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Anonymous	<p> <input type="checkbox"/> Posted: 09 Feb 2007 20:15 Post subject: February 2007: The Earth Charter as a New Covenant         </p> <hr/> <p>Thank you for visiting the Religion and Culture Web Forum's public discussion board for February 2007.</p> <p>In this thread you will find the invited responses from Klaus Bosselmann, Lois Livezey, Paul Heltne, Stephen Rowe, and Laura Westra.</p> <p>To leave your own response to Ron Engel's essay or to another posting, choose "post reply." In order to submit a comment, you must register with a personal user ID and password.</p> <p>Debra Erickson Editor, Religion and Culture Web Forum</p>	
Anonymous	<p> <input type="checkbox"/> Posted: 09 Feb 2007 20:29 Post subject: Stephen Rowe's response to Ron Engel         </p> <hr/> <p>Reading J. Ronald Engel's "The Earth Charter as a New Covenant for Democracy," and reflecting on the state of contemporary conversation about religion, culture, and public life, I see how this piece is especially strong on five themes:</p> <p>First, it is [i]problem centered[/i]. The essay begins with identification of the perennial problem of how to construct our lives so that "all life flourishes" (1), and moves to the more specific problem of our need for an alternative to "procedural democracy and the corporate-dominated global free market system with which it is allied" (8).</p>	

Second, it is [i]constructive[/i]. It argues throughout that humans are beings of covenant, that we must covenant for "the flourishing of all life" (20), and, more specifically, that the Earth Charter provides a framework and the relational linkages through which to be guided in this work. Fundamentally, Engel is arguing for "covenantal understanding of democracy" (7).

Third, it is [i]empirical[/i]. In the Chicago tradition, this essay is centered on actual events, experiences, and processes. At the center of the story of the Earth Charter is the discovery that the "the moral and spiritual imaginations and good faith commitments of many thousands of misnamed 'ordinary citizens' can outrun the thinking of democratic theorists who insist that ethics are relative and that people of diverse cultures cannot agree on a vision and a standard for the common good" (21).

Fourth, this essay provides an [i] understanding of religion[/i] which accounts for the simultaneity of its unity and the diversity, and its [i]efficacy[/i] as well. The Earth Charter is expressive of "gifts that outrun what we can see or understand," and gives testimony to "The experience of transcendence [which] has been thematized in a wide diversity of religious and secular traditions throughout history." It takes the posture that "underneath all these different interpretations there is a natural religious piety we all can share and a common covenant we all can make with the ultimately reliable powers of life" (21). □

Fifth, Engel's essay is [i] practical[/i] in that the four themes above come together in his advocacy of a shared vocation: "Citizenship becomes an ethical union within the context of a spiritual vocation." This vocation, of course, entails the work which is indicated by the Earth Charter, but Engel is arguing that this work cannot be effective without our underlying responsiveness to "a 'gift' not of our making," and "our need to reach out towards more than we can ever experience" (22).

The significance of these five themes is underlined by comparing Engel's essay with another work in which they are found. The work I have in mind is [i]Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed[/i] by Phillip Hallie, a study of a small village in the French Alps which harbored and saved many Jews during World War II. The phrase from that book I find so attractive and significant is that this village, Le Chambon, was "a place where goodness occurred."

The analogous phrase in Engel is that "the democratic inheritance ... contains sources of its own criticism and renewal, a cumulative wisdom of hard-won institutional principles and public virtues [which can] enable ordinary people to create self-governing communities that can limit ambition and corruption and serve justice and the common good" (6). In both cases, [i]something has happened [/i]that the theoreticians might likely miss, something we can identify and be faithful to, something on which we can draw strength and find direction.

Engel's essay is the multilayered and richly nuanced story of one of the most momentous covenants of our time. It is about that most fundamental covenant which comes to articulation and action through the Earth Charter, but ultimately one which must find many other expressions as well. And here is the full sense in which this essay is a model work in the area of religion, culture, and public life.

