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## A QUAKER THEOLOGY OF THE STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

VIRGINIA SCHURMAN

### I. INTRODUCTION

“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” (Ps. 24:1) George Fox often quoted this passage to reflect the early Friends’ belief that the world belongs to God. God made the world and everything in it, and continues to sustain the creation with loving care. They believed that everything was created to be in harmony and right order with God and with each other. Because God created everything by design, everything has its God-given place, purpose, and role in the community of the creation. God gave humans the role of stewards of the creation to maintain its goodness and harmony. As long as they remain under divine guidance, they will know how to use God’s gifts of the earth and the creatures on it properly, so that the harmony and goodness of the creation can be restored and maintained. This paper will explore this traditional Quaker understanding of the stewardship of God’s creation, and will demonstrate how it provides an alternate way of perceiving reality, and therefore an alternate way of relating to nature and the earth, than that of our modern secular culture.

The way we treat the earth and the living things on the earth is determined by our interpretation of reality. Our perception of the nature, value, and purpose of the world is particularly important in determining how we treat the earth and its living things. In turn, our perception of the nature, value, and purpose of the world is influenced by our understanding of how the world came into being. If we accept the modern secular view that the world came into being by chance, it is difficult to find meaning and purpose for our own lives, much less for the rest of the world. If the world has no meaning and purpose, it is easier to exploit it and use it for our own ends. If, however, the world came into being by God’s design, then all parts of the creation have meaning and purpose in God’s plan. By divine guidance we can come to know how to treat the creation properly so that all will fulfill God’s plan for the whole creation.



In the West, the understanding of the world offered by the Enlightenment legacy and the scientific and industrial revolutions has led to an acceptance of three basic beliefs about reality that affect our perception of the meaning and purpose of the world: (1) that the scientific method is the only valid approach to knowledge, (2) that the universe is a mechanical system composed of elementary material building blocks, and (3) that unlimited material progress is to be achieved through economic and technological growth.<sup>1</sup> These beliefs have led to a view of nature and the earth that sanctions our exploitation and destruction of them on a massive scale. According to this view, nature and the earth are composed of separate, isolated, mechanical objects for study and manipulation. They are viewed as separate from each other, from people, and from God.

Although the modern science of ecology is beginning to acknowledge an interdependence within nature, and between nature and the earth, this understanding is just beginning to be accepted by the wider culture. According to the modern secular view, nature and the earth came into being by chance and have value only as resources to be exploited for the benefit of human beings in their quest for unlimited material progress. As a result, we hear more each day about the decline of the earth. There are many problems to address that affect the earth and all living things: land conservation measures, habitat destruction, deforestation, degradation of the land by building, farming, and mining practices, species extinction, lack of resource conservation, production of hazardous wastes, global toxification (including the greenhouse effect and ozone depletion), overpopulation, equitable sharing of resources, and the human and cultural degradations that result from these abuses. Spiritual and moral decline accompany environmental decay. Secular and religious groups concerned about the environment are asking for help in addressing the spiritual basis for our response to these issues. Many believe that only a fundamental change in the thoughts, perceptions, and values that form our particular vision of reality (our paradigm), can effectively make a change in the way we live, so that we can preserve rather than destroy the earth and its living things. At the same time, some environmentalists criticize Christianity for providing the cultural and religious framework for this massive exploitation of nature.

This paper will explore the traditional Quaker understanding of the stewardship of God's creation, and its implications for providing a spiritual basis for our responses to these modern problems. It will

focus on the theology of George Fox and other early Friends, which theology provides an alternative to modern views of reality and sets forth a way of living that can restore the world to the original goodness, harmony, and order God intended for it. The paper will also explore how the Quaker understanding answers criticisms raised by some environmentalists.

