

Quaker Earthcare Witness

Earthcare for Friends

Unit 3

Earthcare and the Bible

by Ruah Swennerfelt and Ingrid Fabianson

Purposes of this unit

1. To become better acquainted with what the Bible reveals as God's plan for creation.
2. To explore differing opinions about the Judeo-Christian tradition's relationship to Earthcare.
3. To inspire responsible Earthcare/stewardship.
4. To help us to describe and understand our role in Creation.

This unit could be used for at least four separate adult religious education sessions. There are four different articles, with questions for reflection following the end of all the articles. It is suggested that everyone read the article selected ahead of the time and then respond to the questions related to that article. Allow time for challenges and agreement. Look at how what you have read can be reflected in your daily life. Share your reaction to the differing approaches in the articles. How do they match or differ from your own thinking? And why?

Sacred texts and other inspirational readings

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again, the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

—1 Corinthians 21:14–26

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. God blessed 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 1:26–28

Hymns and songs

For the Beauty of the Earth. *Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal*, #10, first verse.

*For the beauty of the earth,
For the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

Issue presentations

_____Article 1_____

Connections

by Lisa Gould

(From *Caring for Creation, Reflections on the Biblical Basis of Earthcare*,
Quaker Earthcare Witness, 1999)

- ³⁶ *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*
³⁷ *Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*
³⁸ *This is the first and great commandment.*
³⁹ *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*
⁴⁰ *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

—Matthew 22:36–40

The Bible tells us a great deal about neighborliness. Six of the ten commandments deal with being a good neighbor:

- ¹² *Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*
¹³ *You shall not murder*
¹⁴ *You shall not commit adultery.*
¹⁵ *You shall not steal.*
¹⁶ *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
¹⁷ *You shalt not covet your neighbor's house, you shalt not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbor's.*

—Exodus 20:12–17

Jesus puts it very simply:

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you..."

—Matthew 7:12

Who *is* our neighbor? Is it the family next door? The people across the street? The folks in our community? Our state? Our country? Over in China or Guam or Costa Rica? Once again, scripture makes clear that it takes the broad view:

- ¹ *Happy are those who consider the poor, the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.*
² *The Lord protects them and keeps them alive; they are called happy in the land.*

—Psalms 41:1–2

And Jeremiah warns:

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper room by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and who does not give them their wages.

—Jeremiah 22:13

QUAKERS have had a pretty good grasp from the beginning of just who our *human* neighbors are. But now we are being asked: *Are just people our neighbors?*

On a very basic physical level, each of us is a community of organisms, with a normal flora of bacteria, mites, roundworms, and other organisms. A few have been around so long they're integral parts of our cells; the mitochondria, scientists believe, were originally symbiotic bacteria. Some members of our physical community are important in helping to keep out detrimental organisms, others are free-loaders, and a few become troublesome occasionally; there are also plenty of other organisms that would like to join the community—such as lice, ticks, fleas, fungi, viruses—and do so whenever the opportunity permits. This idea makes some people

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uncomfortable—we like to think we are quite independent entities, with distinct boundaries: between Us and Them.

And of course the community that is our body interacts physically with other communities, taking in food from plants and other animals, getting rid of wastes that are utilized by the detritus community, and finally, at death, our body community becoming a part of myriad other communities. If you think about it, there *are* no boundaries between one organism and another, between “life” and “non-life.” We are constantly flowing from one to another, one moment a portion of a human being, the next skin in a dust pile, transformed shortly into a house plant or a rhododendron bush...exhaled to be breathed in by a possum...from bacteria into an oak tree into a gypsy moth...all through the food web and the non-living world we travel, zillions of fragments forever being put together and taken apart to make yet more unique creations. Physically we possess no true boundaries, we are forever re-molded and recast into new forms.

Francis Hole, a soil scientist and poet (and Friend), has said “Our bodies are disposable, biodegradable containers for spirit.” We are worms and granite, oak trees and robins, sea spume and mica, we are stardust...we are each as old as the universe.

Listen to the words of poet William Carlos Williams:

*There is nothing to eat
seek it where you will,
but the body of the Lord.
The blessed plants
and the sea, yield it
to the imagination
Intact.*

The Koran tells us: “Whithersoever ye turn, there is the face of God.” [II:115]

How do we nurture an understanding of our connections with one another, with our human community and with our non-human neighbors? The first step in getting to know other people is to look them in the eye, to recognize them. An African greeting—used for both humans and non-humans—is, “I see you, O I see you!” Once we have seen, we learn a name, for if we don’t name, life quickly becomes very complicated (“Hello, I’d like to speak to that person in your department who is very tall, has gray hair, a funny chin, and laughs a lot,” *or* “Doctor, I think you should use that plant that’s green, has fuzzy stems, purple flowers, and the bees like”). But of course, seeing and naming are only the beginning of the relationship. And naming can certainly be a two-edged sword, can’t it? Look at the wars that human being have fought essentially over the name of God. As if we had any clue at all what God’s true name is! As if we, with our imaginations limited by brain structure, language, and culture, could ever name or even begin to define that which is unnameable and unknowable, certainly far beyond pitiful human concepts of race and tribe and gender!

If you are to truly know another being, you must be open to learning on many levels. Marge Piercy (1982) writes:

I live among people who think that analyzing something is an action, who think that if they have dissected why they have done something that makes it permissible to do it again, who think that a label gives possession, that when they have identified a sharp-shinned hawk they know something of hawkness—wooing high in the air and sinking with talons locked, swooping on live prey and tasting the fresh blood spurt hot, feeling with each extended feather the warm and cold shift of the winds and the sculpture of the invisible masses of moving air. Dealing in words, I try to remember how far they go and where they leave off. Hungry for food for my brain, I try to remember all the other ways of knowing that coexist.

We gain this kind of knowing through one of the greatest gifts the Creator has given humanity, our imaginations. Wendell Berry (1993) notes: “It is by imagination that we cross over the differences between ourselves and other beings and thus learn compassion, forbearance, mercy, forgiveness, sympathy, and love—the virtues without which neither we nor the world can live.”

