingly. It is true that only a minority of North American Friends have taken radical steps to simplify their lives and live more lightly on the planet. The best we might say today is that the Religious Society of Friends seems to be slowly moving toward an Earthcare testimony. But we must not underestimate the smaller steps that many Friends have been led to take. Beneath many of those changes we can discern the beginning of a *change of heart*, a stirring of conscience that may yet bear greater fruit—just as the stirrings of discomfort among a few Friends over the keeping of slaves eventually led to a corporate witness against the institution of slavery more than three-quarters of a century later.

But the consensus of the world scientific community is that we don't have that long to right the wrongs we are doing to the planet. It is urgent that we find a way to capitalize on this slowly shifting consciousness among Friends and get these well-intentioned folk to become a larger part of the solution to the planet's deteriorating health and not just a smaller part of the problem. As Marshall Massey emphasized nearly 20 years ago, facts and reasoning alone do not lead people to make significant changes in their thinking and behavior. That, we believe, requires probing deep into ultimate questions about our purpose and role on this planet. As we try to articulate and apply what we have learned in those depths, we are, I believe, creating a new Quaker testimony.

The historic roots of Quaker Earthcare

JUST AS QUAKER TESTIMONIES on peace and equality were radical, spirit-led departures from existing social movements, today's Quaker Earthcare concerns stem from the shortcomings of earlier secular conservation and environmental movements.

By the mid-20th century, it became apparent that fragile eco-systems were unraveling under the unforeseen effects of synthetic chemicals and development pressures, proving that the "enlightened" resource-management programs of the previous century were not capable of protecting nature from the onslaught of civilization. Others began to realize that nature is too complex for direct manipulation and began advocating more ethical and cautious policies toward land use.

A "second wave" environmental movement focused on the reform of laws and institutions. It drew energy from the anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s, expressing disillusionment with the aggressive, materialistic side of the American Dream. However, despite landmark gains in legislation and public policies, the movement seems to have accomplished little more than slowing down the pace of humans' destruction of the natural world.

The late 20th century saw the rise of a "third wave"—interest in deep ecology and more grassroots, holistic approaches to human and environmental health. Focus began to shift to the systemic causes of social and environmental problems. Alliances grew to integrate such concerns as eco-justice, eco-feminism, eco-economics, and spiritual ecology. Meanwhile, scientific discoveries were supporting a new understanding of the fundamental interrelatedness of everything. Fascinating parallels were seen between these new insights and the teachings of various religious traditions, including native wisdom, Buddhism, and Christian mystics of the Middle Ages.

It was during this period that many Quakers and members of other faith groups began to understand that the global environmental crisis is at heart a *spiritual* issue. They saw the problem as basically intractable because it grew out of modern humankind's arrogance and alienation from the natural world. More and more frustrated activists have come to see that reforms that are radical enough to deal with this crisis can come only from deep changes in human attitudes and values, in effect, a spiritual transformation.

Scriptural roots of Quaker Earthcare

THE AWAKENING of Quakers and other faith communities to the environmental crisis has renewed interest in the scriptural basis of this concern. Scholars like Richard Cartwright Austin have found the Judeo-Christian scriptures to be rich in references to the wonders and beauty of Creation. They have reminded the faithful that the original covenant was between God and all of Creation. They have clarified that when God commanded his people to live in right relationship this included responsible treatment of the land.

There have also been attempts to picture what biblical prophets might have said about care of God's creation if in their day there had been an obvious ecological crisis as distressing as, say, the occupation of their land by foreign armies. Jack Phillips, in his essay, "The Spiritual Dimension—Why We Care for the Earth," imagined an "Eleventh Commandment, expressing God's will that we treat his entire Creation lovingly." In another example of "continuing revelation," Jack suggested that Jesus, as someone very in touch with his time, would proclaim today a Third Great Commandment: "You shall love the Earth as you love yourself; care for her health and fitness and beauty as you care for your own body; and protect the earth as you would your own property."

