Fall 2014

Reflections

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

amagazineoftheologicalandethicalinquiry

At Risk: Our Food, Our Water, Ourselves

"We need technical solutions – but also moral perspectives, supplied by a Christian witness in partnership with the humane, ethical visions of others."

– Dean Gregory E. Sterling

front cover art

Photo of a fifth-century mosaic inside the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and the Fishes in Tabgha, Israel. According to tradition, it is the site where Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, as chronicled in Mark 6.

interior photography and back cover

Photographer David L. Smith is an emeritus professor at Xavier University in Cincinnati, where he taught filmmaking, photography, and other communication arts.

As a photographer, he says, he is always on the lookout for spiritual meaning in the visual field, a contemplative dimension to the image.

Smith grew up as a Roman Catholic, and Jesuit teaching has long been important to him.

"They always encouraged us to see the divine in all things, and that's something I still practice," Smith says.

When he's out with his camera, he seeks three components: "One, I look for certain qualities of light, and, two, the geometry of form, line, and texture, and, three, something else, which is the most difficult of all – simplicity, a sense of stillness."

See his blog and other images at davidlsmithcontemplativephotography.com.

REFLECTIONS – VOLUME 101, NUMBER 2

ISSN 0362-0611

Reflections *is a magazine of theological and ethical inquiry published twice a year by Yale Divinity School. Opinions expressed are solely those of the contributing authors and do not represent those of the sponsoring institution and its administration and faculty.*

Visit our website at reflections.yale.edu, where you can sign up for a free subscription or order additional copies of the current issue or past issues.

The website also features options for making a financial gift to the Divinity School as a way to support the work of Reflections*. The magazine is a public service of the School's mission to promote faith and intellect in contemporary society. For more information call 203-432-5359.*

We welcome letters to the editor. All correspondence regarding Reflections *should be addressed to editor Ray Waddle at the Divinity School's address or at ray.waddle@yale.edu.*

Gregory E. Sterling – Publisher
Ray Waddle – Editor-in-Chief
Constance Royster – Senior Advisor
Peter Johnson, YPPS – Graphic Designer
Campbell Harmon – Online Coordinator

At Risk: Our Food, Our Water, Ourselves

From the Dean's Desk

Gregory E. Sterling
The Reverend Henry L. Slack
Dean of Yale Divinity School
& Lillian Claus Professor
of New Testament

I can vividly recall one of the great ethical debates back in the 1980s when I was a Ph.D. student in Berkeley – an uproar over potatoes.

A scientist who lived in the house in front of my garage apartment had developed a new version of the frost-resistant potato. It was regarded as the latest breakthrough in the fight against world hunger, a way to give farmers large and small a better chance against the volatilities of weather. But passions were also high against such research. Wasn't genetic manipulation of nature a dangerous thing? Wasn't it hubris to try to outfox nature and create "Frankenfoods" that could have monstrous, unintended consequences?

The debate wasn't resolved, then or now. I could see the arguments of both sides. On the one hand, we needed more food for people; on the other hand, unintended consequences can be devastating.

Thirty years later, the world population has grown to seven billion, and the ethical debate is as vigorous as ever. Genetic modifications are embedded in the food system. An alternative food sustainability movement has mushroomed in response. Still, food deserts persist. Food insecurity affects some two billion people. Drought in the western U.S. and elsewhere is reaching historic and traumatic proportions. Climate change – with its effect on our food, water, and survival – is emerging as a central preoccupation of the global community.

This issue of *Reflections* was produced in a spirit of urgency and care about the interlocking complexity of food and water and environmental debates, and with conviction that people of faith must join the fray.

Joining might mean starting a community garden on the church grounds. Or it might mean exercising our voices in very public ways to ensure that basic human rights – including the right to food security and the right to clean water – are front and center in our national and international conversations.

People of faith bring a perspective to these unyielding challenges that other discussants lack: God has given us the responsibility to be stewards of earth. It involves a Janus-like capacity to look in two directions at once. As creatures, we must be wary of Tower of Babel-like arrogance and overreach, but as creatures in God's image we must also be willing to apply our intelligence and creativity to human problems.