Another wonderful writer, Loren Eiseley (1946), wrote of standing on the edge of a pond and seeing a frog:

Whenever I catch a frog's eye... I stand quite still and try hard not to move or lift a hand since it would only frighten him. And standing thus it finally comes to me that this is the most enormous extension of vision of which life is capable: the projection of itself into other lives. This is the magnificent power of humanity. It is, far more than any spatial adventure, the supreme epitome of the reaching out.

Friend John Woolman wrote very movingly of an experience he had as a child, an experience which helped him make the imaginative leap to understanding:

I may mention a remarkable circumstance that occurred in my childhood. On going to a neighbor's house, I saw on the way a robin sitting on her nest, and as I came near she went off; but having young ones, she flew about, and with many cries expressed her concern for them. I stood and threw stones at her, and one striking her she fell down dead. At first I was pleased with the exploit, but after a few minutes was seized with horror, at having, in a sportive way, killed an innocent creature while she was careful for her young.

I beheld her lying dead, and thought those young ones, for which she was so careful, must now perish for want of their dam to nourish them. After some painful considerations on the subject, I climbed up the tree, took all the young birds, and killed them, supposing that better than to leave them to pine away and die miserably. In this case I believe that Scripture proverb was fulfilled, "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." I then went on my errand, and for some hours could think of little else but the cruelties I had committed, and was much troubled. Thus He whose tender mercies are over all his works hath placed a principle in the human mind, which incites to exercise goodness towards every living creature; and this being singly attended to, people become tender-hearted and sympathizing; but when frequently and totally rejected, the mind becomes shut up in a contrary disposition.

—*The Journal of John Woolman*, pp. 2–3, Whittier edition

I AM FORTUNATE THAT every few years I am able to accompany my husband Mark to Jamaica, where he teaches a course in Tropical Ecology. Each morning, weather permitting, we are out on the reefs snorkeling, gazing in wonder and delight at the amazing coral reef community. Because I swim without a wet suit—in only a bathing suit covered with T-shirt so I don't burn in the sun—I am in direct contact with the water. It is a place "fearfully and wonderfully made," a community of bright colors and quick fishy dartings, of waving anemones and fiery coral, of gentle sea slugs and gleaming barracuda, spiny sea urchins and pulsing jellyfish. And in rare moments, after I've been there a little while, I feel as if I belong. I forget I am a guest and become, however fleetingly, a member of that community. And it is always with a sense of shock—and loss—that I realize I must rise to the surface and become again an air-breathing creature.

When we are in contact like this—when we truly connect—we know these moments as precious. Awe, gratitude, and joy all spring from within us when we are connected. Meeting for Worship can connect us, being in non-human communities can connect us, dance, music, sex, good food, prayer, a long conversation with a good friend, laughter, tears—all can connect us. And they are *all* "natural"—there are really no natural-versus-unnatural connections, just *connections*, an unlimited number of ways to be one with Creation and the Creator.

Where we fail is in not allowing true "connections" to occur. We disconnect ourselves at every interval, by our fanatic adherence to rigid time frames, by choosing the making of money over connections with family and friends, by watching television (that great disconnecter which turns us into observers *of* rather than participants *in* life): We disconnect in our culture's emphasis on doing things faster rather than better, in our need to categorize people by their gender or race or religion or nationality, in the eating of packaged and processed food that often bears little resemblance to the plants and animals that yielded their substance for them. The disconnections seem endless.

FOR ME PERSONALLY, one of the symbols of our culture's disconnectedness comes through music. Several years ago I spent three weeks with a group of American teenagers in a village in Estonia. Our Estonian hosts gave us a wonderful Fourth of July party, and after we ate we sat around a bonfire and sang. The Estonian teenagers would sing a song, and then the Americans. The Estonians sang beautiful folk songs, in four-part harmony. The American teenagers, to my great surprise (for I grew up singing) knew very few songs that they were able to sing (though they knew the words to many popular songs, such as music of the Beatles, they were not able to sing them), and they would suggest things like "A hundred bottles of beer on the wall"! I have attended graduations where the students could barely sing the class song they had *practiced*. I've even heard singing recently, on television and in the movies, that barely passed for music, in sharp contrast to movies of just 40 or 50 years ago. In my heart, this musical disharmony is a clear symbol for the disconnectedness and disharmony of our modern life.

Much of what's called "New Age" spirituality seem to be about people's deep desire to reconnect. I know that many people object to New Age philosophies, to the paraphernalia of crystals and herbs and incense, to what they fear is pagan worship, to the movement toward Native American, Buddhist, or other non-Judeo-Christian spiritualities. At the core of this movement, however, seems to be a desire to reconnect with the pattern of Creation. And with so many who are seeking in those directions, what does this say about traditional, mainstream churches, where many feel that they do not find those connections with Creation? While fussing about "New Agers," have traditional churches forgotten to take a good look in the mirror? I wonder if Jesus might once again say:

23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.

24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

—Matthew 23:23–24

TO REALLY KNOW SOMETHING—and to truly love it—you must feel yourself connected to it, in a very personal way. The more abstract you make the connection, the less real care you will give it. It's like the difference between writing a check to American Friends Service Committee, and visiting with a sick friend. Both may be helpful, but the abstract act of writing a check to help those you have never seen will never have the affection of personal contact. It is said that "familiarity breeds contempt," and on a superficial level that is true: The better you know someone, the better you know their faults and limitations. But I think that more often than not, familiarity breeds affection, the sense that you know and are known, warts and all, and still cherish and are cherished. And familiarity enables you to recognize that each member of a community has a role and offers unique gifts.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes:

4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,

5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us; prophecy, in proportion to faith;

7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;

8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

—Romans 12:4–21

What happens when the community suffers the loss of a member? What happens when a neighbor dies? When biologists have bemoaned the great loss of species we are experiencing, some have accused them of simply mourning change itself. After all, the line goes, change is inevitable. That is true, of course, but we are speaking of a new kind of change, the like of which has never before occurred on this scale, in this time frame. And when we mourn this change,

we are not talking of grief over the loss of a beloved relative or friend, whose passing we mourn but whose presence among us we also celebrate—I speak of the loss of a kind that will never be resurrected, and whose passing will be noted consciously by few. I speak of deaths with no funerals, losses mostly without recognition: I speak of extinctions. Who speaks for these dead? Who sings a lament when the last of a species is gone? And who understands the few mourners at the wake?