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Stephen Rowe  
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Anonymous

Posted: 09 Feb 2007 20:36 Post subject: Laura Westra's response to Ron Engel

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The first steps of the foundations of democracy in Greece were exclusionary: democracy was only viewed as possible within a community of those committed to the same basic principles and beliefs, leaving the "barbarians" outside the gates of the [i]polis[/i].

The Earth Charter not only avoids these limitations, but attempts to be all-inclusive in both the [i]subjects[/i] that should embrace its all-encompassing principles, and also in the [i]objects[/i] of the obligations and the responsibilities it demands. In addition, it demands from all that "trust in the transcendent" upon which it is built.

But can the Earth Charter assume, or even show that, despite the "wide diversity of religions and secular traditions throughout human history," we can all share [i]one[/i] "common covenant?" It is certainly true that it took many years and much discourse to arrive at the current formulation of the Earth Charter. It is equally true that in respecting first of all life and the basic conditions upon which it rests, it comes as close as any document can to the deepest beliefs of most peoples and most religions.

Engel says:

Only through such a covenant will they be empowered to take responsibility for the integrity of the biosphere; to redress global injustice; to establish peace.

Here is the beauty of this covenant, but also its ultimate weakness. A covenant, by its very nature, expresses an overarching vision, an ultimate good, even a command.

To be sure, it is not the limited, unilateral "good" of one community, as it is based on extensive, all-embracing discourse; and it includes considerations not only from religion, but from ethics and science.

But it is not, as such, wholly compatible with democracy, at least not with the present, flawed understanding of "democracy" as the "right"

to make unlimited, self-serving choices. For instance, the Community cannot accept the covenant, yet commit to activities that, while profitable or otherwise desirable, might run counter to the ecological integrity of Creation, or even to that of their own lands.

With the covenant, we have transcended Rawls' "veil of ignorance" in the most basic way: we [i]have[/i] a vision of the good; we accept that we [i]are[/i] embedded in this planet, hence that we have no choice about the responsibility to the Earth's community. Ecojustice, indeed, demands it.



The Earth Charter does embrace the six principles Engel lists: (1) "democratic humanism"; (2) "democratic liberalism"; (3) "participatory democracy"; (4) "democratic socialism"; (5) "civic republicanism"; and (6) "democratic humanitarianism,, at least in the sense he describes. It also does embrace the possibility of various "liberation movements."

But, the more these principles are understood and taken to heart, the further removed we and all other global citizens are from any choice that may leave the principles behind. Do we assume that no thinking individual or community may [i>want[/i] such choices, that is, any choice that contradicts the respect for life these principles imply? Perhaps. But we must acknowledge that, for the most part and for many decades, even centuries, individuals and nations have not chosen in this way.

It is possible that the recent speech by Al Gore to the Earth Scientists holds, in part at least, the answer: the age of print is over, he says, and with it, the age of thinking, debating, reasoning. What is left is a human species that wants only to be entertained (hence television rather than books), to follow whatever "emotions" are evoked by those they see and hear. But these are, for the most part, those who put trade ahead of life, "fun" ahead of thought, "winning" ahead of peace.

Can such people be persuaded to listen, think, and adopt a transcendent Covenant? Engel is right: we [i]must[/i] hope that this can happen, as the alternative is truly unthinkable. Trust in the transcendent demands not only hope, but faith that somehow there might be strategies to correct the present hopeless scenario in some way.

Primary among these strategies would be the global acceptance of the Earth Charter as more than soft law. It should take its place after the two International Covenants, [i]Civil and Political Rights[/i] and [i]Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[/i], both of which remain groundless without an Ecological-Human Rights Covenant.

Other strategies might include revising the reach of the instruments on the common heritage of mankind and working with other NGOs and UN organs to ensure that the abundant research emerging from many scholars should be included in regulatory instruments for the protection

of humankind and nature.

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Laura Westra  
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York University

Anonymous

Posted: 15 Feb 2007 20:34 Post subject: Lois Gehr Livezey's response to Ron Engel

I must begin with my deep appreciation to Ron Engel for his years of engagement with eco-justice issues and organizations. His practice of moral agency is integral to his intellectual argument. Since 1984, Engel has participated in the local, regional, international consultations and network-building essential to the successful drafting and endorsement of the Earth Charter. Moreover, he challenged the international environment movement to think ethically as well as scientifically and politically. The Earth Charter demonstrates his capacity for persuasion and perseverance.