We know some human-made "solutions" can go too far and be too destructive. Yet world population will reach 10 billion or more this century. Going organic isn't enough. We have to produce food on a massive scale – and distribute it justly on the same massive scale. We need technical solutions – but also moral perspectives, supplied by a Christian witness in partnership with the humane, ethical visions of others.

Thanks to the many voices who contributed to this Fall 2014 *Reflections* for making pathways to a just and sustainable future.

Gregory E. Sterling
Dean

Fall 2014

Contents

At Risk: Our Food, Our Water, Ourselves

From the Dean's Desk – Gregory E. Sterling **2**

Give Us Bread – Sara Miles **5**

Small Enough to Manage, Big Enough to Matter – Andrew K. Barnett **7**

New Alliances of Science and Spirit – Gregory E. Sterling and Sir Peter Crane **9**

God the Gardener – Norman Wirzba **10**

Divine Possibility: Ending Hunger by 2030 – Derick Dailey **15**

The Feeding of the 12 Billion – Robert W. Herdt and Jennifer A. Herdt **19**

Delicious Revolution – An Interview with Alice Waters **23**

Let Us Keep the Feast, Then Keep Going – James Jenkins **24**

Thoughts Beyond the Pail: A Farm Life – Robin Verson **26**

The New Scourge: Unhealthy Diets – An Interview with Olivier De Schutter **27**

Message in a Bottle – Christiana Z. Peppard **31**

Water Gone Bad – Karen Schneider **36**

Ancient Voices Speak to the Ecological Future – Mary Evelyn Tucker **37**

God and Nature, Then and Now – Joel Baden **39**

Worrying about the Food Movement – Willis Jenkins **42**

Eating Food and Justice – Christopher Carter **45**

Rousing Us From Inattention – Christopher Fici **47**

Wisdom on the Ground – John O'Sullivan **49**

Back to the Garden: A New Asceticism – Fred Bahnson **50**

Hustle and Flow: New Threats to Water – Ray Waddle **55**

Toward a Divine Diet – Bruce Friedrich **58**

From the Editor: Table Talk – Ray Waddle **64**

Poems

Enviable – Robert Francis **11**

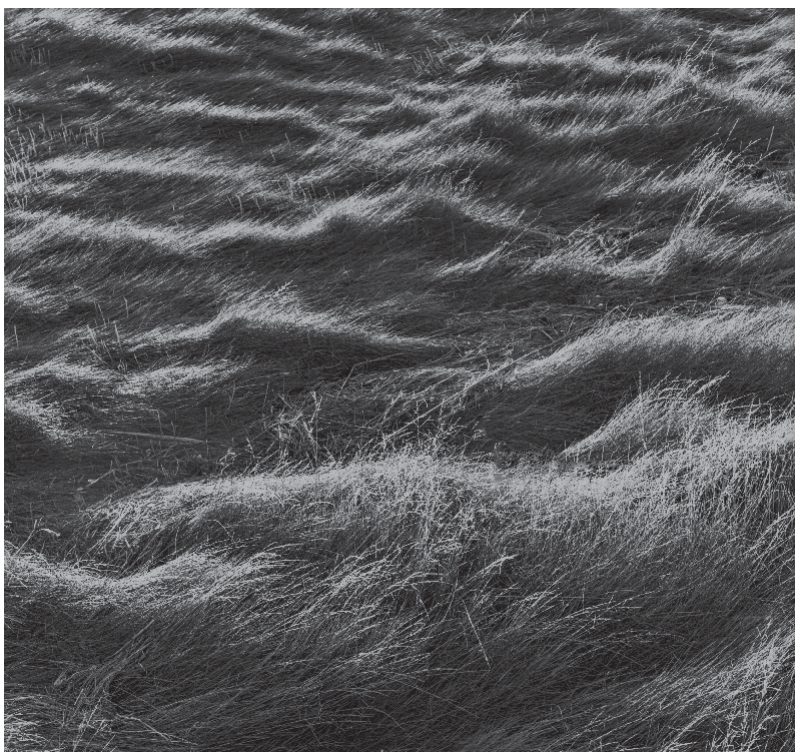
Potatoes – Kathryn Stripling Byer **20**

