

Covenanting for Creation

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all use the language of covenant to express the moral bonds that link God, land, and humans. Each has its own distinctive understanding of covenant, but all are rooted in the epic stories of the Garden, Abraham's quest for land, Exodus, Exile, and return, and all are shaped by the law, the prophetic texts, and the Psalms. These foundational texts portray land as God's creation and God's gift, an inheritance to be held in trust from generation to generation, not a commodity to be bought or sold. Human flourishing is God's blessing conveyed through the land. Our love for God is to be expressed by sharing the blessing in ways that are socially and environmentally just. When sustained by mutual blessing, covenant allows all creation, living and non-living, and all people, urban and rural, to thrive. That ancient insight continues to hold today and it will still hold tomorrow.

But blessing is complicated. Lulled into complacency by abundance, Israel's monarchy began to take the blessing for granted. Forgetting the covenant, they worked the land to the bone, exhausting the soil and impoverishing the people. Exactly as the prophets had foreseen, neglect of covenant led to barren fields, loss of the land, and exile in Babylon. But as the prophets also saw, Exile was not the end of covenant; it was a sabbatical, a time of fallowing for restoration of land, redemption of people, and renewal of covenant.

On this day, we remember the true source of our blessing. We too have been lulled into complacency. Too much of our prosperity has been achieved by mortgaging the abundance of God's world. By abusing God's gifts of earth, water, air, and energy, we are borrowing too much from human neighbors less well-off than ourselves; we are borrowing too much from our non-human neighbors; and we are borrowing too much from those yet to be born. We are borrowing at a rate that we can never repay.

We stand at a crossroad. God's word of covenant with land and with each other calls us to turn from our path of unrestrained consumption and careless disregard of the integrity of creation, and guides us to the straight path, where the good way lies. Religious communities must lead the way. We must remember how to be full without excess, how to be satisfied with enough. We must find delight in ways of living that confer well-being on all people and all creation. Today, in the presence of God and one another, we commit ourselves to walking the path of covenant by sharing God's blessing with justice and compassion so that all creation and all people may thrive together.

Signed June 22, 2010 by,

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