In this essay, Ron Engel begins with politics, quoting Douglas Sturm: "the central question of politics is this: How can we so construct our lives together that all life flourishes?" [size=9]1[/size] Engel responds with a critical, constructive, complex "thick description" of the meaning of democracy and its prospects to secure the flourishing of all life. But the heart of this argument is that such a democratic politics is grounded in a "democratic faith." On Engel's reading, the Earth Charter itself represents a democratic faith-based politics that is distinctive and adequate to the flourishing of all life. The idea of "covenant" is the core of this reconstructive venture.

[b]

The Democratic Faith [/b]

The democratic faith is grounded in a philosophical and theological claim about human nature: the "faith that human beings have the rational and moral capacity to govern themselves for the common good of all under the uncertain evolutionary and historical circumstances of life on this planet." This is an argument about fundamental human capacities. It is an argument about freedom of choice and action. It is also an argument about imagination—the capacity to envision a more inclusive "good" and not only one's own. This is the basis for Engel's distinction between contract (relations defined by self-interest) and covenant (relations defined by commitment to the common good). As Engel puts it elsewhere: "We humans possess a unique and terrible freedom. We are free to choose the unconditional rights and obligations that will govern the relationships to which we are bound – the covenants of our personal and collective existence." [size=9]2[/size] Human agency and the interdependence of all beings and all destinies are the fundamental truths of reality. Rights, responsiveness, and responsibility are the moral heart of this

covenant-oriented argument.

Amidst substantial agreement, I have questions. Let me raise just one. This is a capacious view of human nature. Engel calls us to make a difference—because we can. His work is a testament to “the audacity of hope.” I share Engel’s view that we can enter into potentially transformative conversations and covenants because we can indeed envision a good more inclusive than self-interest. Nevertheless, I long for a word from Reinhold Niebuhr whose commitment to democracy is grounded in a more cautionary view of human nature: “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”<sup>3</sup>

If the power of covenant-making is the promise of our global life together, it is so only as we develop standards for covenants and instruments of governance which challenge the multiple, enduring structures of injustice (poverty, racism, sexism, colonialism) that in fact shape the relational context in which we do our covenant-making. Elsewhere Engel acknowledges that history is a narrative of broken covenants, the contestation of covenants, and the reach for more inclusive and holistic forms of respect and cooperation. In this essay, Engel’s point is that the Earth Charter is such a covenant, grounded in the most inclusive of covenants, “the covenant of creation;” “the community of life.” So, perhaps this was not the time or place. But the effectiveness of the Earth Charter will depend on engaging these issues of structural resistance that are not only political but, ultimately, also faith-based. That is the real challenge for the democratic faith—and I think it will require a theological analysis of injustice and power that is not limited to the critique of “interest.”

[b]

A Global Ethic[/b]

For Engel, “global ethics may be defined as citizens engaged in critical conversation about the covenants by which we live.”<sup>4</sup> These conversations seek to make our covenants more responsive, inclusive, respectful of difference, caring, and holistic. The Earth Charter describes its own venture as a “shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community.” This is a very interesting and important claim.

Engel argues that the Earth Charter articulates a vision at once “universal,” “holistic,” “transcendent” [u]and[/u] specifically appropriate to the contemporary conditions of global life together. These principles are “universal” in two senses. First, the rights and obligations named in the charter include all human moral agents; responsibility and accountability for implementing the Earth Charter are universalized. Secondly, the sphere of human moral activity includes respect and care for every being, human and non-human; the applicability of rights and obligations is universalized. In the Earth Charter and in Engel’s own work, there is much talk of universals.

And yet, as we read the Earth Charter and Engel's argument for it, clearly the conversations are the bedrock. The Earth Charter is the outcome of decades of meetings, consultations, negotiations, contributions from many and diverse communities. The principles represent a negotiated shared vision, not an [i]a priori[/i] or a revelation or the oppression of an imperial state. They establish obligations for our common life and they have credibility because they are the outcomes of the conversations of our common life—and they are open to criticism and reconstruction. A global ethic is an ethic of covenant-making—and it is this practice of covenant-making that is both the beginning and the [i]telos[/i] of the Earth Charter movement.