Aldo Leopold, writing of the passing of the Passenger Pigeon in his book *A Sand County Almanac*, wrote: “For one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun. The Cro-Magnon who slew the last mammoth thought only of steaks. The sailor who clubbed the last auk thought of nothing at all. But we, who have lost our pigeons, mourn the loss.”

Do you understand the pain of those in Bosnia, seeing their loved ones slaughtered and their villages destroyed? Have you heard the cries from Rwanda, as Hutu and Tutsi battle one another? Surely we have all grieved over the senseless deaths in these and so many places where human madness has won out over human kindness. Can you then not hear the sound of ecosystems dying, the cry of thousands of species looking for members of their communities, which are no longer?

*In Ramah there was a voice heard, lamentation and weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not.*

—Matthew 2:18

THAT THERE ARE MOURNERS there is no question. The grief comes tentatively, personally. “Where is the Indigo Bunting I used to see on the telephone wires every summer over by the Johnson farm?” “Did you hear a Whip-Poor-Will this summer?—we never heard one at our place.” “I haven’t seen a Luna Moth in years.” And there are other questions, bravely framed as scientific inquiry, but secretly are laments: “Have you noticed there seem to be far fewer shells on the beaches?” “Are the number of snakes declining in the state?” “Doesn’t it seem to you that there are fewer insects?”

I believe the need to mourn what’s being lost is crucial. The loss of a warbler song in May, or the destruction of a favorite meadow, are personal losses. The grief is essential, and to deny it is to keep a wound festering. But society at large does not recognize the dying, and therefore rejects the need to mourn, under the guise that the mourner is merely lamenting “progress.” And the grief is deepened, I think, knowing that we are both mourner and murderer, the bereaved as well as the executioner. “I am become Death,” were Oppenheimer’s words, I believe, when he witnessed the first atomic bomb explosion. Does it not feel at times that *we* “are become death,” *we*, our culture and our diseased ways?

The Creator felt that way about people at one time, so disgusted with the whole lot of us that God decided to destroy Creation:

¹³ *And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.”*

—Genesis 6:13

But God realized that there *were* righteous people, and decided to save part of Creation, and start anew, reestablishing the covenant with the people and with all living things.

¹¹ *I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.*

¹² *God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations.*

¹³ *I shall set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”*

—Genesis 9:11–13

God decided that Creation was worth saving, and that human beings were—and are—part of that Creation. If the Creator can forgive us—and is that not the entire message of the New Testament—does that not give us great hope? The world will not be a better place without people—although in our collective guilt we sometimes feel that way—but the world *will* be a better place when people learn to live in right relationship to the rest of Creation.

As Quakers, we are keenly aware that to be full human beings, we must recognize the full humanity of all other people. But I think that each of us will be fully human only when we recognize the full aliveness of all Creation, and act on that recognition, when we learn to “speak to that of God in everything.” Hear the words of Old Jack, an elderly farmer in one of Wendell Berry’s (1986) novels:

The way we are we are members of each other. All of us. Everything. The difference ain’t in who is a member and who is not, but in who knows it and who don’t.

LISA GOULD is a member of Westerly (R.I.) Monthly Meeting and has published a number of booklets and leaflets for Quaker Earthcare Witness. She serves as the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Natural History Survey and also does quite a bit of informal writing, lecturing, and teaching about the natural world.

_____Article 2_____

Earth Process and the Wish for Human Exemption

by Keith Helmuth

(Adapted with permission from *EarthLight* magazine, Issue #25, Spring 1997)

IN 1967 Lynn White Jr., historian of technology and Medieval culture, published an essay titled, *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, in which he identified the Biblical tradition of human dominion over the Earth as the origin of the environmental trouble we are now in. This essay marked the opening of a discussion on ecology and the Bible which is still gaining momentum and is now widely recognized as critically important for understanding and possibly altering our culture’s eco-destructive behavior.

During this discussion many Christian thinkers have rallied to the defense of “dominion” by casting it in a stewardship mold. In addition, the Bible has been diligently combed in search of passages which reflect any degree of ecological understanding. Most of the references which can be read in this light are found in the Hebrew scripture and amount to a forceful reiteration of the fact that “the earth is the Lord’s,” “all flesh is as grass,” and that humans are accountable to God for the use they make of Creation.

From the standpoint of ecology, this re-reading of the Bible quickly runs into a limitation. The context of understanding is still *ownership*—God’s ownership and human management. Good management is certainly better than bad management. But management remains management, and, with regard to what we now know about the ecological complexity of the earth, the idea of human management is a stunningly arrogant delusion.

The ethos of domination

REVISING OUR UNDERSTANDING of dominion and rehabilitating a theology of creation is not likely to alter the fact that the ethos of domination permeates Western culture. The urge to dominate is undoubtedly a pre-biblical behavior. But the biblical injunction to march under the banner of a progressively widening dominion, has allowed this tendency to be amplified into a virtual worldview, a generally unconscious assumption about the natural order of things and relationships.

Denial of Earth process

THE PROBLEM OF DOMINION, however, is just the tip of the theological iceberg. Looking deeper, I see two other configurations of feeling, thought, and language, intrinsic to the biblical worldview, which are of even greater ecological significance. They are the misunderstanding and stigmatizing of death and the wish for exemption from the basic conditions of Earth process.

The wish for exemption

THE STORY OF A SUPREME God's chosen people in the Hebrew scripture flows from the wish for special status in the fabric of Earth's social ecology—special status in relation not only to other life forms, but in relation to other human groupings as well. The story of the defeat of death in the Christian scripture is the core of the wish for exemption from the conditions of Earth process.

These two cultural psychologies, these two transcendent wishes, deeply inform Judeo-Christian tradition and its utopian secular derivatives, such as, Marxism, various socialisms, capitalism, and technological utopianism. In combination they have driven the social and economic behavior which has set the stage, and has now dramatically raised the curtain, on the disabling of Earth's biotic environments.