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Other historical research has found a rich vein of nature-consciousness in the journals of Fox, Penn, and Woolman, and of other early Quakers, who were nourished in part by their lifelong immersion in the Bible. Early Friends' awareness of the immanence of God's spirit naturally led to a strong sense of responsibility for His creation. Contemporary writers, in addition to enlarging the scope of the original Quaker testimonies, have made connections to a widening circle of compassion and presumption of rights in Western culture: Rights originally were accorded only to propertied men; now the veil of discrimination has been parted (if not eliminated) for other classes, including women, people of color, children, and animals. In Quaker terms, this widening circle means opening ourselves to the idea that there is "that of God" in all of Creation and not just other humans.

Historic Quaker testimonies and Earthcare

IN THE COURSE OF OUR TRAVELS on behalf of Quaker Earthcare Witness, my wife and I have facilitated discussions of ways that we all can "walk more gently on the earth" and experience a deeper spiritual relationship to Creation. Our presentations have resonated with many participants who are seeking greater meaning in their lives through greater "simplicity" or "simple living."

Nods of agreement have been strongest, however, when we have emphasized Earthcare as a matter of *integrity*. This term refers not only to truthfulness but to *wholeness* and single-minded pursuit of the Good. Quaker history suggests that, in fact, all Friends testimonies spring from this principle.

What does integrity mean in practice, and how do we foster it? Stephen Carter, in his 1996 book *Integrity*, says that our expectations for integrity in ourselves and in our leaders are seldom met because most of us don't realize that integrity is a *process* that requires discipline and practice. Carter advises: 1) making a personal commitment to right living, beyond the conventional expedient, 2) devoting sufficient time and energy for discernment and periodic reassessment, 3) acting on our best understanding at the moment as to what is right, and 4) remaining open about what we are doing and why.

To Carter's list we have added: 5) *shifting to a less human-centered perspective that values integrity not only for humans but for the entire life community.*

Wilmer Cooper's 1991 Pendle Hill pamphlet, *The Testimony of Integrity*, reminds us that integrity involves obedience to the Light within. It is experienced when we allow our lives to become vehicles for God's action in the world. By entering into a covenant with the divine order, we carry that covenant into all of our relationships, whether social, economic, political, or environmental. When we maintain personal integrity, perhaps at the cost of short-term personal gain, we believe that in the long-term we are also contributing to the integrity of the whole, of the social systems and biological systems of which we are a part.

Simplicity and integrity in turn serve the cause of peace. Greed-driven exploitation of the earth is a form of violence that grows from the same roots as mistreatment of humans. When we finally realize that our personal happiness does not depend on high levels of material consumption, we begin to reduce competition for resources and take away the occasion of both war and ecological destruction. We are reminded of the tapestry in the William Penn House in Washington D.C. that concludes, "...How lightly might the earth bear man forever." We recall how the Quaker artist Edward Hicks depicted the Peaceable Kingdom in images that were at the same time intercultural, intergenerational, and interspecies.

Quaker Process and Earthcare

THE QUAKER PRACTICE of waiting for spiritual guidance in personal and corporate decisions is also an antidote to the haste and arrogance that have fueled the destruction of the earth. Similarly, the Quaker approach to conflict resolution, a mutual search for truth rather than argument and debate, provides a good pattern for dealing with conflicts between humans and the natural world: Too often we have waged "war" against some perceived threat in nature only to discover that we have wounded ourselves in the process, by ignorantly upsetting natural balances that benefit all. Searching for "win-win" solutions in our working relationship with nature also parallels the process of seeking unity in a Quaker meeting for business: We may

run into thorns of differing viewpoints and styles, but we end up with more workable and lasting decisions when everyone's needs and interests are considered. So it is in our dealings with other species.

An explicitly Quaker Earthcare testimony?

WHILE MANY VALID POINTS have been raised about applying existing Quaker testimonies and processes to environmental issues, I also find some basis for an explicitly Quaker Earthcare testimony.