Like Ghosts of Eagles – Robert Francis **32**

Cooking Catalogue – Jill Breckenridge **52**

Reunion – Caitlin Kenzie Scott **56**

Credits **60**



Give Us Bread

By Sara Miles

I live in San Francisco, ground zero for America's secular obsession with food, and sometimes I think I'll scream if I hear anyone say "organic," "local," or "artisan," not to mention "single-source" or "farm-to-table" again.

And as a woman who was converted to Christianity by communion bread and wrote a book about it, I'm even more cynical about the religious values we assign so glibly to food. Does buying all-organic groceries make you a better person? Does being really careful about how much sugar your kids consume bring you closer to God? Can kale save?

It's a short step from imagining that your own food choices about watershed-conscious, humane, sustainable agriculture will justify you, to believing that other people who don't eat the way you do are

Does being really careful about how much sugar your kids consume bring you closer to God? Can kale save?

living in sin. But poor Mexican kids eating hot Doritos, and white middle-class social workers eating soy yogurt, and the CEO of General Mills eating a big old industrial steak – we are *all* in a state of sin. And food will not save any of us.

God will save us.

Culinary Theology

Yes, this country's food systems are sick. But the healing of our selves and communities can't come about solely through technical interventions around agriculture, by political campaigns to improve the quality of the foods we eat, or by an anxious focus on organic cleanliness. Real healing requires communion: that is, sitting down and eating with others – especially with strangers and the impure, as Jesus does.

Gregory of Nyssa, the patron saint of my home church, was a bishop in the fourth century in what is now Turkey. Here are his strikingly contemporary words on faith and food, from his sermon on the Lord's Prayer:

So we say to God: Give us bread. Not delicacies or riches, nor magnificent purple robes, golden ornaments, precious stones, or silver dishes ... We do not say, give us a prominent position in assemblies or monuments and statues raised to us, nor silken robes and musicians at meals, nor any other thing by which the soul is estranged from the thought of God and higher things; no – but only bread!

... But you go on business to the Indies and venture out upon strange seas; you go on a voyage every year only to bring back flavorings for your food, without realizing that ... [it] is above all a good conscience which makes the bread tasty because it is eaten in justice. ...

*"Give Thou bread" – that is to say, let me have food through just labor. For if God is justice, the man who procures food for himself through covetousness cannot have his bread from God. You are the master of your prayer, if abundance does not come from another's property and is not the result of another's tears; if no one is hungry or distressed because you are fully satisfied. For the bread of God is, above all, the fruit of justice ..." **

Gregory's use of the first person plural is Gospel. Not "give *me* bread," but "give *us* bread." Not *I*, but *we*. Not *my* self, but *our* body.

Every Friday

Every Friday at the church named for Gregory of Nyssa, after singing the Lord's Prayer at the morning service, I go with our priest Paul Fromberg to shop at the big new Whole Foods store around the corner, so we can prepare lunch for the more than 50 volunteers who run our food pantry. The volunteers come from the streets and the projects, they're for-

* St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer – The Beatitudes* (Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 18), translated by Hilda Graef (Newman, 1954), pp. 63-64, 67.

eigners, they're hungry and poor. They work all day at the pantry, giving away food to strangers: They unload pallets and set up tables overflowing with bread; they lift sacks of potatoes and break down boxes and deal with the public – it's hard work. So Paul and I always cook a full, hot family meal for the volunteers, and everyone shares it before the pantry opens.