The Christian misunderstanding and stigmatization of death is a more difficult problem, with regard to ecological integrity, than is the ideology of dominion. A whole theology of evil, sin, punishment, and salvation is anchored in seeing death as an enemy. In a still further theological twist, Christian doctrine developed the view that since death was pervasive throughout Earth process, Earth itself was in a "fallen" state. Earth was seen as beholden to the power of evil and in need of redemption.

This unfortunate doctrine can, of course, be refuted from within the Bible itself, since God is clearly recorded as having declared Creation to be "good." The only part of it God is reported to have regretted making is the human. But despite this recovery, we are still left with the powerful assumption that death is the great enemy of life.

The antidote to this profoundly anti-ecological view is not difficult to demonstrate. We are dealing with an error in language, thought process, and logic—an error with great emotional and behavioral consequences. Think of the numerous times you have heard and used the expression "life and death." This expression sets up an opposition which seems self-evidently intrinsic to the natural order of things, a polarity which seems to come from the very dawn of our culture.

But death is not the opposite of life. Death is the opposite of conception and birth. Life is the realm which contains them both. Birth and death are the way life hands itself on from generation to generation, from community to community. Birth and death are like right and left hands folded into each other for the presentation of a gift. When the realization of this monumental error dawns over us, our siege mentality in relation to death releases its grip and we have the opportunity to stand at ease.

This mentality surrounds the story of the Children of Israel at the level of competition with other peoples and emerges in Christianity in relation to death and the place of death in Earth process. This sense of opposition, battle, victory, and domination which has powered Western civilization in its geographic and technological exploits, has now proven to have been a singularly inappropriate way of relating to Earth process. An appropriate understanding of death and the abandonment of the siege mentality may, perhaps, foreshadow the emergence of a truly ecological culture.

In addition to the defeat of death, there is, throughout the Bible, a more generalized wish for exemption from the earth's normal conditions. The accounts of miracles feed the wish for exemption. After the removal of the Israelites from Egypt, the miraculous plays a relatively minor role in Hebrew scripture. But in the Christian scripture, the miraculous is not only high profile, but comes to be the whole point. The suspension of the house rules, a waiver of compliance with the Earth's normal conditions, is seen as the culminating and authenticating component of the Christian story.

Psychic attachment to the possibility of miracles is not in itself a problem. Strange things do seem to happen. But to rest the entire case of eternal truth and the Divine-human relationship on an exemption from the earth's normal conditions is to open the door on a staggeringly difficult theological task. The Christian story of salvation was thus detached from any Earth-based reality and failed to generate an ecologically grounded ethic. Its theological credibility became increasingly diminished as the culture of science, technology, and economic development gained ascendancy.

Technology, a new secular religion

WHAT DID NOT BECOME REMOTE, however, was the biblically rooted wish for human exemption. It was no longer a matter of waiting for miracles. Miracles could now, increasingly, be designed and produced—made to order. Through the accumulation of wealth and the control of technology, the social relations and economic behavior characteristic of ecological adaptation could more and more be set aside in favor of the pursuit of privilege and aggrandizement.

Technological success became the miracle of a new secular religion, to which a new “chosen people” began to aspire. Thus, we have traveled deep into the logic of consumerism, a logic—still largely divorced from Earth process—which is poisoning the planet.

Do I really think all this can be laid on the doorstep of the Bible? Not quite; the issue is far more complex in terms of cultural influences at work throughout our history. But I do think the development of Western culture cannot be understood or redirected towards ecologically sustainable practices without careful scrutiny of the Biblical code and the worldview which flows from it.

The Bible is central to our culture and is a deep, formative influence, even (or perhaps especially) on those who have never given it much thought. The Bible study reflected here is an effort to rescue our heritage. It is, after all, the only scripture we have. I am suggesting that if we disentangle and extract the anti-ecological elements of the biblical worldview, then the truly vital and enduring values of our heritage—namely compassion and justice—may shine through and help us build reasonably harmonious social ecologies within the various wild ecologies of the given, ongoing Creation.

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Article 3

Right relationship

by Lisa Lofland Gould

(from *Caring for Creation, Reflections on the Biblical Basis of Earthcare*,
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For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

—Matthew 6:21

You see, I am alive.

You see, I stand in good relation to the earth.

You see, I stand in good relation to the gods.

You see, I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful.

You see, I stand in good relation to you.

You see, I am alive, I am alive.

THIS NATIVE AMERICAN POEM expresses a joy of living in balance, in right relationship to the Creator, other people, and all Creation. What does it mean to stand in good relation to the Earth? In good relation to all that is beautiful? In good relation to one another?

Are we standing in good relation to the earth? Here are a few of the facts:

- ❖ Each second a forested area the size of a football field is cut down; we lose an area a little smaller than the state of Kentucky each year.
- ❖ Billions of tons of topsoil are lost from cropland each year. As the quality of agricultural land diminishes with topsoil loss, there are also decreasing water supplies available for irrigation and increasing conversion of farmland industry and other forms of development. World grain production in 1995 was 5 percent below the 1990 harvest, and carryover stocks declined.
- ❖ The increase in CO₂ and others gases' concentrations in the atmosphere may cause as much as a 5- to 7-degree Fahrenheit rise in mean global temperature by the year 2040;

this is as much change in mean global temperature as has occurred since the last ice age, but it will occur in 50 years rather than in 20,000. 1995 was the warmest year on record; the ten warmest years of the past 130 years occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. [See Unite 14 on Climate Change and Earth Process.]