[b]  
Governance [/b]

The Earth Charter is a statement of comprehensive, interdependent and compelling principles--and it is a call to action. Anti-global skeptics ever remind us that the enduring challenge to international documents of principle is the road to transformative practice. In my view, one of the strengths of Ron Engel's writings on the Earth Charter is his attention to the issues of governance that are required to turn principles into practices, practices of life together in which all life flourishes. Specifically, he calls for a federal approach to the implementation of the Earth Charter.

In this essay, Engel's substantial body of argument on governance is only briefly noted in the section on the Earth Charter as a "holistic" democratic covenant. "Holistic" has to do with the one and the many. The maximal flourishing of the whole "community of life" (the biosphere) requires respect and care for the plurality of forms of life, well-being, and perspective. Thus, Engel argues for the complex inclusion of contending democratic traditions, and, likewise, the plurality of ethical arguments that constitute an "eco-justice" ethic. The issue of governance emerges toward the end of this section. The Earth as "polis" is "a community of communities and potentially, for humans...a democracy of democracies." The concept of "world citizenship" embraces participatory decision-making and collaborative action in every space of political life. The "flourishing of all life" is not just an agenda for the "the nations." The policies, partnerships, and practices of this covenant must connect international, regional, national and local communities and organizations. Elsewhere, Engel calls us to action through stories of such effective networking: The Earth Charter, Eastern Europe, Chicago.[size=9]5[/size] Federal governance is the Earth Charter's democratic politics of the democratic faith in action.

The idea of "world citizenship" was anathema to Hannah Arendt. For her, human action (citizenship) was inextricably linked to the polis—and [b]a sense of place[/b]. It was the fundamental antithesis to totalitarianism. Arguably, things have changed. For Engel, the globalization of the basic conditions of life requires a biosphere-oriented breadth and depth of human responsibility. The transformation of communications offers hitherto unimaginable access

and modes of global political engagement. Increasingly, we live in a world of people displaced (refugees, migrants, prisoners, and others dispossessed by violence, disease and famine). Engel's argument for federal governance seeks to respond to Arendt's concern by connecting the global and the local. He emphasizes the connections between the effective practice of citizenship, the significance of particular places, and the trust-building commitments across differences in local communities. In this process, it is critical, also, to secure access to citizenship (the spaces of political efficacy) for the multitude of the displaced. At the global level, furthermore, in the face of the escalating mobility and integration of life-worlds and institutional activities, the politics of interdependence must challenge ever new threats of hegemonic forms of "world citizenship."

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I remember Ron and Joan Engel's Christmas card in the year of the Earth Charter: the little candle-lit boat of flowers on the canal in Bangkok. Ron set it afloat to celebrate the historic, potentially world-transforming vote on the Earth Charter and, on the same day, the birth of their granddaughter. The precious, joyous birth of one child and the hope of the world's children are bound together. This is the meaning of covenant--and the hope of the Earth Charter.

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[size=9]1[/size] Douglas Sturm, [*i>Solidarity and Suffering: Toward a Politics of Relationality*] (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1998), 21.

[size=9]2[/size] J. Ronald Engel, "The Earth Charter Covenant," in [*The Earth Charter in Action*] ed. by Peter Blaze Corcoran, Mirian Vilela, Alide Roerink, (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2005), 38.

[size=9]3[/size] Reinhold Niebuhr, [*The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*] (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944). Available at: <http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=446> (accessed February 12, 2007).

[size=9]4[/size] Engel, "The Earth Charter Covenant," 38.

[size=9]5[/size] Ibid., 39-40. See also: J. R. Engel, "A Covenant of Covenants: A Federal Vision of Global Governance for the 21st Century" in [*Sustaining Life on Earth: Environmental and Human Health through Global Governance*] ed. by Colin Soskolne (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); J. R. Engel, "Making the Earth Covenant: The Earth Charter and the Eastern European Revolutions" in [*Democracy, Religion, Pragmatism*], ed. by Les Murray and Jon Taylor (New York: Peter Lang, forthcoming).