Each week Paul and I stroll down the aisles of Whole Foods, arguing about what to cook, and I gaze at the incredible variety: tiny jars of pink peppercorns and displays of artisanal sheep's milk cheeses from around the world and shelves over-

What makes our bread tasty? The love of God, which is the love of all God's people. *And so we say to God: Give us bread.*

flowing with 19 varieties of salt. I look at the figs from Spain and the saffron from Kashmir and I hear Gregory sadly saying: *"But you go on business to the Indies and venture out upon strange seas; you go on a voyage every year only to bring back flavorings for your food, without realizing that…[it] is above all a good conscience which makes the bread tasty because it is eaten in justice."*

Of course, I love flavorings from the Indies too, and delicacies and riches, and cooking big splashy meals. But sometimes the excess makes me nervous: It's not what food is for.

Birthday Cake Compassion

One day I noticed Paul had picked up special expensive supplies at Whole Foods to make a three-layer cake, then, while I was busy with the soup, he made a complicated meringue-based icing, and while I was rushing to get the casserole in the oven, he began decorating the whole thing with crushed praline dust and beautiful little pastry-cream rosettes.

"What's up?" I asked, kind of irritated that Paul was taking so long fussing with decorations when we had 50 hungry people waiting for lunch.

Paul shrugged. "Somebody told me it was Matthew's birthday," he said. Matthew, who works unpaid 20 hours a week as the director of operations for the food pantry, is Irish, undocumented; a former heroin addict who got clean in prison. He lives in a single-room hotel. He doesn't have a bank account. He's impossibly generous: He barks gruffly at everyone but then gives away the food he gets from the pantry. Matthew has missing teeth and homemade tattoos and would probably set off security alarms at Whole Foods.

God, Gregory of Nyssa wrote, desires relationship with us, and we desire relationship with God, and with other humans. *This* is what food is for. Paul stood back and admired his handiwork. "You know, when Matthew was inside, in San Quentin," Paul said quietly, "I bet he never imagined anyone would bake him a birthday cake again. So I wanted to make it special."

What makes our bread tasty? The love of God, which is the love of all God's people. *And so we say to God: Give us bread.* Gregory, down the years, teaches that faith is not abstract, but requires us to act. That our faith has material as well as philosophical consequences. We say over and over in church that we are the body of Christ. Yet if one part of the body enjoys flavorings from the Indies while another part is starving, then that body is sick.

And what can possibly heal us? Bread. The simplest loaf or the fanciest pink birthday cake, if it is eaten together in justice. Not justice in the sense we mean when we reduce social justice to an "issue," the formulaic justice of this world, but overflowing justice based on the undivided life of God. So give us that bread, we pray, which transforms us, as we share it with others, into one body.

Sara Miles is founder and director of the Food Pantry, based at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She is also director of ministry at the church. Her books include City of God: Faith in the Streets *(Jericho, 2014) and* Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead *(Jossey-Bass, 2010). Her 2008 book* Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion *(Ballantine) has been selected as a focus of study and conversation among all students, staff, and faculty at YDS this academic year. She will lecture at the Divinity School on Jan. 13, 2015.*

CUCUMBERS AND COMMERCE: FARMERS' MARKETS

The number of farmers' markets in the U.S. has risen to 8,284 this year, continuing a trend of annual increases. Growth surged during the last decade but now appears to be slowing, reportedly because the markets are nearing a saturation point in some cities.

Twenty years ago, there were 1,755 farmers' markets.

Annual food sales at farmers' markets add up to about $1 billion. Americans spend some $500 billion at grocery stores.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Small Enough to Manage, Big Enough to Matter

By Andrew K. Barnett

Start Anyway. Sorry to lay it all on the first line, but there it is. None of us knows enough, has enough money, pulls enough strings, or carries the clout to justify a new project. Start anyway.

We can all pose unanswered questions that will kill a new idea before it gets out of committee – how will we pay for it, what will the neighbors say, what if _____ (insert the name of your local curmudgeon) gets upset, who's to serve on the committee, what will we call the committee, do we even need a committee? These legitimate issues could clog a year's worth of meetings.

Finding Answers Faster

But when we start anyway, we find answers faster. Invited to the inevitable messiness of new ideas, people take ownership and solve problems – tomatoes in need of stakes, say, or hungry guests waiting for bread. Intractable social ills suddenly offer concrete solutions and specific ways to get involved. Theology gets done.