## II. GEORGE FOX AND THE EARLY FRIENDS

### A. *Introduction*

The most complete explanation of the early Quaker theology of the stewardship of creation is found in the writings of George Fox, who was deeply interested in nature and its stewardship. William Penn described Fox as a "Divine and a Naturalist"<sup>2</sup> and Fox depicts himself as a "friend of creation" (4:52).<sup>3</sup> In his journal he described a pivotal occasion in his spiritual journey when he experienced the creation being opened up to him in a new way, as he came under God's guidance. He saw creation as God intended it, and saw into the "nature and virtues" of the creatures clearly. As a result of his obedience to God, Fox came to know God's wisdom, by which the creation was designed. By God's wisdom he was guided to use animals and plants in ways God intended, with concern for them and for the needs of the poor and for future generations. In his writings Fox describes how God made both man and woman to be stewards of the creation. God gave them dominion over the creation, as long as they kept dominion by following God's guidance and using God's wisdom. The proper use of the creation is part of what Fox means by "dominion." He uses the term to include dominion over the whole creation, including Satan as well as the creatures and the earth. (When Fox uses the term "creatures" he is sometimes referring to people as well as to animals and plants. Here we will use the term "creatures" to mean only animals and plants.) A consideration of what dominion over Satan means is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper will consider the dominion over the creatures. Fox's understanding of dominion and proper stewardship of the creatures can be seen by comparing the guidance of three teachers or "speakers" to man and woman, concerning the proper stewardship of the creation: (1) God, the first speaker to Adam and Eve in the Eden paradise, who as Creator gave dominion under His guidance, (2) Satan, the second speaker, who as serpent in the Garden destroys the creation



and influences Adam and Eve to lose dominion, and (3) Christ, who is also God, the first speaker, who made the creation and restores the creation and dominion by guidance as the Inward Light.

### *B. God—the First Teacher to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden*

George Fox and the early Friends affirmed the biblical understanding of the world as God's creation (Gen. 1, 2), which is continually sustained by God's loving care. Fox writes, "The Lord God of heaven and earth, who is the creator and maker of all things . . . all things are to be subject to the great Lord. So he is called God Almighty to oversee all his works . . . who is the nourisher and preserver of all creatures that he hath made, and takes care for all, who gives life, being, and breath unto all . . ." (6:3) Fox describes some examples of the creation's immediate and continual dependence on God for nurture and sustenance: "He is the living God, that clothes the earth with grass and herbs, and causes the trees to grow . . . and makes the fishes of the sea to breathe and live . . . [he] causes the snow and frost to melt, and causes the rain to water the plants . . ." (8:42)

Fox and the early Friends used the biblical image of wisdom to describe the action of God in creating everything by design. They also identified wisdom as Christ, who as God, was the Creator, and now restores the creation to its original design. God designed the creation by divine wisdom, which made everything to be good and blessed, and in harmony and right order with God and with each other. All things have meaning and purpose in that all are to serve, praise, and glorify God. All are dependent on God for their coming into being and their continuing sustenance and nurture. Divine wisdom gave each part of the creation its own place, duties, and value, which together contribute to the harmony of the whole. There is mutual dependence and assistance of each part of the creation on each other. What happens to one part necessarily affects the other parts. The creation stays in harmony as long as each part fulfills the role God intended for it.

Man and woman are particularly important in maintaining the original harmony, goodness, and blessedness of the creation. Man and woman, like all the other creatures, were made to serve and worship God (6:4). Adam and Eve were created to be "happy, blest, perfect, and good," and were "created in [God's] image, and after his likeness, in Righteousness and Holiness." (8:294) They were given

dominion by God to act as God's stewards. Both man and woman were given "power and authority" over the earth, and over the creatures: "God said . . . replenish the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over all cattle, and over all the earth . . . and over every living thing . . ." (Gen. 1:28-30) (8:294) They were given this power and authority conditionally, as long as they depended on God to give them the guidance and power. They could not have that dominion in their own wisdom and power, but retained dominion by being guided by the divine wisdom by which the world was designed, and everything in it. By this wisdom Adam and Eve came to "know all that God made and to give names to them." (Gen. 2:19-20)<sup>4</sup> Naming gave them their identity and role, the "nature and virtue" that God intended for them. As long as Adam and Eve kept in God's wisdom they would know how to use the creation in the way it was intended, so that everything "fulfilled" its "nature and virtue." As long as they "kept dominion" in this way the creatures and the earth would continue to be rightly ordered as God intended.