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Lois Gehr Livezey  
New York Theological Seminary

Anonymous

Posted: 22 Feb 2007 00:45 Post subject: Klaus Bosselmann's response to Ron Engel

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### [b]Transforming the Earth Charter to Earth Governance[/b]

Ron Engel presents the [i]Earth Charter [/i]as a 'new covenant for democracy'. I find the notion of a covenant intriguing, in particular, in conjunction with democracy.

The term 'covenant' represents a solemn promise, a unilateral agreement that does not rely on reciprocity (unlike a contract). Mostly known from its biblical origins, a covenant is an unconditional commitment of trust and care. In this context, a 'new covenant' resembles the epochal relationship of restoration and peace following a period of trial and judgment.

In international law, covenants are agreements establishing obligations [i]erga omnes[/i] for an indefinite future. Examples include the two human rights covenants of 1966. Equally, the constitutional basis of a state could be expressed in terms of a covenant. A famous example is the Swiss Confederation or "[i]Eidgenossenschaft[/i]" literally meaning "oath fellowship." The common English translation "Confederation" does not properly reflect this special, eternal bond of brotherhood. It is better referred to as a covenant.

Engel locates the [i]Earth Charter[/i] in the tradition of the [i]Universal Declaration of Human Rights[/i] (1948), the Declarations of [i]Stockholm [/i>(1992) and [i>Rio[/i] (1992) and other covenantal statements, but speaks of a "new" covenant to "rewrite the global social compact" associated with the United Nations system. The [i]Earth Charter[/i], so it seems, seeks continuity and transformation. How can the [i]Charter[/i] be in the covenantal tradition of states and NGO's and, at the same time, be a covenant of profound change?

Engel's essay explains this dual nature by referring to some key features of the [i]Charter[/i]. It translates the concept of "universal responsibility" to the responsibility of "everyone" (i.e. people and states) for the "human family and the larger living world." Likewise, "we, the people of the earth" declare our responsibility (Preamble), not just "we the peoples of the United Nations" ([i]UN Charter[/i]). Such universality "completely universalizes the community of human moral agents" and applies to "all beings, human and non-human, present and future" (Engel).

The principles associated with this universal responsibility are to be found in our existing democracy—where else? By formulating and executing them, however, democracy will transform. The [i>demos[/i], once confined to Athens and still shackled to the nation state, will become the [i>demos[/i] of the Earth. National citizenship transforms to global citizenship. This is the new Earth democracy we need to aspire

to, not by establishing a [i]World government[/i], but—to the contrary—by establishing [i]Earth governance[/i] in every local community. ‘Acting locally and thinking globally’ calls for a kind of governance that the world has never seen!

Nothing short of such transformed governance will save us. If anyone still believes that “better” governments or more “efficient” environmental laws will do the trick, that person better take a good hard look at the history of environmental governance so far. In no instance was it the foresight of governments to promote precautionary principles or sustainability. These and other principles were hard fought for by civil society.

Just like the democratic movement and the human rights movement (both first taking hold in France and the U.S.), the environmental movement has been up against [i]systemic forces[/i], not people or politics. All three movements—[i]one[/i] movement really!—have long been calling for a “new covenant” to broaden a too-narrow mindset: democracy is NOT only procedure; human rights are NOT mere entitlements; and the environment NOT just natural resources. At the heart of each are people who demand access and participation, but also accept responsibility. Their common course is one of social, economic, and environmental justice that has, at best, informed governments, but never guided them. Nor has it had any impact on how business goes about its business.

Transformed [i]Earth governance[/i] is a reflection of a broadened sense of justice. If the 18th and 19th centuries introduced the idea of justice among people and the 20th century the idea of justice among peoples, our 21st century must promote the idea of justice among “the human family and the larger living world” (Engel). To me, this concept of eco-justice is the essence of [i]Earth governance[/i] that the [i]Earth Charter[/i] promotes.