Food justice is an element of the larger global fight for human dignity. As the 21st century trends toward 10 billion people and a very harsh global climate, we can only love neighbor as self when we work for a stable climate, a just society, and food security. When we synchronize initiatives that are small enough to manage and big enough to matter, devising solutions that make sense in specific places and times, then we pair local cost with local benefit, and things actually happen. Parks get built. Gardens get planted. Food gets served. We tunnel through political barriers. We mobilize pockets of political will. We cultivate partnerships and invent possibilities that we had never imagined. We get out of the office and onto the streets. Engaging our communities, enriching our spiritual and physical wellness, it's possible to make measurable progress on issues Jesus cares about most passionately: human dignity for all, love for neighbor and self.

Gardens get planted. Food gets served. We tunnel through political barriers. We mobilize pockets of political will. We cultivate partnerships we never imagined.

Planting Seeds of Hope

Two years ago, when Bishop Jon Bruno asked urban farmer Tim Alderson to help the Episcopal communities of Los Angeles build an integrated harvest and food distribution system, the bishop's first words were, "We'll start in January."

Courageously, Tim took the job, built a program called Seeds of Hope, and I was thrilled to join his team recently. The work matters, because South-Central LA is a food desert, where 72 percent of the food shops offer nothing but fast food.[1] Despite the energy, water, and pollution costs of a bacon double cheeseburger, it's a shocking irony that the meat sandwich is still cheaper and easier to buy than veggies in low-income communities. Fresh produce is a luxury good in the city.[2] Drive across town to the wealthier western side, and you'll find only 41 percent of the restaurants serving fast food. The difference in life expectancy is about 12 years, due largely to food-related illness in poor communities. That's the same gap that separates the United States from North Korea, and it's wrong.

Twenty-four months ago, Seeds of Hope started as a new idea with lots of unanswered questions. Now it coordinates gardens at 75 churches and 22 schools, and we share fresh produce with 60 food pantries and 50 feeding programs. We won a $900,000 grant from the LA health department to help community leaders support nourishing food cultures. The Seeds of Hope innovation is to coordinate land, people, money, and community centers,

all dedicated to bringing healthy food to people who need it. The goal is to farm the diocese and feed people real food.

Food allows us to sow relationships, re-cultivate a sense of gratitude, and fertilize community in ways only God can predict. Praying shapes believing. *Doing* does too. *Lex agendi, lex corandi*: What we do, we believe.

Does this work matter? Only time will tell. I can say it's exciting to see people become aware of capacities they didn't know they had. It is holy to partner with faith communities venturing beyond the stained glass and stone walls to break bread together. In a complex system, we only have control over ourselves. But I am in charge of me and you are in charge of you. If we want to spark a movement, start moving. Even and especially when we don't know all the answers, start anyway.

The Rev. Andrew K. Barnett holds the Bishop's Chair for Environmental Studies and Food Justice in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. He is a 2012 graduate of Yale's Divinity and Environment Schools and pianist with the Theodicy Jazz Collective.

Notes

1 "Food Systems Snapshot 2013," Los Angeles Food Policy Council. See http://goodfoodla.org/good-food/2013-food-system-snapshot.

2 "Food Systems Snapshot 2013."

Yale Divinity Farm: A Story About Starting

Here's what happened when an idealistic bunch of Yale seminarians decided to start anyway.

Five years ago, global climate talks had just collapsed, and a lot of us were feeling hopeless. I read the essay Michael Pollan wrote after Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Pollan basically said, in the face of daunting odds, he would go out back to plant a garden. He thought it was the least he could do, it would make a dent in his carbon footprint, and it would be a beautiful thing to plant veggies with his kids.

About that time, members of Yale Earth Care Committee (YECC), a YDS student group, considered what we might do with the last few weeks of school and how we might use our last funds. I mentioned the Pollan article, and folks were interested. The next day, the YDS dean had a BBQ, and he got several of us talking about how fun it would be to grow cucumbers sometime.

"Funny you should mention that," I said to Harry Attridge, who was dean at the time. "We were hoping to plant a garden next week. Can I talk to you tomorrow morning?"