As part of their dominion they were given animals and plants to provide them with food. They were to use these with God's guidance in the way God had designed. They were to use them in thankfulness to God, who provided daily food, and who made the creatures to be good: "receive [all] creatures . . . with thanksgiving to the Creator, and you ought to give him thanks that created all to his glory . . . and they that take the creatures; in God's fear with thanksgiving, will not destroy them . . . and they are sensible of the goodness of the creatures, and of the goodness that God gave them." (5:4)

God made Adam and Eve to be help-mates (appropriate, suitable, or proper helpers to each other) (Gen. 2:18) (6:6).<sup>5</sup> They were to share together in the oversight of God's creation, as long as they "kept God's commandment, and obeyed his voice." (6:9) As long as they obeyed God all of creation remained good and blessed as God had created it (6:4).

### *C. Satan, Who as the Serpent in the Garden of Eden, Was the Second Teacher*

Adam and Eve destroyed the goodness and blessedness of the creation that God had made. They succumbed to the temptation proposed by the serpent (Satan) to seek to be independent from God and equal with God. By eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge



of good and evil they sought to live by their own wisdom, or Satan's wisdom, rather than God's wisdom. They turned away from their dependence on God's guidance, power, and wisdom to order their lives and those of the creatures. Instead, they sought to order their own lives and the creature's lives by their own wisdom or the serpent's wisdom. As a result of turning away from God's guidance to Satan's guidance they chose to do evil instead of good, and they lost God's image, taking on Satan's instead. As a result, they lost dominion. All who are disobedient and turn away from God in every age will also lose dominion for the same reasons. They lose "the image and likeness of God, and righteousness and holiness, which God almighty made them in, and [lose] that power, in which the Lord gave them dominion over all the works of his hands. The serpent became their god, and Adam and Eve his slaves, and their disobedient posterity, and were plunged and baptized into the serpent's image, likeness, power, and wisdom, by which man knows not God." (6:29)

Fox describes the destructiveness of the evil that comes from following Satan's wisdom, and its effect on the creation. As Satan rules and works in the hearts of the disobedient in every generation, he fills them with "airy notions and conceits" (his "earthy and sensual" wisdom). From these come evil and all kinds of wickedness. They turn away from the Creator and destroy the creation by their evil behavior. They "spend their time in wantonness, pleasures, sports, plays, vanities, voluptuousness in meats, drinks and apparel, in idleness, and all manner of looseness in conversations, with all covetousness and greediness, devouring and destroying the creatures and the creation upon their lusts, with all greediness and oppression, injustice, cruel, and tyrannical [sic]." (6:20, 21) Not only man and woman, but all of creation suffers as a result. Even the ground is cursed (Gen. 3:17) (6:7). God casts Adam and Eve out of the Garden, acknowledging that, in a sense, they have already left by their disobedience (6:7, 8). God blocks the return to the Garden by placing "cherubim, and a flaming sword" in the way (Gen. 3:24).

Instead of having dominion over the creatures, Adam and Eve and all the disobedient fall into "captivity under the creatures." Instead of trusting in God's providence they become anxious about whether they will have enough to eat and drink, and enough clothing. They lust for more than they need and disregard God's design for the right use of the creatures. They use more creatures than they need and disregard the needs of the poor and of future generations

(4:321). In a tract written to urge proper use of the creation, Fox speaks of how "wasters, drunkards, and gluttons" dishonour God, "devouring and destroying his creatures, and consuming them upon their lusts, and feeding themselves without the fear of God." (5:6) This mistreatment of the creatures mistreats God and subverts the order of the creation. As a result God may withdraw these gifts, and "restrain the earth from increasing, and [withhold] all other creatures which give [them] food." (5:3)

Edward Burrough also writes of the effect on the creatures from following Satan's wisdom. As people transgress against God and become evil, they "corrupt and pervert" the creatures to another "end" than that for which they were created. People abuse the creatures by using more than they need for eating, drinking, and clothing. All they should need is enough to keep them from hunger and nakedness. Instead, they lust for more, and become "devourers and destroyers" rather than "preservers" as they ought to be. They rule over the creatures "in oppression and cruelty, and hard heartedness, and not in the wisdom of God . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Fox describes the disobedient also as falling into "captivity under the creatures." Instead of having dominion over the creatures, they worship them and allow them to replace God in their lives. They worship the creatures by making idols of them, and worship the works of their own hands. Like the disobedient in every age, they invent their own religions, using their own wisdom (Rom. 1:22-23) (6:4, 11; 7:325).