I go back to my opening point that testimonies are different ways of bearing witness to *Truth*. An Earthcare testimony, therefore, is a way of speaking truth about humans' rightful place in the community of life and about our responsibility for maintaining its health and integrity. It confronts the falsehoods and deceptions (including self-deceptions) that are keeping us from seeing the irreversible damage we have been doing to the earth's fragile ecosystems. (See Article 4 by William Beale in this unit.)

Earthcare may be considered a new testimony to the extent that it draws on and expresses knowledge and perspectives that were not available to Friends in previous generations. For example, the modern science of ecology involves systems-thinking beyond the experience of earlier generations of Friends. Similarly, new tools for understanding Earth processes, such as eco-economics and eco-psychology, mark a departure from the perspectives of older testimonies. A distinct Earthcare testimony emerges from a new understanding that we are participants in a universe that is dynamic and creatively unfolding, in contrast to the old Newtonian paradigm of a clockwork universe of separate parts.

A distinct Earthcare testimony also can direct attention to the links between our personal behavior or possessions and events in other parts of the world. This kind of thinking may have begun with the breakthrough that John Woolman made 200 years ago when he was able to see the connection between slavery and dye-making and began wearing only undyed clothes. In the current age of economic globalization we need a similar lens to help us know when humans and natural systems around the globe are being oppressed and abused in providing the goods and services we enjoy.

Article 2

Friends, Slavery, and the Earth

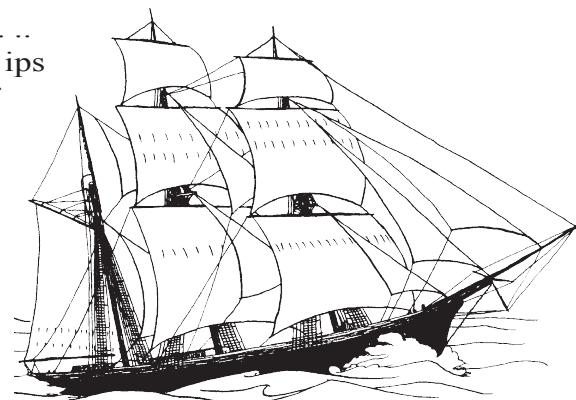
by Lisa Lofland Gould

(from a Quaker Earthcare Witness pamphlet)

GIFT OF GOD, Brotherhood, Justice, Integrity, Liberty, Jesus...
fine words beloved by Friends...words also the names of ships
in the slave trade. How disconnected from the sufferings of
their human cargoes were the owners of those ships, how
much denial did they hold in their hearts, to be able to
give such names?

But as we look for splinters in the eyes of slave traders of the past, are we perhaps overlooking beams in our own eyes? Is it possible that today we are equally disconnected from an understanding of the suffering we bring to the whole of God's creation? *Behind what euphemisms do we hide the modern equivalent of the slave trade, our oppression of the earth?*

Modern Friends are proud of the Quaker record on slavery. We point to George Fox's and William Penn's early words on treating Native Americans and slaves with kindness, to the witness of John Woolman, to Friends' participation in the Underground Railroad, to the southern Friends who migrated from slave-holding to free states, and to the many Friends whose words and actions had influence well beyond the Quaker community.



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Fox, Penn, and Woolman wrote movingly of the human relationship with the rest of Creation. All were concerned about the spiritual degradation brought on by *wrong relationships*. In his *Journal*, John Woolman wrote of the spiritual effect of slavery on slaves, slave owners, and future generations. He asked Friends to stop using human beings as personal property, at the cost of both money and power.

Friends also were asked to take on work previously done by slaves, or pay fair wages for hired labor. They were asked to recognize black people as full human beings at a time when much of society considered them soulless creatures. They were asked to examine every aspect of their lives to root out practices and purchases which utilized slave labor.

Early Friends searched their hearts and came to the corporate leading that they could no longer participate in any aspect of slavery. In a society in which much of the economy was based on slave labor, this must have been a very difficult decision to live by. As time passed and the initial difficulties were surmounted, however, surely those Friends who changed the way they lived in response to this corporate leading found their lives more joyful. They had “come ‘round right” in relationships, and were freed from the terrible burden of guilt and empowered to positive action and lives of wholeness.

