

Chapter 25

Unity of creation

- 25.01 The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.

John Woolman, 1772

- 25.02 Our planet is seriously ill and we can feel the pain. We have been reminded of the many ways in which the future health of the earth is under threat as a result of our selfishness, ignorance and greed. Our earth needs attention, respect, love, care and prayer.

In comfortable Britain we are largely insulated from the effects of the environmental crisis. It is the poor of the world who suffer first.

As a Religious Society of Friends we see the stewardship of God's creation as a major concern. The environmental crisis is at root a spiritual and religious crisis; we are called to look again at the real purpose of being on this earth, which is to till it and keep it so as to reveal the glory of God for generations to come.

It is a stony road ahead but our faith will uphold us; the power to act is God's power which is mediated through each of us as we give and receive support one from another. We can all listen if we will to the sounds of the earth, tuning into it with joy.

London Yearly Meeting, 1988

- 25.03 My children were having a hard time. Really bad – I mean drugs, sex gone wrong, quite unable to fit in anywhere for the time being. Yet now they have come through it... I felt desperate with guilt., but as time passed I came to see that what had happened was not entirely our fault, as parents. It was also that they were inheritors of social

guilt and social pain. Our children are the first generation to grow up facing the possibility of the end of our species. Perhaps it is partly the planet crying out in us? Perhaps the violated earth needs to cry and feel desperation in us?

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1982

- 25.04 All species and the Earth itself have interdependent roles within Creation. Humankind is not the species, to whom all others are subservient, but one among many. All parts, all issues, are inextricably intertwined. Indeed the web of creation could be described as of three-ply thread: wherever we touch it we affect justice and peace and the health of all everywhere. So all our testimonies, all our Quaker work, all our Quaker lives are part of one process, of striving towards a flourishing, just and peaceful Creation – the Kingdom of God.

Audrey Urry, 1994

- 25.05 I was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted in an inward life wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator and learns to exercise true justice and goodness not only toward all men but also toward the brute creation; that as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being, on the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world; that as by his breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal and sensitive creatures, to say we love God ... and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature ... was a contradiction in itself.

John Woolman, 1772

- 25.06 If it is right that we should show love and compassion for people, surely it is right that we should extend our love and compassion to animals, who can feel fear and experience pain in much the same way as humans. They may not be able to speak, but we can certainly see fear in their eyes and demeanour. I feel that being a vegetarian is a natural progression from being a pacifist and a Quaker.

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Vera Haley, 1988

- 25.07 As to our own planet which God has given us for a dwelling place, we must be mindful that it is given in stewardship. The power over nature that scientific knowledge has put into our hands, if used in lust or greed, fear or hatred, can bring us to utter destruction. If we choose life we may now feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick on a world scale, thus creating new conditions for spiritual advancement so often till now prevented by want. Many of our resources – of oil, of coal and of uranium – are limited. If by condoning waste and luxury we overspend the allowance God has given us, our children's children will be cheated of their inheritance. Limited too is the annual bounty of nature. The material foundation of our life is the tilling of the earth and the growing of food... We must conserve the goodness of the soil and not exploit it.

We must guard, too, the abundance and variety of untamed nature, and not forget the spiritual resources available to us in the continued existence of unoccupied lands. Modern civilisation perpetually threatens our awareness of the true nature of our being which in the presence of the wild we can more easily retain or at length recapture. Year by year silence and solitude are growing more needful, yet harder to obtain, and contacts, by this means, with the mind of the Creator more tenuous. To conserve nature is thus again a contribution to the fuller life of mankind.

Norfolk, Cambs & Hunts Quarterly Meeting, 1957

- 25.08 This is a marvellous world, full of beauty and splendour; it is also an unrelenting and savage world, and we are not the only living things prone to dominate if given the chance. In our fumbling, chaotic way, we do also make gardens, irrigate the desert, fly to the moon and compose symphonies. Some of us are trying to save species other than ourselves...

We have no reason to be either arrogant or complacent: one look at the stars or through a microscope is sufficient to quell such notions. But we have to accept our position in the world with as much grace, responsibility and fortitude as we can muster, and try to grow up to our mission of love in this tangle of prospects and torments.

