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Earthcare for Friends: A study guide for Individuals and Faith

Communities

Edited by Louis Cox, Ingrid Fabianson, Sandra Moon Farley, and Ruah Swennerfelt (250 pages) Quaker Earthcare Witness, 2004 (Available at Ottawa Quaker Book Service, \$28.80, plus shipping) Reviewed by Donald Alexander

This study guide sets itself the task of “supporting individuals and faith communities across North America in a faith based response to current ecological concerns.” It is also for those “seeking ways to integrate their concern for the environment with Friends’ long-standing testimonies for peace, simplicity and equality.”

You may already be familiar with some of the articles and themes. Pamphlets and other publications of Quaker Earthcare Witness (and the earlier Friends Committee on Unity with Nature) were the source of much of the content. But here it is all fleshed out with added queries, other readings, and recent essays.

The editors suggest a variety of uses for this study guide, including its use in retreats or study groups.

As a study guide, how friendly to Friends is the layout and design? It works.

There is an introductory chapter on how to use the book and 18 study units are clearly defined.

The organisation of material is

used—more or less—in the same way in each unit.

Each study unit begins with a statement of purpose and intent. Next there are suggested inspirational readings and sacred texts. The unit has four featured articles and ends with some suggested illustrative activities and questions for reflection.

There is a macro-organisation too. The first few chapters deal broadly with those matters of tying faith to our environmental concerns. The central body of units deals with specific topics such as water, air, soil, peace, simplicity, and climate change. The final four units are more future-oriented with expressions of interconnectedness and unity, with the concluding unit containing details and background of the Earth Charter.

At a time when CYM is seasoning concerns about the Earth Charter, it is worthwhile to read and consider this study unit. The editors have gone to the Earth Charter web site to detail the history and process that was used in its development. In an essay “How the Earth Charter Relates to Friends’ Beliefs and Testimonies,” Ruah Swennerfelt lists Earth Charter principles as they relate to each of the testimonies of simplicity, peace, equality, integrity and truthfulness. She then poses questions for reflection that could help us further consider the role of the Earth Charter in our personal and meeting lives.

The book is brightened by two reprinted poems of Jack Ross, of

Argenta Monthly Meeting.

While I was reading the necessarily fact-laden book, it was a noticeable pleasure and relief to feel a smile develop. Reading both of the poems, “Apples” and “Born of Water” was a reminder to “lighten up.” Environmental concern is a serious subject and is hard slogging without these lighter touches:

*During the first week
God dealt with big issues, like water
firmament and darkness/light.
Then later in the week, maybe 5th
day,
God made apples.
Then she had an inspiration:
Why not create seeds and be done with
it?
All things considered she was having a
good week.
Thank you God for apple seeds.*

The two Jack Ross poems are not indexed but appear randomly. I would give them the strength of being noted in the index and standing as a “teaching” in their own right.

I was most impressed with Unit 17, “The Great Story,” which sets as a purpose “to show that people are creative beings within a creative universe. This is the basis of hope that we can create a sustainable future in this unique time.”

Keith Helmuth has significant articles in several of the study units, including Unit 15, “Economics and Earth Process.” His germinal 1997 article, “Earth Process and the Wish for Human Exemption,” is repub-

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lished in the study unit on Earthcare and the Bible.

In this wide-ranging book each reader will embrace one or two chapters that stand out. For me, the later chapters, especially "The Great Story," provide hope and creative ideas about the wonder of it all. ↻

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Be Ye Perfect: the Quaker Call to Wholeness

By Lisa Lofland Gould

Annual Walton Lecture, published Southeastern Yearly Meeting 2002 (Available at Ottawa Quaker Book Service, \$6.40, plus shipping)

Reviewed by Arnold Ranneris

This small publication (35 pages) is a treasure. The author, Lisa Lofland Gould, is a published writer of many books, including *Caring for Creation: Reflections on the Biblical Basis of Earthcare* (Friends Committee on Unity With Nature, 1999). The enlarged pamphlet being reviewed here includes two lectures: "Returning to Right Relationships: Where on Earth Are We?" and "Be Ye Perfect: the Quaker Call to Wholeness." They are complemen-

tary and thought-provoking.

Lisa Lofland Gould holds out hope, building on Loren Eisely's thought, "I believe we can use that gift of reaching out, to help us envision how we might begin to live on this planet in harmony" (page 13). The human faculty of creative imagination may indeed save us. In the first talk she builds on the fact that "right relationships" are at the core of Quaker testimonies and beliefs. "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (*A Sand County Almanac*).

The second lecture, "Be Ye Perfect: the Quaker Call to Wholeness" builds on Jesus's statement, "to be perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Lisa Gould notes that the call to "be perfect" can also be translated "be you whole." She says that perfection is total integrity. Applying this to ecology, she says that we are called to be integrated with Creation wholly and faithfully, using the gifts we are given by our creator.

These lectures are richly supported by excerpts and quotations from Quaker and other writers: Howard Brinton, John Yungblut, Wendell Berry, Laurens van der Post, and

Aldo Leopold.

John Yungblut (whom I think coined the phrase "Walk gently on the Earth") is quoted in this publication: "If we truly believe that there is that of God in every living creature, we must accept the corollary that God will never appear again in that particular form. Willful participation in the extinction of any creature must make one guilty of deicide. And the living community of this planet will be altered forever insofar as one of its members has been permanently removed. It is as if one member of the divine family has passed into oblivion. Ever so great are the implications of the crime against the universe and its Author" (page 11).

Lisa Lofland Gould concludes with the Native American poem:

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. ↻

Arnold Ranneris is a member of Victoria Monthly Meeting and a member of the Quaker Ecology Action Network.

We must realise that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.

– *Earth Charter*