After Friends abandoned the practice of slavery, they were asked to work in the political arena to help abolish slavery as an institution, and then to help former slaves become part of the larger society. At every juncture, Friends were required to examine their relationship with black people, to see if it was in keeping with Fox’s admonition to “speak to that of God in everyone,” and with Christ’s great commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Although our work for racial justice is not finished, God calls Friends today to look into our hearts and examine our relationship with the rest of Creation, and to recognize that our neighbor includes *the entire Earth community*. We, too, are being asked to give up habits and things which have made our lives seem easier, just as slaves appeared to make life easier for their owners.

We are being called to examine our relationship with modern technology, to make conscious choices about which technologies enhance our lives and which are superfluous or destructive. We are being asked to develop a new relationship with the land, one based on mutual respect and care rather than exploitation. We are being asked to acknowledge our interdependence with all Creation. And we are being asked to do these things at a time in history when much of humanity still cannot accept other people as their “neighbors,” much less accept the sacred nature of the rest of Creation.

TODAY we are reminded constantly of the results of wrong relationships, as we hear the grim news of crime, pollution, drug abuse, racism, promiscuous sexuality, poverty, war, and despair. One hundred thirty years after its abolition in America, we still reap the bitter fruits of slavery. *How long will we reap the fruits of our treatment of the earth?* It is time that Friends seek to understand the spiritual consequences of our broken relationship with the rest of Creation, and how this broken relationship is affecting our human communities and the wider biological communities to which we belong. It is time we seek to mend this relationship and return to wholeness.

How many Friends have looked into their hearts and asked themselves, “If I had been living at the time of John Woolman, how would I have reacted to his message?” Friends have rested long on the laurels of Quaker participation in emancipation. In looking backwards so proudly, have we forgotten to look ahead at the new revelations we are offered? Two hundred years from now, will Friends be as proud of Quaker initiative in caring for the earth?

Now is the time for Friends to explore these new revelations. We must move forward with joyful hearts to help heal our human communities, and to reconnect humanity to the rest of Creation.

Article 3

Unleashing Holy Energy: Witnessing for God's Green Kingdom

by Ted Bernard

(from his keynote address at the 1998 FCUN retreat)

OVER THE YEARS, Friends Committee on Unity with Nature [now Quaker Earthcare Witness] has projected its work as drawing from the very taproots of Quakerism.

- ❖ The testimony of *peace*: living less violently in the midst of God's creation.
- ❖ The testimony of *simplicity*: reducing material demands upon the planet's resources, carving a path to right livelihoods.
- ❖ The testimony of *social justice*: witnessing for the vast oppressed and impoverished throngs of the earth who have a minuscule proportion of its material wealth; knowing that without social justice there can be no environmental justice; right sharing.
- ❖ The testimony of *integrity*: a commitment to truth, honesty, authenticity, and wholeness, which implies a life more fully integrated into the workings of Creation—that of God in every living thing.

We are a Quaker movement, and it seems right to have the force of Quaker history behind us. It has been eminently wise to build our work on these testimonies. They [provide] spiritual grounding that make sense to us. From these we have tried to make the following case:

1. Since we are sure that God would not possibly approve of war, violence, oppression, injustice, inequality, and dishonesty, it also seems likely that it is not God's will that Creation be trashed and that the earth's intricate and beautiful components and interrelationships be exterminated before their time.
2. God does not approve of overconsumption, inefficiency, and waste, causing less fortunate people to live in a barren world.
3. And if we cannot be honest and "come round right" in the way we ourselves live, we are unlikely to convince anyone else to change.

These are connections we have tried to make in our writings, workshops, activities, and personal lives. We have also tried to inform ourselves of other traditions and to be inspired by their wisdom. I am thinking of the practices of indigenous peoples, deep ecology, creation spirituality, and other faith traditions within and beyond Christianity.