Instead of having dominion, they let wickedness and unrighteousness destroy the goodness and order of the creation. For example: those wearing extravagant clothing are "the spoilers of creation, and have the fat and the best of it, and waste, and destroy it." (Ni 206) Those who are slothful "cumber the ground and stain the earth, that it cannot enjoy her sabbaths nor yield her increase." (Lev. 26:34) (7:67) Those who go into debt are wasters and destroyers of the creation and its creatures (7:194-95).

#### *D. Christ, the Third Teacher*

Christ, the third teacher, is also the first speaker, the eternal God of truth. Christ, the Son of God, "renews his believers again into the image of God as Adam and Eve were in before they fell; and creates them anew in Christ Jesus, unto good works." (6:32) Christ gives the power to overcome Satan and his wisdom and his works of sin



and death, which destroy the creation. Dominion is restored through obedience to Christ, and the creation can return to the goodness, harmony, and blessedness in which it was created.

George Fox experienced this victory of Christ over sin, death, evil, and destructiveness in his life by the work of Christ, the Inward Light. After he heard the inward voice that said "there is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition" (Ni 110), he came to realize that only this Inward Teacher, the Light, would lead him and others out of the power of sin, evil, death, and destructiveness brought by Satan, and into the life, holiness, righteousness, and goodness of God. It was possible to be restored to the goodness, blessedness, and perfection of Adam and Eve before the Fall by obedience to Christ, the Inward Light. As a result, dominion would also be restored. In his journal Fox describes his own experience of this restoration to Paradise, as he came "up in the spirit through the flaming sword" that God had used to block entry into the Garden of Eden. This experience opened up the creation to him in a new way, as it is when it is renewed to its original state. "All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before."

Through obedience to Christ, he was returned to the "pureness, and innocence, and righteousness" of the image of God that Adam and Eve were in before the Fall. Through obedience he received God's wisdom and therefore came to know what God intended for the creation: "The creation was opened to me, and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue. And I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practice physic [medicine] for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtues of the creature were so opened to me by the Lord." He was taken "up in the spirit" again, to see that by obeying Christ one would not fall. God showed him that those who were obedient to Christ would "come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell, in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues" of them were known through the revelation of the divine Word of wisdom that had designed them. Fox identified the divine Word of wisdom as Christ, who designed the creation and reveals its design to those who are obedient to God, and brings them into unity with the creation . . . "as people come into subjection to the spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of wisdom, that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being." (Ni 27, 28)

Fox learned by his experience that to "come into subjection to the spirit of God" by obedience to the Inward Light involves an inward struggle between one's own will and God's will. Fox experienced the Light of Christ as not only exposing sin and evil but also as offering power to give up one's own will. One's own will needed to die or be crucified. "Therefore, keep in the daily cross, the power of God, by which ye may witness all that to be crucified which is contrary to the will of God." (Ni 17)

This inward work of Christ brings men and women through the flaming sword, and back into the righteousness and holiness of the image of God. This sword represents that inward work of Christ that brings sin to judgment and turns people from their own to God's wisdom. It "cuts down the transgressing life and earthly wisdom to burn it up,"<sup>7</sup> and allows one to enter the Paradise of God by being renewed again into God's image through obedience to the Inward Christ. As a result of this inward work of Christ a person is "recreated" to become a new creation in Christ (Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 5:17). As people give up their own will and receive the wisdom of God, they return to the state of Adam and Eve before the Fall. This is the state of man and woman as God intended it to be, what Fox calls "nature in its course," exhorting people to "feel the power of God, that will bring nature into its course . . . and there the wisdom of God will be received, which is Christ." (Ni 347)

In his account of his experience of being restored to the Garden of Eden, Fox identifies the "Word of Wisdom" as Christ. As the Word, Christ is the Son of God and is also God, and therefore is also the First Teacher, who created all things, and continues to sustain and order them to God's glory (Ni 347) (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17). As the Word, Christ upholds all things and in him is "unity with the creation." (Ni 2) As the Word, Christ is also the Inward Light or Teacher, who "recreates" man and woman to become a new creation in Christ. "And God will dwell in the saints as the creator, he creates in them right minds, new hearts, new spirits; gives them understanding and knowledge to know him, which is eternal life and wisdom; to walk in his ways which are perfect . . ." (3:457)