We met at 7:30 a.m. "YECC has $1,000 and 15 volunteers who would love to plant a vegetable garden. Whadyathink?" I said. He took me for a walk and made some phone calls. Two weeks later we broke ground near the YDS dorms when an anonymous (and amazing) maintenance employee drove his bulldozer over at 7 a.m. to avoid detection from the shift supervisor.

Later that day six volunteers showed up, but the rain made us quit early. We had just converted 2,000 square feet of country club lawn into a mud hole, and we were facing disaster. I could just imagine the Monday morning hecklers, to say nothing of the University bigwigs who lived nearby. Start anyway? Really? How'd that work out?

That night, we called everybody we knew. I was texting like crazy between songs at a concert. "Urgent: we need hands at the farm tomorrow morning. Can you make it? #therewillbecookies." The next day at 7:30 a.m., four folks met with a rototiller and a big pile of cow poop. By 8:30 we had 10 people hauling soil, and by 9:30 we had 20 people planting seedlings and spreading mulch. Over the course of that day, more than 30 people joined in, and we built the garden in two days. We went on to craft a compost bin, shed, irrigation system, and integrated community garden. Today, YDS community volunteers compost the salad bar waste from the cafeteria. Future pastors tend the veggies. Neighbors bring their kids to play.

This little farm took us beyond theory, toward action, and it changed hearts. I love the relationships that formed when we jumped in, learned to garden as the plants grew, and met people who stopped by. Someone met the guy who runs New Haven's farm-to-foodshelf program, and we brought him produce. We shared food for seminary meals, and with apartment residents. There's this great kid Robert who planted a giant pumpkin and started bringing his friends to the garden every day to watch it grow.

Five years later, YDS now funds a student farm manager who coordinates volunteers and keeps the place running. None of us knew enough or had enough to start. But, guided by idealism and a bit of naïveté, we started anyway.

– Andrew K. Barnett

NEW ALLIANCES OF SCIENCE AND SPIRIT

By Gregory E. Sterling and Sir Peter Crane

STERLING CRANE

A young entrepreneur starts a non-profit to connect at-risk youngsters with questions of environmental health.

An Episcopal priest moves to Los Angeles to coordinate new community gardens across an urban diocese.

Thus do two Yale alums pursue different vocational paths – yet they have something specific in common. Both are graduates of a unique joint degree program, offered by the Yale Divinity School and the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, as a response to the unprecedented challenges of the 21st century.

When the Divinity-Environmental Studies master's degree was forged a decade ago, the moment was right. Evidence of climate change was mounting. Volatile crises of water, food, and land use were intensifying. The need for new collaboration between scientists and other communities was urgent. Impatient with silo thinking, students and faculty were seeking entrepreneurial ways to broaden the debate and connect spiritual and environmental arguments.

By now, the global challenges have only grown more acute. The problems we face – a warming planet, scarcity of fresh water, pollution of all kinds, and environmental fragility in the face of political conflict – are so complex and interwoven that one discipline, one approach, one vocabulary, cannot resolve them. In a pluralistic era, we need a larger view of global environmental health, one that weds precision and ethics, technology and morality. We hope to produce a new generation of interpreters, activists, healers of earth and spirit.

We need a larger view of global environmental health, one that weds precision and ethics, technology and morality.

A generation ago, technical answers to the world's great problems seemed to promise a future that would conquer hunger, disease, drought, and energy shortages. We've indeed witnessed dramatic breakthroughs – progress on poverty reduction, astounding digital access to data, revolutions in biomedicine, and expanded use of sources of alternative energy.

Many solutions demand technical approaches and always will. But consumerism with its underlying value system, coupled with social and demographic change, is an unyielding driver of deteriorating ecological health. The challenge is to find deeper perspectives on human values and morality.

As a nation and as an international community, we need to find ways to reach consensus and work together, without delay. Yet we live in a time of unprecedented divisions that threaten to stifle progress. The divides are real both domestically and globally. Debates are inflamed around values. In discussions about privatization of water we hear a clash of competing interests: market freedom versus public trust. Yet water is a fundamental human need and right. It must be managed for the benefit of all. How then do we talk about it together?