To my mind, Quaker Earthcare Witness member Lisa Gould best contextualized [our situation] in a flyer that recalled the response of Quakers to human slavery two centuries ago. [*See previous article.*] She challenged Quakers today to be inspired by their example to witness and work toward righting the relationship between humans and this despoiled planet. But Lisa wondered whether we have as much courage to prevent enslavement, or worse, obliteration of Creation. She mused: "Two hundred years from now, will Friends be... proud of Quaker initiatives in caring for the earth?" That seems to me a central question, and the time available to work on it may be much less.

Where is the sense of urgency?

REGRETTABLY, the radical witness which aroused abolitionist Quakers is not yet out there today. When I speak to Quakers, I don't feel a sense of urgency. I don't sense that most Yearly Meetings or Monthly Meetings are "quaking" over the state of the earth. Beyond the small cadre of Quaker Earthcare Witness folk and those in our wider circle, there is not much evidence that we are leading Quakers to an understanding of the precarious future of the earth they inhabit and abuse.

Marshall Massey, whose vision helped spark the formation of Quaker Earthcare Witness, blames this on denial and being trapped in an immensely complex set of forces—the way the modern world works. He says we have a hard time admitting our complicity or admitting that our own ways of thinking and behaving immobilize us. He argues that we must come to grips with this denial before we can break through to the possibilities of an open-hearted and more

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harmonious relationship with God's green kingdom.

Asking the Religious Society of Friends to reexamine and deepen its spiritual relationship to the earth has been difficult. Some Quakers claim an environmental concern and tell stories of recycling and energy audits at Meeting Houses, of environmental workshops and First Day School curricula, and of Monthly and Yearly Meeting queries. Some seek insights from the "deep ecology" movement—at the risk of being called "pantheists." But most of us, myself included, have not arrived at a deeper level; we have not sufficiently opened our hearts to God's green kingdom and changed how we live.

Vermont professor Daniel Noel thinks that the vision of a cataclysmic ending that has haunted the human imagination for 3,000 years is now a literal menace and a source of present dread. Do Quakers understand this? Are Quakers capable of responding to the urgency of this situation?

William Durland believes the way Quakers worship may be part of the problem: In a Pendle Hill pamphlet he writes that in Meeting for Worship we float serenely in pools of silence while outside the Meeting House a flood of problems inundates the world. Our worship form, he thinks, is anesthetizing. Our light is a mere flicker.

How to rediscover the blazing inward Light that Quakers once emitted, how to tap the energizing center behind that Light, how to unleash the holy energy that moved the "Valiant Sixty" during the early Quaker movement—these are the challenges still before us. If we could learn how to do these things, we would release an apocalyptic witness, perhaps sufficient to respond to the magnitude of the need. What does this call us to do as activists and witnesses? If we wait patiently and if we are open we will be clear about where to go next. Letting go is hard, but when it happens, it will open new possibilities. We will do less but we will do it better. We will not feel sorry or guilty for that which we cannot do. We will find new directed energy for our activism and witness. We will collaborate more effectively with each other and with other Quaker and non-Quaker organizations. And we will be able to take our vision effectively to the wider Religious Society of Friends.

Healing ourselves and the earth

...IN SUM, Quaker Earthcare Witness can model a dynamic, 21st century spirit-led organization that practices what it preaches; that is impressively effective for its uncomplicated structure and modest resources; that understands that God and all Creation are sacred and therefore lives as lightly as possible; that uses fast and efficient means of getting its crystal-clear message out; that is the cutting edge of a mass movement of great force and fortitude, whole and inclusive and possessed of holy energy—an organization that seeks not only to heal the earth but to heal itself.

At the onset of Decade II for Quaker Earthcare Witness, I hope that a new energy, an energy that Isaiah foresaw in the coming kingdom in these comforting words:

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall grow wings as a dove; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.

—Isaiah 40:31

Article 4

Why a Specifically Quaker Organization on the Environment?

by William Beale

(from a 1994 *BeFriending Creation* article)

SINCE THERE ARE many excellent organizations actively working to improve our relation to the planet, is there any need or place for a specifically Quaker organization to address the same concerns? The fundamental environmental questions we face are essentially religious: What is our place in the world (Creation)? What is our purpose in life? What is good behavior which furthers that purpose and affirms that place?

