

Faith and Land Use

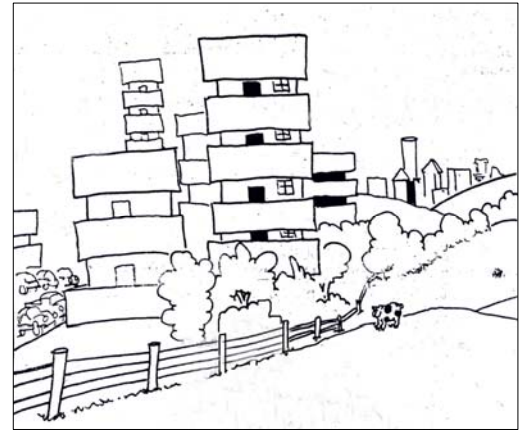
Is our use of land a faith issue? Some have said it is our duty to fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). But haven't we already done that? Can we say the earth has not only been subdued, we have even defiled much of this heritage?

*“And I brought you into a plentiful land
to enjoy its fruits and its good things.
But when you came in you defiled my land,
and made my heritage an abomination.”*

Jeremiah 2:7 RSV

*“Woe to those who join house to house,
who add field to field,
until there is no more room,”*

Isaiah 5:8



Some are saying we now have a sacred duty to restore a new Eden, to care for and till the garden (Genesis 2:15). So how do these words challenge us today? For example, how should we balance landowners' rights to use their land with their responsibilities for safeguarding a heritage? Should landowners have a responsibility to serve their neighbors?

“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Romans 13:10

Should landowners have a responsibility to those who depend on the produce of their land?

*Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for man to cultivate,
that he may bring forth food from the earth,”*

Psalms 104:14

From seed to table, food is a profoundly spiritual and ethical concern. As people of faith, are we called to play a role in maintaining just and sustainable food systems? What does this mean to us in terms of protecting productive farmland? And how about forest land?



*“The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon which he planted.
In them the birds build their nests.”*

Psalms 104:16-17

Today the large cedar forests of the Holy Land are gone: used up and replaced by barren, dry land. Should we maintain our forests for broad benefits and services such as forest products, wildlife habitat, clean water, clean air, recreation and inspiration? Or should our forests, like the cedars of Lebanon, give way to progress?

*“The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein;”*

Psalms 24:1

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