- ❖ Air pollution damages crops, livestock, human health, and ecosystems all over the world. “What goes up, must come down”: the pollution that comes from one place ends up in another. Soot from the oil fires in Kuwait made the snows in the Himalayas black and oily; the fallout from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster fell on Sweden and Norway. There has been a 40-percent increase in the asthma rate in the industrialized Western world since 1982, one third of the victims children—air pollution, both indoor and outdoor, is considered to be the major factor.
- ❖ The presence of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in the atmosphere is breaking down the ozone layer, which protects us from ultraviolet radiation; there are concerns that this will affect both agriculture and human health.
- ❖ Thousands of barrels of toxic and radioactive waste have been buried in landfills or dumped into the ocean; these are time bombs for future generations.
- ❖ Each year, three million children under age five die of diarrheal diseases, related to poor water quality—a direct result of poverty and the unequal distribution of the world’s resources.
- ❖ The human population reached 5.8 billion in 1996, and is predicted to reach nearly 10 billion by the year 2050; at the same time, the planet will be facing major changes in climate, with unprecedented effects on agriculture and coastal habitations. The ongoing loss of topsoil will act in synergy to have an impact on human ability to produce food.
- ❖ Current estimates suggest that each hour anywhere from four to eight species go extinct (compare this to the “massive” die-off of the dinosaurs, which occurred at a rate of one species every 1,000 years); we believe that by the year 2000 20 percent of all existing species will be gone (the tiger and the rhinoceros likely to be among them). We have named only a small percentage of these species, and know very little about how they function within their ecosystems. Some scientists have likened most species to rivets in the body of a jet plane: You don’t see them, or think about them, but they are crucial. How many rivets can an airplane lose before it crashes? How many species can be lost before ecosystems crash, with unpredictable effects on all life on the planet, including human life?

OKAY—ENOUGH. We have been bombarded with such facts for many years now. I first saw Mark, my future husband, at an organizational meeting for the first celebration of Earth Day at the University of Rhode Island in 1970; in 1995, at the 25th anniversary celebration of Earth Day, we were still saying the same things. And you know, they have been said, in some form, for thousands of years! I have already written about the many Bible passages that talk about God’s laws for protecting the Creation. But God also gave some clear instructions on how to be in right relationship with the land itself, through laws that required a year of rest for cultivated land every seventh year:

Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

—Leviticus 25:3–4

There was also to be a year of rest every 50th year, the jubilee, when all slaves were to be freed and land leases would expire, everyone returning to their ancestral holdings and their families. God says quite firmly that people cannot own the land forever:

²³ *The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.*

²⁴ *Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.*

—Leviticus 25:23–24

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And the Bible tells us, in quite clear terms, what will happen if we don't follow God's laws, including our covenant relationship with the land, in these lines from Leviticus:

- 19 I will break your proud glory, and I will make your sky like iron and your earth like copper.*
20 Your strength shall be spent to no purpose: your land shall not yield its produce, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit...
33 And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheath the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste.
34 Then the land shall make up for its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the hands of your enemies, then the land shall rest and make up for its sabbath years.
35 As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it.

—Leviticus 26:19–20

Proverbs also reminds us of the land relationship:

- 20 Therefore walk in the way of the good, and keep to the paths of the just.*
21 For the upright will abide in the land and the innocent will remain in it;
22 but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

—Proverbs 2:20–22

Of course Isaiah has something to say on this:

- 4 The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish together with the earth.*
5 The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken their everlasting covenant.
6 Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt...

—Isaiah 24:4–13

As does Hosea:

For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

—Hosea 8:7

APPARENTLY these laws involving land redemption were mostly ignored by the Israelites from the beginning. Ever since then, it's curious how little we have heard from the religious community about the Levitical laws involving the sabbath for the land, and the fact that the land ultimately belongs to God, while other Levitical laws, such as those against homosexuality, have been widely trumpeted.

Do we have some selective vision here? How easy it is to attack a practice when we believe it has nothing to do with us, but oh, how scary things get when our money is involved, and how contorted the denial becomes! We have people in our country now who will not admit that the actions they take on "their" land affect adjoining lands and waters (or perhaps they simply do not care about those effects). Can you imagine what might happen if the religious community were to begin to preach about sabbath for the land? Sixty years of "cold war" already inform us of how terrified capitalist society is at the idea of communal land ownership—and the failure of industrial communism informs us that different models are needed. There is much new thinking to be done, for the area of private property rights—and our culture's belief that it can take endlessly from the Earth—needs all the spirit-led thought and action it can muster.

Wendell Berry in *Home Economics* states: "The industrial mind is a mind without compunction; it simply accepts that people, ultimately, will be treated as things and that things, ultimately, will be treated as garbage."

Even if you've never read the Bible, you couldn't have helped but know, as part of our culture, that the Bible is ambivalent about wealth. Solomon and Job, for example, are rewarded with great wealth, but those who let the pursuit of wealth become the driving force in their lives are warned over and over again. How familiar to all of us are these lines from Scripture:

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

- ⁹ *But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.*
- ¹⁰ *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.*
—1 Timothy 6:9–10
- ¹⁹ *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:*
- ²⁰ *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:*
- ²¹ *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also...*
- ²⁴ *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*
—Matthew 6:19–24

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

—Mark 10:25

Nor are admonitions about loving money only to be found in the New Testament:

- ¹⁵ *The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands.*
- ¹⁶ *They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes but they do not see;*
- ¹⁷ *They have ears, but they do not hear, and there is not breath in their mouths.*
- ¹⁸ *Those who make them and all who trust them shall become like them.*
Psalms 135:15–18

The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain.

—Ecclesiastes 5:10

You have sown much, and harvested little;

You eat, but you never have enough;

you drink, but you never have your fill;

you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;

and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes.”

—Haggai 1:6

THE ENTIRE BIBLE is a treatise about right relationship, warning over and over about the sins of excess wealth, lust, power, and religious apostasy. The Old Testament is full of God telling people how to behave, explaining over and over that God *expects* responsible behavior—and the people ignoring the laws, and being punished over and over. The New Testament is about the Divine Spirit coming to earth and showing people how it's done, trying to capture their imaginations in a totally new way.... and people are still ignoring God's message.

John Woolman was very concerned about the right relationship with wealth, and right relationship among people.

...Look, my dear friends, to Divine Providence, and follow in simplicity that exercise of body, that plainness and frugality, which true wisdom leads to; so may you be preserved from those dangers... such as are aiming at outward ease and greatness.

Treasures, though small, attained on a true principle of virtue, are sweet; and while we walk in the light of the Lord there is true comfort and satisfaction in the possession; neither the murmurs of an oppressed people, nor a throbbing, uneasy conscience, nor anxious thoughts about the events of things, hinder the enjoyment of them.

Notice that Woolman is talking about the ability to enjoy life to the fullest, when we are in right relationship with our possessions.