There must be many in the Religious Society of Friends who have not had the opportunity to explore these questions, so I would like to offer, as food for further thought and discussion, the following factual reasons for Friends' spiritual concern for the environment:

- *The innate relatedness of all life.* This is exemplified perhaps most compellingly by the observations from science that all life is based on the very same code—DNA—which is shared by every plant, animal, virus, and bacterium on this planet.
- *The profound complexity of the web of life.* Our interrelatedness extends far beyond the genetic legacy of our DNA. Human society and economic activity interact with our biosphere in ways which humanity has barely begun to be aware of, much less understand. And as we increase in numbers and activity, our interactions become more overwhelming and hence more needful of our care.
- *The enormously disproportionate effect of the actions of humanity.* When we were few and powerless our actions had no more effect on our planet than those of opossums or anteaters. But now, with our burgeoning numbers and technological prowess, we have begun to have the dominant effect—overwhelming those of every other living creature. This power brings with it responsibility in proportion.
- *The unpredictability of the effect of our actions on the environment.* In the face of the complexity of ecological interactions, we must recognize our inability to understand what effects our actions may have. Witness the unpredictable effects of burning fossil fuels, which produce carbon dioxide and threaten climate change.
- *The need for caution and modesty of action (“walking gently”).* Since we are largely ignorant of the effects of our actions, and since these effects can be worldwide and long-lived, we are led to be modest in our actions, not just for our own sake but for the sake of our descendants—and for all living things.
- *The finiteness of our biosphere and our planet.* It has become obvious in the recent past that we live not in an unlimited volume of space but instead in a closed and relatively small sphere, only the very thin surface of which is able to support life.
- *The intrinsic limits of material resources.* Economists are belatedly coming to an observation which has been long held by physical scientists—that not only is there an absolute limit to the sustainable rate of consumption (i.e., the limit imposed by the solar energy we are able to intercept) but also a limit to total consumption of any commodity.
- *The laws of nature.* Utilization of resources is limited by the fact that once a substance is scattered it cannot be gathered together again without a disproportionate expenditure of time, energy, and other resources. Imagine for example being given the task to reassemble a pound of rare metal which someone has ground into powder and spread over the entire surface of the planet from an airplane. This is in fact what is happening to copper, tin, and many other relatively rare elements.

The moving finger writes, and, having writ, moves on. Nor all your piety or wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line. Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

—The Rubaiyat of Omar Khyaam

- *The essential requirement to limit our numbers.* Given the limits of the space and resources available to us, the need to limit our number is a simple fact of arithmetic, beyond any dispute or any philosophy. The question is not whether, but when, and to what extent we limit our numbers.
- *The demands of equity and just dealing with the present and posterity.* We must recognize that no single small group of humans can ethically or practically monopolize a major part of the world’s resources. The resources of the planet must be distributed not only over space but also over time. We must think of the future generations. To do otherwise is to deny the value of our offspring.
- *The increase in value of resources as knowledge accumulates.* This is perhaps hard to grasp, but is nevertheless a very real effect. It can be compared to the archeologist digging up a rare tomb—the earlier in the development of that art that the tomb is exhumed, the less that humanity learns from it, and so if the explorer is wise, he may in fact elect to do nothing at all with his find, but leave it to the wiser and more skilled colleagues of the future. And so it is with nature. What we use up today for some frivolous purpose might be used by future humans in far more valuable ways than we can dream of.

