

# The Path We Are On: Excerpts from Quaker Writings

• *John Woolman, 1772:*

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.

• *London Yearly Meeting, 1988:*

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.

• *Keith Helmuth, 1990:*

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.

• *Canadian Yearly Meeting, 1999,  
Minute from Special Interest Group on Sustainability:*

We acknowledge our heritage of social testimonies of

peace, community, simplicity and harmony which govern our relations as Friends with one another and the wider human community.

We feel a strong leading to extend these testimonies to include our spiritual connectedness with all creation, and of our care to live within our ecological capacity, seeing that of God as the governing principle in all of these relations.

Our faith perspective leads us to request Yearly Meeting's approval to form a working group on ecological concerns to:

- a) encourage and support Friends working on ecological issues;
- b) explore and deepen our faith and practice as Friends as we face these challenges;
- c) communicate the ecological faith perspective amongst Friends;
- d) explore how we work with other Quaker groups with these concerns and the ecumenical coalitions.

• *Canadian Yearly Meeting, 2001,  
Ecology Testimony of Canadian Friends:*

Friends believe we are all manifestations of the Creator, the Divine Spirit, God. As our knowledge has grown, we have come to realise that indeed all life forms are exquisitely interrelated and interdependent; thus all life is sacred. We envision a Religious Society of Friends in the 21st century that includes in its testimonies a clear call of responsibility to live in harmony with all life on Earth.

We see that our traditional peace testimony of nurturing peace with each other must be clearly expanded to include nurturing peace with all the Created world. We are inspired to do this with a renewed respect for Creation which goes beyond self-interest. We envision a relationship with Earth that allows us to see ourselves as an integral part of God's creation and not as the sole inheritors of it, to use as we will. We seek non-violent ways of meeting the needs of our species with whom we share this Earth. While Friends respect science as a useful tool for understanding aspects of reality, we recognise there are divine mysteries that remain beyond our ability to understand.

While evidence of ecological disaster is all around

us, we can and must make changes now which will heal our spiritual and physical connections with the Earth. In the tradition of First Nations Peoples we work to ensure a better future for, at the very least, the next seven generations. We see that significant changes in the way we live our day-to-day lives are necessary for life on Earth to survive and flourish.

To follow up from this 2001 session, Canadian Yearly Meeting prayerfully encourages all Meetings and individual Friends to take action to measure and reduce our ecological footprints. QEAN offers suggestions and resources:

- Conduct ecological audits
- Establish monthly meeting ecology working groups or networks to address issues and facilitate change within meetings, and as bodies which can network with other faith-based groups and beyond the faith community.
- Make use of resources provided by Friends Committee on Unity with Nature, QEAN and other groups.

• *Canadian Yearly Meeting, 2001, Endorsement of the Earth Charter:*

Wolfville Monthly Meeting asked Canadian Yearly Meeting to endorse the Earth Charter. Friends felt that although this document is not perfect, it is a document that deserves our support because it arises from many groups which have a deep concern for the protection of God's earth. We agree to endorse the principles of the Earth Charter, recognising that this will require us to make changes and sacrifices in the way we live. We ask Friends in Canada to begin a discernment process with respect to this document and with how we might begin to implement these principles in our lives and in our Meetings. We ask our Quaker Ecology Action Network to help our Clerks develop a process for follow-up with Monthly Meetings, the Government of Canada, First Nations associations, and the United Nations.

• *Canadian Yearly Meeting 2005, The Earth Charter:*

Bill Curry spoke on behalf of Quaker Ecology Action Network (QEAN). He reminded us of the his-

tory of our work on environmental issues. He referred us to section 25.14 in *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995, written by Keith Helmuth in 1990, and to minute 52 of Canadian Yearly Meeting 2001 on sustainability. The clerk of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting spoke about a minute distributed to Canadian Friends by her Meeting. Yonge Street Meeting is concerned that some statements in the Earth Charter could be seen as in conflict with our Quaker peace testimony, and questions whether this might cause future problems with conscientious objector status. Yonge Street is asking us to consider whether our unqualified endorsement of the Earth Charter may put conscientious objectors in a compromised position. A Friend spoke on behalf of Victoria Monthly Meeting in support of our endorsement of the Earth Charter. They ask us to take part in the review process for the Earth Charter. It was noted that Ottawa Monthly Meeting supports continued endorsement of the Earth Charter and work with non-Quakers on this concern. Wolfville Monthly Meeting has discussed Yonge Street Monthly Meeting's concern and does not see any conflict between the Earth Charter and our peace testimony. Pelham Executive Meeting suggests that one of the parts of section 16 in the Earth Charter, other parts of which are being questioned, was viewed by them as being strongly in support of Quaker testimonies.

We have given prayerful consideration to our 2004 endorsement of the Earth Charter. We have heard both support for and concerns about the principles of the Earth Charter and its implications for our life as a spiritual body. We are left with the pressing question of how to actualise those portions of the Earth Charter that we support without reservation. We will continue to consider this in 2006. We ask that Monthly Meetings and the Quaker Ecology Action Network continue to engage with the evolving Earth Charter review process, expressing our deeply held commitment to our testimonies and engaging in dialogue with the Earth Charter initiative. We note that there will be a review of the Earth Charter in Amsterdam, November 7-9, 2005. ↻

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community.

– *Earth Charter*