Woolman recalls in his Journal a discussion with a Friend who was defending the slave trade, saying it was a biblical imperative that the descendants of Cain, whom God made black in punishment for killing Abel, be enslaved:

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...I was troubled to perceive the darkness of their imaginations, and in some pressure of spirit said, “The love of ease and gain are the motives in general of keeping slaves, and men are wont to take hold of weak arguments to support a cause which is unreasonable. I have no interest on either side, save only the interest which I desire to have in the truth. I believe liberty is their right, and as I see they are not only deprived of it, but treated in other respects with inhumanity in many places. I believe He who is a refuge for the oppressed will, in his own time, plead their cause, and happy will it be for such as walk in uprightness before him.”

AS WOOLMAN TRAVELED throughout the eastern U.S. during the mid-1700s in witness against slavery, he worried about the effect of slavery on both the slave and the enslaver. He wrote in his journal “...the white people and their children so generally [live] without much labour... I saw in these southern provinces so many vices and corruptions increased by this trade and this way of life, that it appeared to me as a dark gloominess hanging over the land; and though now many willingly run into it, yet in [the] future the consequences will be grievous to posterity.”

Should we hear “the murmurs of an oppressed people” or have “a throbbing uneasy conscience” as we go about our lives? Well, do we know where our electricity comes from? Do we know if people have been forced off their lands, deprived of their hunting grounds, and seen their cultures disintegrate so that we here in America can forget to turn out the lights? Do we know where our garbage goes—whose community it is buried in or who breathes the smoke from the incinerator where it is burned? Do we know whose impoverished country accepts the toxic wastes that we refuse to have on American soil? It seems to me we continue to make that age-old assumption that, in Wendell Berry’s words, “it is permissible to ruin one place or culture for the sake of another.” (*Home Economics*)

So we continue to struggle with “the love of ease and gain,” both in our relationship with our fellow human beings and our relationship to the rest of Creation. We still reap the bitter fruits of slavery, even now, 130 years after its abolishment: How long will we reap the fruits of our treatment of the Earth? Friends are very proud of Quaker achievements in helping to right our relationship with the slaves; to hear some Friends, you’d think that abolition happened just yesterday and they’d been part of the Underground Railroad themselves! Let us turn around, Friends, and look forward into the future: In the year 2126—130 years from now—will Friends look back so proudly at Quaker achievement in righting our relationship with Creation? What are—and will be—the spiritual consequences of our disconnection from the Earth?

Realize, Friends, that we’re not trying to “preserve” the Earth! That sounds like we’re going to pickle it, put it neatly in a jar and keep it on a museum shelf somewhere, to be dusted off and gawked at every now and then. *That’s* how we’ve been treating the Earth for far too long—as “Other.” The Earth will likely do quite nicely preserving itself—we’re trying to save *ourselves*, by bringing ourselves back into right relationship with Creation and the Creator.

Christ tells us: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” [Matthew 5:48]. I struggled with this word “perfect” for many years: I knew there was no way *I* would ever be perfect; that was simply unattainable for any person, and certainly for me. But then a Friend in our Meeting, who had studied Hebrew, said that another translation for “perfect” was “whole.” “Be ye whole” —now *that* has potential, that gives us hope. What if we focus on wholeness—*holiness*—the bringing together of all Earth communities?

How do we begin to create wholeness? We begin in the most obvious place, ourselves. As I mentioned in the first unit, one area that seems to be out of right relationship in today’s world is *time*. But this, too, is an old problem—look at that wonderful story of Mary and Martha that Luke tells. In the story, Jesus and the disciples are traveling:

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of

only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

—Luke 10:38–42

Now can't you just hear Martha muttering in the kitchen and banging pots for the next hour: “Of *course* she's got the better part; she's in there sitting on her duff while I'm in here cooking dinner for a small tribe!” What woman doesn't resonate to that story, and while fully understanding Jesus' message, still sympathize with Martha? How to balance the Mary and Martha in all our lives is crucial to coming round right with time!

And yet, I cannot help but wonder what Jesus might have to say about the dishonoring of Martha—of all that relates to the so-called feminine side of us—in today's society. Rearing children, cooking meals, cleaning the house, caring for our neighbors, tending the sick and elderly—the keeping of a home and caring for a community—are so devalued now that people who do these things full-time often apologize for not “working”! Modern society has a deep prejudice against work that does not earn a wage. After all, time is money, right?

John Woolman also wrote on right relationship with time: “So great is the hurry in the spirit of this world, that in aiming to do business quickly and to gain wealth the creation at this day doth loudly groan.”

Woolman found ways to make clear his witness against slavery, such as wearing undyed cloth (so he would have no connection with the trade of indigo dye, which used slave labor), and refusing to write bills of sale for slaves. Today things seem more murky; it's often harder to make those clear witnesses. But how did Woolman know when he was not in right relationship? He listened to the Inner Light, constantly, to assess what he should do. When he was not in right relationship, he knew it: He would be “in considerable agitation of mind.” If we are to discern our place in Creation, we must also take that time to listen, to be open to that “still, small voice.” This is the reason I stress the need for us to get into right relationship with time.

One of my gauges for right relationship is beauty. I don't mean the way that we people usually label beauty, calling a rose “beautiful” and a tarantula “ugly.” I mean the true beauty of *integrity*. If something is beautiful, there is a harmony to it—it radiates integrity, whether we speak of an animal or plant, music, a child's toy, a meal we serve. We know when we have had a beautiful day: The pieces fit together, and we flow from one part to another. If we live in a beautiful way, we know it. I think it is especially important that we surround children with true beauty—in our homes, our schools, our Meetings—that we envelope them with that integrity, both as a spiritual shield against the crumbling integrity of our wider society, and as a germ of hope.

Isaiah has a lovely, Quakerly phrase about what will happen when we are in right relationship:

17 The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

—Isaiah 32:17

Ecclesiastes also reminds us of the beauty of the pattern, of being part of the inner stillness:

- 3 What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?*
- 4 A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.*
- 5 The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises.*
- 6 The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.*
- 7 All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they continue to flow.*

—Ecclesiastes 1:2–11

WE KNOW IT IS NOT EASY to change our ways, our patterns of living. But I like to think that even our mistakes and backslidings have a use. The analogy of gardening came to my heart in worship one First Day—of how I need to root out bad habits, like I need to weed the garden. Some habits are like chickweed and easily uprooted; although they may pop up again from seed, they can again be removed. Others habits have deep taproots and grubbing them out is sweaty and difficult. How easy to remove only those parts which show on the surface, and leave

the deep roots to sprout again! Weeds will always pop up in any empty space, any place in the heart left neglected and untended. But I had a happy thought: The weeds can be thrown onto the compost heap of the soul, fertilizing one's life and adding richness and depth to the soil. It is from that compost that we grow.