Christ, as the Word of Wisdom, restores dominion by first "recreating" the person and then teaching the recreated person how to use the creation according to the purposes for which God intended. To have dominion, they must become obedient to the Inward Light. Then they may receive God's wisdom that designed the world, which will show them how to use the creatures as God



intended: "Wait all in the Light for wisdom, by which all things were made, with it to use all the Lord's creatures for his glory, for which end they were created, and with the wisdom by which they were made, ye may be kept out of the misuse of them . . ." (7:40). Christ is "that Wisdom which is pure from above, which is gentle and easy to be entreated, not hurtful, nor destructive, but is to the preserving of the whole creation." (4:272) God is calling all of the creation, including the people and the creatures, to be ordered again according to the divine wisdom, as they were in the beginning. "Christ has come to restore the creation . . . redeeming man up into the image of God . . . and so is restoring the creation, and giving rest to his people and all the creation . . ." (3:559)

Fox contrasts God's wisdom, by which the creation should be ordered, with human wisdom. Human wisdom is limited and cannot know God or the things of God. Persons can only know God by relying on God's Spirit to teach them (8:283-4). Thomas Lawson, one of the Valiant Sixty and a botanist, writes of the true knowledge of the creation that comes from God, and contrasts this with our limited human understanding: "Adam and his posterity, if the primitive original station had been kept, had had no book to mind, but God himself, the book of life, and the book of the Creation, and they that grow up in the knowledge of the Lord and of his Creation, they are the true philosophers . . . his Work within and his Works without, even the least of plants preaches forth the power and wisdom of the Creator, and ey'd in the spark of eternity, humbles man."<sup>8</sup>

As the original order of creation is restored through Christ, harmony, goodness, and blessedness is restored, with right relationships restored throughout the creation. Individuals become recreated, but, more importantly, a gathered people, the Church, is recreated to restore the early Christian Church of the Apostles. The Church is a gathered people, called together by God to be obedient to the Inward Light. By obedience to the Inward Light, they are all restored to the Paradise of God through the flaming sword, and are all to work in the "garden of God" by God's guidance, and are to have dominion as a faith community. Like Adam and Eve, they are to have dominion not in their own wisdom, power, and authority, but in God's wisdom, power, and authority. "All are to work in his righteousness, and in his image, in his power, in his garden, to subdue the earth, and keep the dominion, in his power, in the restoration, as man and woman did in the image of God before the fall . . . keep your dominion, authority, and inheritance in the restoration, in the power of

God." (8:140) As part of the restoration of God's order, man and woman are restored as helpmeets, and both are given dominion again, as well as other roles in the Church (8:69).

This dominion includes the sparing use of the creatures for food, drink, and clothing, as God intended them to be used. This testimony, which is part of what we call simplicity today, arises from humility and submission to the will of God. This testimony glorifies God by using the creation as God's gift and with concern for others, as God intended. "What wages doth the Lord desire of you for his earth that he giveth to you . . . and all creatures, but that you give him the praises, and honour, and the thanks, and the glory; and not that you should spend the creatures upon your lusts, but to do good with them; you that have much, to them that have little . . . but leave all creatures behind you as you found them, which God hath given to serve all nations, and generations . . . and so that you have [enough for] food and raiment, therewith be content." (4:321).

Those who have dominion because they are a new creation in Christ rely on God's providence and are no longer "in captivity under the creatures." They do not worry about whether they will be given enough creatures for food, drink, or clothing, and do not use more than they need. Instead, "they seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness." (Matt. 6:33) They become like the biblical lily of the field, which relies on God's providence for providing them with their needs (Matt. 6:28-30; Luke 12:27-28). They become "as the lily [that] ye may all grow and receive wisdom how to use the creatures in their places, to the glory of him who created them." (7:121) They "live out of the creatures up to the creator." In this way they differ from the "people of the world," "who take thought what they shall eat . . . drink . . . put on . . ." [Instead, wisdom] brings them to use the creatures to his glory, whether they eat, or whether they drink, all is done to the praise and glory of God." (7:91)

