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## Stewards of Creation

Laura Shaw<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1 - "Earth Mother" by Maxine Noel

Maxine Noel's painting titled "Earth Mother"<sup>2</sup> provides a colourful depiction of our role as stewards of creation. From both a Christian and an Indigenous perspective, the painting provides viewers with an opportunity to see human beings as a part of the created world and not separate from creation. The fourth principle of *The Earth Charter*<sup>3</sup> will be used to tie in the importance of caring for creation now and for future generations.

Genesis 1:26–28<sup>4</sup> provides a biblical context to how we were created and what God created us for. The verse begins with God saying:

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Shaw is a student in the MA (Theology: Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy) program.

<sup>2</sup> Maxine Noel, *Earth Mother*, n.d., matted print, 11 in × 14 in, <https://www.madeincanadagifts.ca/collections/maxine-noel-canadian-indigenous-artist-sioux/products/mother-earth-maxine-noel-ioyan-mani-canadian-aboriginal-sioux-art-print>.

<sup>3</sup> Earth Charter Initiative, *The Earth Charter*, (2001), <https://earthcharter.org/library/the-earth-charter-text/>.

<sup>4</sup> All biblical quotations are from The Message (MSG).

Let us make human beings in our image, make them  
reflecting our nature  
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,  
the birds in the air, the cattle,  
And, yes, Earth itself,  
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.

We as human beings are part of creation, part of the created world. We are not to rule over the earth but are called to be caretakers of it. Genesis 1:26–28 ends with God saying, “Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.” God created us to serve one another, including the animals, the land, and the sky. In Noel’s painting, she provides a seamless drawing of the earth and the woman. There is no distinct separation from one another; they are one. If we can come home to our first true calling as caretakers of the world and what it inhabits, then maybe we can make a difference for future generations when it comes to climate change and climate justice.

The fourth principle of *The Earth Charter* tells us to “secure Earth’s bounty and beauty for present and future generations.”<sup>5</sup> We can honour this principle by listening to and respecting the beautiful creation we have been given that is described in Genesis 1:26–28, and by learning from Indigenous communities and how they view and care for creation. This principle has similarities to the ways Indigenous peoples have been living for years. Within Indigenous culture, it is the role of the elders to pass on their rituals and traditions to the next generation to ensure that their heritage lives on.<sup>6</sup> Indigenous peoples have a strong and sacred connection to the earth and the animals that inhabit it.<sup>7</sup> Women are seen as the protectors of the land and are called to care for the earth.<sup>8</sup> Noel’s painting provides a powerful and honest interpretation of the role of women in Indigenous communities. The woman is not dominant over the animals, but rather cloaked in them and the trees. Noel’s painting provides us with an opportunity to view animals and creation with the same respect and sacredness that Indigenous peoples have been giving them.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of a dish with one spoon comes to mind when looking at this painting and thinking about *The Earth Charter*. The dish with one spoon concept was created by Indigenous peoples living around the Great Lakes and North-Eastern America.<sup>10</sup> The concept describes how the “land can be shared to the mutual benefit of all its inhabitants.”<sup>11</sup> We are called to work together to sustain each other, and not to take more than what we need in order to ensure that there is enough for everyone.<sup>12</sup> By also incorporating the fourth principle of *The Earth Charter*, we can ensure that we are not taking more than what is needed to sustain us, while leaving enough for the next generation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Earth Charter*.

<sup>6</sup> Erin Hodson, “Colonial Acts of Violence on Indigenous People Living in Canada” (lecture notes, Martin Luther University College, Waterloo, ON, September 23, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Hodson.

<sup>8</sup> Hodson.

<sup>9</sup> Hodson.

<sup>10</sup> Fred Glover, “A Dish with One Spoon,” in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified March 31, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/a-dish-with-one-spoon>; Hodson, “Colonial Acts of Violence.”

<sup>11</sup> Glover, “A Dish with One Spoon.”

<sup>12</sup> Glover, “A Dish with One Spoon.”; Hodson, “Colonial Acts of Violence.”

<sup>13</sup> *The Earth Charter*.

In the painting, Noel presents a seamless drawing of the earth and the woman as one. It is as though she is one with the earth, and a steward of creation. This picture captures the true essence of what it means to be one with creation. As we were created and called to be stewards of the earth, my hope is for us to listen to what creation is trying to tell us. How can we take steps to move towards healing and reconciliation? What can we do to leave the world a better place for the generations to follow? By educating ourselves on the importance of protecting creation and by connecting with the earth on a deeper level, we can hopefully change the trajectory for future generations.