Friends, let us keep these words in our hearts, let us allow them grow in our imaginations as we seek the path back to right relationship.

You see, we are alive.

You see, we stand in good relation to the earth.

You see, we stand in good relation to the gods.

You see, we stand in good relation to all that is beautiful.

You see, we stand in good relation to each other.

You see, we are alive, we are alive.

_____Article 4_____

What Does the Judeo-Christian Tradition Teach Us, *Earth-Wise*?

by Louis Cox

(Adapted from *Becoming a Friend to the Creation*, Quaker Earthcare Witness, 1994)

QUAKER EARTHCARE WITNESS encourages a spiritual concern for the environment because we believe that is the key to motivating people to live in ways that do not threaten the fragile ecological systems on which all life depends. In other words, if we respond only when we are impacted personally, irreversible damage will continue until it is too late for everyone.

There are encouraging signs that orientations are changing. "Environmental theology" is springing from the roots of ancient traditions, and there is growing appreciation for the storehouse of sophisticated, yet earthy wisdom to be found in indigenous religions.

When it comes to specific spiritual paths or religious traditions, we tend to take a pragmatic stance that I would express this way: "Practice Earthcare or stewardship in the context of whatever faith works for you. (Religion, like language, is universal; but both are experienced in terms of particular faiths and languages, which are bound up with their respective human cultures.) Quakerism works for us, but from the standpoint of integrity of Creation we value any religious tradition or orientation that fosters benign treatment of the Earth."

But some deep ecologists, eco-feminists, and adherents of holistic philosophies have condemned the Judeo-Christian tradition for doing the opposite. Certain attitudes and values that they associate with that tradition (patriarchy, dualism, etc.) are blamed for just about every environmental and social ill. (The parallel influences of ancient Greek and Roman cultures on the attitudes and values of Western civilization tend to be overlooked in this indictment.)

Such skepticism has been fed in part by historians trying to correct what they see as serious biases in traditional portrayals of "how the West was won." Heroic pioneers have been recast as religious imperialists and environmental anarchists, quoting the Bible as they deforested the continent and pushed native peoples and native flora and fauna to the edge of extinction. But those of us who are descended from European stock and who were steeped in Judeo-Christian values from childhood doubt that blame can be laid so easily at the feet of a faith tradition. History also records responsible, even saintly, conduct that had been nourished by the same tradition. Evidently there is potential there for both good and bad. For our cultural-religious heritage is a lot like our genetic makeup: Even if we consciously disown it, *at some level it will always be part of us*. Since genetic and cultural endowments tend to be mixtures of positive and negative qualities, we can still make a difference by *focusing on what is positive*.

ELIZABETH G. WATSON, author of the Quaker Earthcare Witness booklet *Healing Ourselves and the Earth*, lists five patterns in thinking or perception, long associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition, that she believes have been destructive to the earth. But she points to other, more constructive patterns that are just as strongly grounded in biblical wisdom. For example, the hierarchical thinking that starts with Heaven above and puts the earth literally on the bottom of the heap is symbolized by "Climbing Jacob's Ladder." But we also have "Dancing Sarah's Circle" to symbolize a more egalitarian, less human-centered attitude toward the rest of Creation.

Another positive aspect of the Judeo-Christian tradition is that it does, on closer examination, appear to have a strong Earth-friendly aspect. For example, many scriptural references can be cited to demonstrate that respect for Creation was a central part of the original Covenant.

The traditional Quaker practice of studying scriptures and then holding them in the Light can also be helpful in the search for religious truth about the environment. We need look no farther than the writings of John Woolman, who studied the Bible intensively all of his life, for whom the need to protect all living Creatures was just as biblically based as his convictions against slavery:

I kept steadily to meetings; kept First-day afternoons chiefly in reading the scriptures and other good books; and was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted in an inward life, wherein the heart doth reverence and love God the Creator, and learns to exercise true justice and goodness, not only toward all men, but also toward the brute creatures—That as by his breath, the flame of life was kindled in all animal sensible creatures, to say that we love God as unseen, and at the same time, exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by his life, or by life derived from him, was a contradiction in itself.”

—*Journal*, pp. 21–22

THROUGH THE INNER LIGHT, Woolman was led to a sense of the will of God for his life that was all the more compelling because it came from the Bible *as a whole* and did not rely as much on literal adherence to selected verses.

Putting ancient scriptures in historic context might help explain the fairly minor role the environment seems to play in the Old and New testament writings: By the time most of the books of the Bible were written, agricultural practices in the Middle East had already wrought significant environmental damage, but the pace of degradation was far too slow to attract attention in anyone’s lifetime. So it’s likely that the ancient biblical writers would have had a lot more to say on this subject if they had been confronted with the acute environmental crises that are unfolding today.

More significant than scattered scriptural references to the earth is the emergence, described in the book of Genesis, of a new kind of religion among the early Hebrew people: The descendants of Abraham are distinguished in realizing they belong to something larger and more enduring than a tribe or city-state. They are part of Creation, and thus a conscious, responsible part of the goodness it represents.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

—Genesis 12:1–3

Yahweh’s noted jealousy (Exodus 20:5) stems from intimate involvement with his people. The gift of free will is bound to the promise of a greater destiny through union with the Divine will. The Sinai Covenant is a *statement of optimism*, declaring that what people do in their daily lives has cosmic significance. Our modern Western concepts of *history, progress, and individual responsibility* can be traced in part back to this *unique consciousness of divine leadership*.