Those who are a new creation in Christ worship the Creator, and not the creatures. They "delight in the Lord [their] creator, more than the creature," and "take pleasure in God alone." (4:50) They do not let the creatures take the place of God, or invent their own religions. "In the power of the Lord God, ye may act over them [the handiworks of God], out of the entanglements and thralldom of them, and out of the vain inventions of men." (7:171)

Dominion also includes the kind treatment of animals. Edward Burrough writes that the "restored man" sees that "all creatures are restored and made blessed." They come out of the curse that fallen



mankind had placed on animals by treating them poorly and perverting them to “another end than [that for which] they were created.” This curse is removed in the restored person, and the creatures become “good and decent, and enjoyed, and received in the life and virtue by which they were created, and by the wisdom [with] which they were made. The abuse of all animals is stopped.”<sup>9</sup>

Fox was concerned about the abuse of animals, and records several times in his journal (Ni 301, 376) when he admonished others for their cruelty. Also, he published a tract against bear-beatings, bull-beatings, cock-fightings, horse-racing, and hunting for pleasure, condemning them as done by those who “glory in their own strength and abuse the creatures.” These cruelties were not practiced by the Apostles. They “stir up wantonness,” and are not to be practiced by the Church (4:316).

In a letter to Friends in the New World, Fox writes of the relationship between the obedience of the Church and the right order and blessedness of the creation: “And the Lord said to the Children of Israel if they were obedient, and kept his commandments, he would give them their rain in due season, and the land should yield her increase, and the trees of the field should yield their fruit . . . And you shall eat your bread into the full, and shall dwell in your land safely and I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid . . . neither shall the sword go through the land. I will set my tabernacle among you . . . and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” (Lev. 26:5-12) (8:295)

### III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Quaker theology of the stewardship of the creation provides a sound spiritual basis for addressing the modern problems of the exploitation and destruction of the earth and nature. It provides an alternate way of understanding the reality in which we live, and therefore our relationship to the earth, and to animals and plants. It also calls us to an alternate way of living that can restore the creation to its original goodness, harmony, and order.

The theology of George Fox and the early Friends provides an alternate to our modern secular way of relating to the earth and the animals and plants on it. Instead of living in a meaningless world, we can live in the reality of God’s world, a world given meaning and purpose by its relationship to God. Instead of seeing nature and the

earth as having value only in their use as resources for human exploitation, we can understand that nature and the earth have value in their relationship to God, who created everything to be good and provides daily care. Instead of seeing nature and the earth as isolated and separate entities, we can view them as part of the whole community of the creation. Each member of this community has a God-given role to play and is part of the harmony of the whole creation. Man and woman play an important role in maintaining the goodness, harmony, and blessedness of the creation by being God’s stewards under God’s guidance. Instead of using human wisdom to order the creation, we are to use God’s wisdom. The proper stewardship of the creation requires reliance on God’s guidance, power, wisdom, and righteousness, rather than human power and wisdom. Human wisdom is very limited in its understanding of God’s plan for the creation, as we can see from our modern problems arising from its abuse. It is only God’s wisdom that discerns the design of the creation, and knows how everything should be properly ordered in order for each part of the creation to fulfill the purpose for which it was created. To receive God’s wisdom requires obedience to Christ, the Inward Light. In turn this requires taking up our daily cross and giving up our will to God’s will. Then Christ will recreate us to become a new creation—to become restored into God’s image, in righteousness and holiness. When we remain guided by Christ, the Word of Wisdom, the creation will be restored to its original goodness and harmony. We will know the right use of the creation, which includes a concern for the well-being of the animals and plants, as well as for the needs of the poor and the needs of future generations.

A theology of the stewardship of the creation must be “lived out” by the spiritual community of the Church. This is part of God’s plan for the restoration of the creation. Certainly individual commitment alone is not sufficient to address the enormity of the problems facing us. As a community of faith, we must come to a new understanding of the reality in which we live. Like early Friends we must come into a new understanding that we are living in God’s world, and that our lives should be lived in obedience to Christ, in dependence upon his power and divine wisdom, thus to order our own lives and to restore the creation.

The Quietist period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is an example from Quaker history of how this theology of the stewardship of the creation can be “lived out” by a community of Friends.