Earthcare and Friends Testimonies

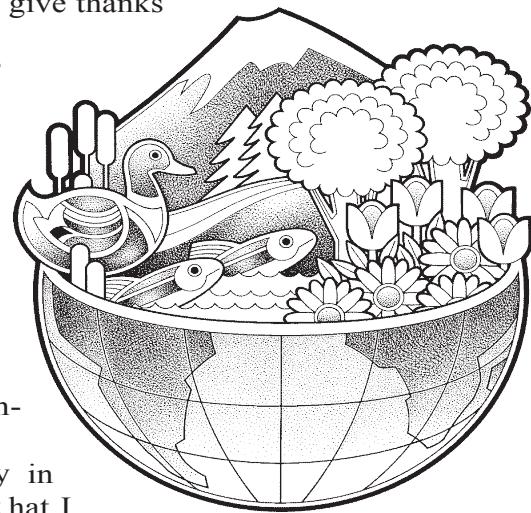
- *Materialism as a source of our difficulty.* Close to overpopulation as a root cause of human misery is the ancient and persistent error of materialism—the perception that since additional material possessions are crucial for happiness when one is poor, then ever more consumption is desirable when one's condition rises above poverty. What are the true sources of well-being? What are the consequences of pursuit of material goods beyond their real utility? These questions are, of course, universal in every religion, but why do we need to have them endlessly repeated generation to generation?

Questions for reflection

A TIME MAY COME when our concern for the environment becomes an integral part of our recognition of who we are called to be as Friends. At present, however, we need to increase our awareness of these special aspects of living our testimonies. As we reflect on how the historic Quaker testimonies can shape our daily lives, consider how the following questions are relevant to our use of food, transportation, housing, and entertainment. As well as applying them in our personal and family lives and in the life of our Meeting, let us ask how they apply in our personal and corporate witness for social justice and peace.

1. When do I take time to deepen my appreciation of being a member of the wondrous community of life on Earth? How do I give thanks for the beauty of Creation and the gift of life?
2. Do my actions reflect concern for the environment?
3. Do I give voice to my concerns? Is my speech on these subjects honest, unpretentious, and open to mutual learning?
4. Do we work together to educate ourselves about the care of the Creation, in order to make responsible choices?
5. Do we work to improve sharing of resources with everyone?
Recognizing that our patterns as consumers in the industrialized world are a major factor in the declining health of the earth's life support systems,
6. Am I careful to avoid spending and investing money in ways that result in others doing things to the earth that I would not do myself? (from Baltimore Yearly Meeting)
7. By sharing things we spread the world's resources. Do I enjoy things without owning them, and do I give things away for others to use?
8. Do I resist advertising and the broader forces of our culture that encourage unnecessary consumption?
9. Am I willing to know and pay the full and fair cost of the goods and services I use, including the future ecological and social costs?

—Strawberry Creek (Calif.) Friends Meeting's Deeper Ecology Study Group



Illustrative activity

DIVIDE INTO FIVE GROUPS: Peace, Simplicity, Equality, Truth-telling, and Integrity. Find out what your Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* says about these testimonies. Ask each group to list environmental issues that relate to that testimony and decide whether Earthcare should be included as a testimony. They could be asked to design a poster for their testimonies with Earthcare included in it, or to make another type of presentation of their conclusions. Then compare—even argue the cases. Then ask whether a case can be made for a separate Earthcare testimony.

Prayers and responsive readings

Environmental Sabbath

Leader We join with the earth and with each other

All To bring new life to the land
To restore the waters
To refresh the air.

Leader We join with the earth and with each other

All To renew the forests
To care for the plants
To protect the creatures.

Leader We join with the earth and with each other

All To celebrate the seas
To rejoice in the sunlight
To sing the song of the stars.

Leader We join with the earth and with each other

All To recreate the human community
To promote justice and peace
To remember our children.

Leader We join with the earth and each other.

All We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery: for the healing of the earth and the renewal of all life.

—United Nations Environmental Sabbath Program

Prayer

Creator,

May we heal the earth, all of creation. May we free the oppressed, including all the creatures on the earth who are abused, comfort the sick, and help the blind to see. May we restore the ravaged land, the poisoned waters and air, and the endangered habitats. May we give Sabbath rest to the land and all who dwell in it. May we proclaim that Creation is where we are all set free.



Unit 2. Quaker Testimonies and Earthcare

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- Finch, Suzanne. 2000. *A Quaker Testimony to the Earth?* Self-published, Bridport, Dorset, U.K.
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