The New Testament records another historically significant spiritual breakthrough: the extension of the original Covenant from the realm of outward conduct to the *Kingdom within*. (Matthew 23:27) At the same time, the definition of the “people” called to share the new Covenant is expanded to include the entire human race. (Romans 3:29)

These basic themes and patterns of the Judeo-Christian tradition have, for better or worse, echoed throughout Western civilization and continue to have a profound impact on our environmental consciousness today, regardless of the particular belief system we may ascribe to. For example, the archetype of Creation is largely responsible for our culture’s *creative orientation* to the physical world—a two-edged sword, to be sure. It has helped us develop technologies that

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sometimes upset the balance of nature. On the other hand, it is one source of our deep interest in the laws of the nature, without which we could not acquire the scientific knowledge needed to identify and address environmental problems.

Creation-consciousness also accounts for our instinctive *sense of responsibility* for what is happening in the world, as well as the climate of hope and the *vision of a better world* that keep us searching for solutions.

The Judeo-Christian warnings against rebelling against the divine order explain why things have gone so wrong environmentally, especially since the Industrial Revolution: Pride, selfishness, and arrogance have led us to make gods of ourselves. We are reaping the alienation and self-destruction that result when we break our historic covenant with the Creator. As 2 Chronicles 7:14 puts it:

“...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

BUT AWAKENING TO OUR SPIRITUAL ROOTS is only the beginning. The environmental crisis is forcing us to look at religion itself in a radically new way: If the earth's life-support system is destroyed, little else that we may pursue in the name of religion will matter; if the balance of nature is lost, prospects for peace and brotherhood will go down with it. Therefore, followers of all religions need to be open to new revelations about what is truly enduring, what is sustainable in the light of modern environmental knowledge.

At the same time, environmental concerns need to be broadened to include timeless spiritual questions: Not just, “How are our actions and the substances we release affecting ecosystems?” But also “Who are we?” “Why are we here?” “What is lacking in us that keeps us from wholeness and harmony?” “How do we recover what is missing?” I believe that some partial answers to those questions can be discerned in the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

LOUIS COX is Publications Coordinator of Quaker Earthcare Witness. He is a member of the Burlington (Vt.) Friends Meeting, where he is active in the Earthcare Committee. He also serves on the Earthcare Ministry committee of New England Yearly Meeting. Together with his wife, Ruah Swennerfelt, he grows much of his own food, lives in a solar-electric house, and tries to walk gently on the earth.

Questions for reflection

Article 1: “Connections”

- ❖ How do we nurture our connections with one another? With Creation?
- ❖ Do I work to improve sharing of resources with everyone?
- ❖ In our witness for environmental issues, are we careful to consider justice and the well-being of the world's poorest people?

Article 2: “Earth Process and the Wish for Human Exemption”

- ❖ What do the concepts of “dominion” or “stewardship” mean to me?
- ❖ What is my response to Keith Helmuth's article? How do I agree? How do I disagree?
- ❖ Do I accept personal responsibility for stewardship of Creation? Are we formulating and implementing an ethic for responsible care of our planet?
- ❖ How far can I transcend my theological differences with others to work together with them for the healing of the earth?
- ❖ Do I hold in the Light my own and other spiritual traditions to discover the ways they foster a cooperative relationship with the natural world?
- ❖ Do you find the following Bible quote supportive of Keith Helmuth's position?

For the same misfortune which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one misfortune befalls the: as one dies, so dies the other; yes, they have all one breath; so that man has no preeminence over the beast;...

—Ecclesiastes 3:19

Article 3: “Right Relationship”

- ❖ 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?
- ❖ Do we work together to educate ourselves about the care of Creation in order to make responsible choices?
- ❖ Do we work to improve sharing of resources with everyone?
- ❖ 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?

Article 4: “What Does the Judeo-Christian Tradition Teach Us—Earthwise?”

- ❖ Do I understand that the Judeo-Christian tradition has elements that encourage respect and care for the earth as well as other elements that do not? How do I discern those that are helpful and appropriate for the issues of our time?
- ❖ Do we in our church or Meeting regularly study the spiritual foundations for caring for Creation?
- ❖ Do I treat with reverence the natural resources of the earth which all living things share interdependently?
- ❖ Do we 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?

Illustrative activities

1. Form an Earthcare group in your church or Meeting.
2. Re-study the Bible with Earthcare in mind.
3. Study Lisa Gould’s book, *Caring for Creation, Reflections on the Biblical Basis of Earth-care*, Quaker Earthcare Witness, 1999.
4. Explore Quaker Minutes on Earthcare in Appendix A.
5. Create new queries and Minutes.
6. Develop and present a sermon for children and adults.

Prayers and responsive readings

A Call to Prayer
from Hildegard of Bingen
(1098–1179)

“God is the foundation for everything.

This God undertakes, God gives, such that nothing that is necessary for life is lacking.

The Earth is at the same time mother,

She is mother of all that is natural, mother of all that is human.

She is the mother of all, for contained in her are the seeds of all.

The earth... contains all moistness, all verdancy, all germinating power.

It is in so many ways fruitful,

All creation comes from it. Yet it forms not only the basic raw material for human kind, but also the substance of the incarnation of God’s son.

—*Earth Ministry*, March 2001, back page, www.earthministry.org

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A Benediction Antiphon
For All Nature's Gifts

All praise:

For our sun, and all other suns.

For rain as it comes to us, and

For drought and flood.

For they are all natural.

For all animals, fierce or friendly.

For Birds and butterflies and reptiles and

For all species, everywhere and every kind.

For we are all related.

For our human friends and loves:

For those we fear and those we hate.

For all saints and all murders and

For all those who are neither.

For we are all related.

For all languages,

For they bring the world to us.

For all the arts,

For they restore our vision.

For all knowledge wise enough to confess ignorance,

For that keeps us real.

...For pain and joy.

For rage and peace.

For growth and age.

For fear and courage.

For they are all natural, and remind us we are
alive.

For canyons, mountains, rivers, plains, plants and
rocks,

For they are all natural

...For every chance we have to heal another,

Ourselves, or the Earth, and

For everything that helps us find our place

And leads us home

For all these too are natural.

For life,

For death...

For Nature,

All one,

All accepting.

For all of it

—all of it—

All Praise

—Gary Holthaus and delivered at the Sitka Symposium
Island Institute, Sitka, Alaska, June 2003.

Unit 3. Earthcare and the Bible

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