A “new covenant for democracy” then has two dimensions: individually, I declare my solemn promise to care for the community of life; collectively, we are bonded by a new pact. This pact includes all people and in their various groupings, for example, as governments or companies, but is a pact of ALL people, not civil society OR states, not poor OR rich, not nations OR the UN. This inclusiveness makes the pact “new.”

Ron Engel asserts that the Earth Charter conceives Earth as a [i]polis[/i]. Is it conceivable for our political institutions—citizenship, governments, international organizations—to think of the Earth as their common [i]polis[/i]? It shouldn’t be difficult. Ironically, political institutions are lagging behind economic institutions that have no regard for the idea of a [i]polis[/i], but use the Earth as their common good. The management strategies of transnational corporations (TNCs) have all the ingredients of Earth governance—local actions, global awareness, a borderless world—except the idea of a [i]polis[/i]. That



much political institutions can learn from TNCs; the case for open borders and refined state-sovereignty is certainly a strong one. What both political and economic institutions are profoundly lacking is the morality associated with Earth as a [i] polis [/i]. The Earth Charter provides such a morality, both in terms of content (values and principles) and status (covenant).

The logic of the [i]Earth Charter [/i]as a new covenant for democracy is compelling. There is no other logic that would save humanity from further, perhaps ultimate decline. However, Engel's essay concludes: "The more one ponders the [i] Earth Charter [/i] the larger loom hope, trust, commitment, and faith." These are the characteristics of ethical ambition. They are not the normal characteristics of those in power. Yet ethical ambition is what the Earth Charter utterly relies on; without it we are doomed.

On the other hand, are we in 2007 not seeing new signs of ethical ambition? There is surely hope when, all of a sudden, climate change becomes a global political issue (the "Gore effect") or the morality of the "war against terrorism" is universally questioned. If I am not totally mistaken, the world speaks increasingly with a sense of responsibility. And if I am not too hopeful here, the world begins to look for a new covenant. Ron Engel's essay comes very timely indeed.

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Anonymous

Posted: 27 Feb 2007 21:59 Post subject: Paul Heltne's response to Ron Engel

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[b]Charter to Covenant to Declaration[/b]

Dr. Engel's paper "The Earth Charter as a New Democratic Covenant for Democracy" is the latest step in a fruitful career of calling attention to our responsibilities with regard to nature, an Earthly nature of which we are a part. This species of ours is most needful of this timely proposition which I support fully.

The commitments of the Earth Charter and this call to engage in covenantal democracy stands in stark contrast to certain recent trends in thought. These trends are seen in the titles of several recent cultural events. I will mention only two. The first is a heavily attended 2006 exhibition at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA). Its title is "Massive Change: The Future of Global Design." Lest one should have merely a suspicion of hubris in this endeavor, that suspicion is removed by the exhibit's defining question, "Now that we can do anything, what will we do?" and its defining statement, "It's not about the world of design. It's about designing the world." The exhibition was designed

by Bruce Mau, an energetic man who heads the Institute Without Boundaries. These quivering titles and the exhibit they introduced were all about humans getting outside of the boundaries of the resources of this planet without respect to the rest of life, or even of human life to come, even for as little as a thousand years into the future.

Contemporary with this exhibit at MOCA was a symposium at the University of Chicago Divinity School whose title was "Without Nature?: A New Context for Theology." The central theme seemed to be now that we can bio-engineer food and our own cellular processes we can envision a world free of death, hunger, and illness, for humans at least. This is an extremely dangerous misreading of our current or any possible future capabilities, as pointed out by the noted botanist and conservationist Peter Raven early in the symposium. And even if it were a possibility, it is not clear to me that the new condition would free us from sin, provide for covenanted community, or require a new definition of God. As a simple check on such hubris, we should never forget that the spiders won in Biosphere II. Nor that the most advanced cultures in the history of the Earth killed hundreds of millions in war and death camps during the last century, continuing to the present.

I wish to carry Dr. Engel's marvelous, evocative writing one step more. I want to provide, for testing, a pre-Preamble to the Earth Charter; it is a system of assertions to which I believe that many people are ready to assent. Knowing that assent exists can greatly speed the development of covenant so here goes:

We the People of this good Earth are and affirm that we are utterly dependent on nature. This is the dependence of a child in its mother's womb. This is dependence that reaches from breath to breath, from sip to sip, from swallow to swallow. We share with all living things in this dependence.