Because they took up their daily crosses and sought to order their lives by divine wisdom the Quaker community extended the love and benevolence of God to all creation: animals, plants, and the earth, and also to slaves, slave owners, native Americans, and the poor. In this period kindness to animals was a special concern in the everyday life of the Quaker community. Several prominent Friends, such as Anthony Benezet and Joshua Evans, were led to become vegetarians because of their concern for the killing of animals. Concern was also extended to the proper stewardship of the land. Friends of that time testified against the destruction of the creation by those whose first priority was the acquisition of wealth, a problem that continues to destroy the creation in our day.

The Quaker theology of the stewardship of the creation also answers the criticisms by some of the environmentalists, that Christianity has played a role in the exploitation of nature and the earth.

1. Their first criticism is that the doctrine of a God-given dominion sets human beings apart from nature and directs them to conquer and exploit it.<sup>14</sup> Quite the opposite is true of early Quaker theology. Human beings are given dominion as God's stewards, lovingly to care for and preserve the harmony and interdependence of the creation under God's guidance.

2. The second charge of these environmentalists is that Christianity promotes a dualism between the spiritual and the material, making the earth and nature of little importance, or even regarding them as evil.<sup>11</sup> Early Friends believed that everything in the creation was created to be good and had value and meaning in its relationship to God. Christ has come to restore the creation to its original goodness, harmony, and order.

3. A third criticism of Christianity is that it has enthusiastically blessed modern science and technology in the conquest of nature and the earth.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the Quaker theology proposes an alternate approach to the knowledge of the meaning of creation. We are to seek God's wisdom, rather than human wisdom, properly to care for the creation.

4. Quaker theology challenges the assertion by some feminists that man's domination of woman and nature come from a common source: efforts by men to exert power over others. Environmentalists' fourth criticism is that Christianity sanctions male domination over women as well as nature by appeal to biblical precedents.<sup>13</sup> To the contrary, Quaker theology and the biblical precedents supporting it show that both man and woman are to share in the oversight of the

creation, as well as other roles in the Church. Neither man nor woman is to dominate the creation or each other, but all are to live under God's guidance. The power to be used by both man and woman is God's power, not human power.

5. Finally, Christianity is criticized on the basis that belief in the Second Coming of Christ, which will bring in the total reign of God on the earth, negates any reason to improve or even preserve the creation.<sup>14</sup> Quaker theology states just the opposite, that Christ has now come to reign and to restore the creation and return it to its original harmony, goodness, and blessedness.

## NOTES

1. Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point. Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 31.
2. *Rise and Progress of the People Called Quaker* (Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, 1947), p. 63.
3. Most citations of Fox's writings occur in parentheses within the text: e.g. 4:52 refers to the volume and page of George Fox's *Works* (Philadelphia: Gould, 1831). "Ni" refers to the Nickalls edition of Fox's *Journal* (London, 1986).
4. George Fox, "Sermon at Wheeler Street, London . . . 1680" in *Early Quaker Writings* edited by Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1973), p. 503.
5. T. Canby Jones, editor, *The Power of the Lord Is Over All. The Pastoral Letters of George Fox* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1989), p. 483.
6. Edward Burrough, *A Standard Lifted Up and An Ensign Held Forth to All Nations . . .* (London: Giles Calvert, 1657), pp. 20, 26.
7. George Fox, "Sermon at Wheeler Street" *EQW*.
8. Thomas Lawson, "Letter to John Rodes, 18th of 11th month, 1690," in *A Quaker Post-Bag*, edited by Sophie Lampson (London: Longmans Green, 1910), p. 21.
9. *op. cit.* pp. 20, 21.
10. See Arnold Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," in David and Eileen Spring, *Ecology and Religion in History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 149.
11. See Wendell Berry, "A Secular Pilgrimage" in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, ed. by Ian Barbour (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley Co., 1973), p. 135.
12. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, ed. by Ian Barbour (*op. cit.*), pp. 55-65.
13. See Elizabeth Gray, *Green Paradise Lost* (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1979) and Rosemary Reuther, *New Woman, New Earth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), *passim*.
14. See Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality, The Call to Redeem Life on Earth* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 33, 34.