Pamela Umbima, 1992

- 25.09 I want to list ten controlling principles for the outward expression of simplicity. They should not be viewed as laws but as one attempt to flesh out the meaning of simplicity into twentieth-century life. First, buy things for their usefulness rather than their status. Second, reject anything that is producing an addiction in you. Third, develop a habit of giving things away. De-accumulate. Fourth, refuse to be propagandised by the custodians of modern gadgetry. Fifth, learn to enjoy things without owning them. Sixth, develop a deeper appreciation for the creation. Seventh, look with a healthy scepticism at all 'buy now, pay later' schemes. Eighth, obey Jesus' injunction about plain, honest speech. Ninth, reject anything that will breed the oppression of others. Tenth, shun whatever would distract you from your main goal.

Richard J Foster, 1979

- 25.10 Our adoption of the [World Council of Churches'] concern for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation grows from our faith and cannot be separated from it. It challenges us to look again at our lifestyles and reassess our priorities and makes us realise the truth of Gandhi's words: 'Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.' The earth's resources must be conserved and shared more equitably and, as we are an integral part of creation, this is our responsibility.

London Yearly Meeting, 1989

- 25.11 As consumers, producers and investors, or as travellers, readers and campaigners we can be active in support of the Two Thirds World. Our use of energy connects us directly to the greenhouse effect and to world food supplies. Our bank interest rates link us to the debt burdens which are forcing many countries to destroy their environment to produce cash crops and foreign currency. Our ability to acquire knowledge gives us the chance to act as a mouthpiece on behalf of the environment and the poor who are suffering most from its destruction. Indeed we have the responsibility to use that knowledge wisely.

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Ruth Tod, 1990

- 25.12 We live in a part of the world where the dominant motivation is material self-interest, justified by the concept of personal freedom. In these circumstances, the rich get richer and the poor, for the most part, become comparatively poorer. This offends our moral sensibility and, at the practical level, the process of material growth cannot in any event go on indefinitely. We must find some way in which we in the West can change our dominance in setting the style of the world's living from one motivated by self-interest into one in which material resources are made available according to need. We know a good deal about this kind of distribution in particular situations but have not yet any effective idea about how to embody compassion into the essential structure of our society. This demands both thought and personal commitment at the level of where we are, not taking refuge simply in telling those with political power what they should do. We must be aware in all humility that it is we who are sinning in accepting the elevation of self-interest and that it is we who must move towards another form of motivation. What are we doing to proclaim our joyful acceptance that our living standards are going to have to drop; what are we doing to join with other Christians and concerned fellow-citizens to proclaim the vulgarity of our affluent style of living; what are we doing to find ways of influencing the way in which our fellow-citizens think and act, be they our neighbours or elected and appointed representatives, to recognise the need for change?

London Yearly Meeting, 1975

- 25.13 That the sweat and tedious labour of the farmer, early and late, cold and hot, wet and dry, should be converted into the pleasure of a small number of men – that continued severity should be laid on nineteen parts of the land to feed the inordinate lusts and delicate appetites of the twentieth, is so far from the will of the great Governor of the world, ... [it] is wretched and blasphemous.

William Penn, 1669

- 25.14 We are building towards the climax of crisis. The spiritual crisis is folding into the ecological crisis and the ecological crisis is folding into the economic crisis. As Christians, it seems to me, we are now required to critically assess the capital driven market economy and identify it as a false religion, a fabulously productive but ultimately destructive system bringing closure on God's goodness in creation and bringing a creeping atheism to the soul. To look this system straight in the eye and call it to account is a critical test of Biblical faith.

Challenging market economics with a Biblical sense of the goodness of God in creation is to join a spiritual struggle. Faith in God, solidarity with the suffering poor and all other forms of life demands that we take a stand and say, 'This destruction must stop.' We must be perfectly clear about the implications of undertaking this responsibility. It is more than just setting up household recycling bins, growing organic vegetables or riding a bike to work. It is more than a talking job. It is a renovation which will change everything: the way we do business, the way we eat, the way we travel, the houses we build, the products and services we can expect and the prices we pay for them, the way we feel about trees and the way we worship God.

Keith Helmuth, 1990

- 25.15 Our testimonies against war and inequality have been aimed at persuading people, and reminding ourselves, as to where their wealth lies: in the discovery of a common identity and a common cause with other human beings. Those testimonies apply in the same way to our treatment of our natural environment which, as Augustine said, is itself like a 'commonwealth', in which every creature in its own way serves the interests of the others. The difference now is that the commonwealth of people and the commonwealth of the earth have become inseparably interrelated and interdependent – have become in fact one new commonwealth of life. Our thinking about God and the world and the way we live in relation to them must now give recognition to that fact.

Rex Ambler, 1990

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See also 20.27-20.36, 21.42, 23.40, 29.04-29.07 & 29.18