We acknowledge utter dependence – not utilitarian dependence (as in the "cost-benefit analysis shows that maintaining the flood plain will save ..."); not removed dependence (as in statements beginning "of course, we are ultimately dependent on ...."; for what is it that we think stands between "right now" and "ultimately"?); not interdependence (because our dependence on nature has a different meaning than its dependence on us) – but utter dependence. We know and heartily accept that seeing ourselves as utterly dependent generates the insight that we have an utter responsibility to nurture our complex relationship with the Earth.

This we have rarely done. Believing ourselves somehow outside of a context of profound dependence, many of us have behaved very rashly though often thinking and believing (on the strength of philosophers and prophets we often misunderstood) that we behaved reasonably. Thus, many of us have taken much, much more when we might easily have flourished with much, much less.



By contrast, understanding our utter dependence, we commit to taking every care for the full well being of the other creatures and processes in that relationship. Yes, this is inter-relationship, but one that is in no way balanced or neutral. Yes, this speaks of our responsibilities for the well-being of ourselves and our fellow humans, but with the recognition that this cannot be upheld apart from assuring the well-being of all our fellow living creatures. In short we commit to Aldo Leopold's land ethic which says, in part, that, each of us, you and I, must forego doing (taking, altering) all that we might. This nurturing stance calls for a new economics, a new technology, a new philosophy. It is possible, that we might, with utter care, leave behind us a richer community of life than we found when we arrived.

Thus, we seek an ethical stance that reaches to all of nature's grandchildren and all of theirs (including humans, as nature always has). We seek to make decisions which hold in highest regard tree generations and butterfly generations, human generations and bacterial generations, the water cycle, carbon cycle, the soil, and on and on. We must think about how we can leave all those who come after us a chance to make it through the next Ice Age. We pledge that we will not mortgage all their futures for our current, transient comforts. If we get it right, humans will still enjoy bountiful lives (not the profligacy of the present, however) within a thriving nature.

We believe that we are interdependent with nature, especially because we have now put so much pressure on nature that if we are inattentive and keep doing what we are doing we will extinguish hundreds of thousands of species and threaten ecosystem processes. The potential for our doing great harm is, of course, true; but this statement immediately shows that our dependence on nature is different than nature's dependence on us. We depend on nature for life; nature depends on us not to be stupid and greedy. We depend on nature for water and food; nature depends on us to honor what is taken, the taking, and what is left. We depend on nature for clean water and clean air; nature depends on us to be very respectful concerning what we put onto the land and into the water and air. Nature offers us grace and mercy, well-being and delight; let nurture and thanksgiving and love be our response. And we simply acknowledge that sometimes Nature's exuberant processes of change and renewal – such as the wildness of Earth's weather and its moving plates – are too much for us.

We promise to learn to honor all of Nature – fellow humans, other creatures, and the undergirding processes. Let us seek a renewal of the idea of the commons, but in a very deep sense, namely, our commons with all living creatures and the ecosphere which contains and supports us. We pledge to learn again to ask permission of the lives we harvest, permission of the larger human and biological communities in which we live, and the permission of all those who come after us.

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Paul Heltne  
Center for Humans and Nature

Brooke Hecht

Posted: 28 Feb 2007 21:01 Post subject: Global ecological governance

In "The Earth Charter as a New Covenant for Democracy," Engel highlights a central question of politics: "How might we so construct our lives together that all life flourishes?" An interesting response to this challenge is offered by French President Jacques Chirac in his address at the Citizens of the Earth conference for global ecological governance on February 2, 2007.

In this address, Chirac openly calls for global environmental governance. Chirac argues for this outcome, "Because in our reprehensible selfishness we refuse to face the facts; because we are unable to shake off outmoded mindsets and an economic structure inherited from the 19th century; because our international policy-making structure is ill-suited to the crucial issue of the 21st century, namely the environment."

The full text of Chirac's address can be found on the Environmental News Service website:

<http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/feb2007/2007-02-06-inschi.asp>

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