Another conflict is the discord among nations about how to reduce greenhouse gases and ease the severities of climate change. The dialogue – often the haranguing – between G8 nations and emerging economies is a challenge of trust and self-scrutiny. It highlights the need for new perspectives on global citizenship.

No matter how compelling the science is, it won't persuade until it engages people at a deeper ethical level. For the majority of the global population, religious beliefs are instrumental in shaping impressions, passions, and responses to environmental management and emergency. Alongside the need for good data and sound policy there must be room for conversation about ethical and moral vision.

Spiritual education and environmental management are two orbits of human endeavor uniquely situated in the 21st century. They need each other as conversation partners. The world needs them to be.

The world's great religions can provide grounding for moral lives, an ethic of stewardship and social justice, foundations of resilient civilization. But faith traditions don't claim to provide the technical solutions to today's problems of energy production, sustainable food systems, land use, water conservation, and ecological protection. The Yale Divinity and Environmental Studies dual degree invites students to find ways in which rigorous inquiry in environmental management and ethical analysis can enrich moral thinking and pragmatic solutions.

Universities exist to address the major problems of humanity and the world in which we live. Today one of those is nothing less than the future of the planet and our place in it. Answers will not come by working in isolation. We need more models of collaboration.

This is the rationale behind Yale's dual Divinity-Environmental Studies degree. It proposes an argument – that two disciplines central to human life ought to be dialogue partners tasked to confront global problems and help secure a flourishing future. The planet's inhabitants seek creative, life-affirming ways to blend science and spirit, apply them to everyday solutions, and prepare the world their descendants will inherit.

We envision a fresh cadre of leaders with the dexterity to field new challenges and bring a sense of pragmatic hope and adventure to a vital enterprise.

Sir Peter Crane is the Carl W. Knobloch, Jr. Dean of the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and Professor of Botany. Gregory E. Sterling is the Reverend Henry L. Slack Dean of Yale Divinity School & Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament.

God the Gardener

By Norman Wirzba

The Shakers traditionally practiced a period of silence before they ate. Why should anyone take time to stop before eating? One reason is, our heads are packed with all the things going on in our world. It doesn't take long to discover that when we are eating, we aren't paying attention to the significance of it. We don't attend to what it means to eat.

Eating is one of those great acts of intimacy with the whole world. When we eat we are involved in the life of microorganisms in the soil, the life of worms, butterflies and bees, photosynthesis, weather systems. We starve without them. Our involvement extends to farms that produce the food. What is their condition? Are they healthy and vibrant? How is our water being used? What about the justice or injustice of the economies that bring food to us – those who harvest the food, who ship and process it, who cook and serve it?

There's so much to think about every time we take a bite, it's a wonder we ever get to eat at all! How long would we have to observe silence in order to take in the world behind every bite?

Mindless Eating

Mindful eating has become difficult in our fast-food nation. We eat on the run, or at our desks at work. We eat alone much of the time. This reflects a lot about cultural sensibilities. But I want to focus on why our eating has become so ignorant: We have so little practical or detailed knowledge of what it takes to grow food.

Never in human history have so few people had any intimate knowledge of the practices and affections required to grow food. In this great cloud of ignorance we are prone to consumer habits that are greatly destructive to land and farming. We know so little about the fragility and vulnerability of life, or the mystery, tragedy, serendipity, and hope that come out of the land.

To live in a consumer culture is to walk into a grocery store and see a lot of food there. It will be packaged beautifully. It will be fairly cheap. And we have it year round. Why then do we even need to be patient or attentive about how our food is produced?

We don't consider the violence it takes to do agriculture the way we do now. We have come to believe that whenever we have a problem we should poison, bulldoze, burn, or explode our way through it. Our agricultural systems now rely on vast amounts of poison. To promote food fertility, we kill.

I know this violence myself. In my garden at home, I'm in a battle with deer and rabbits. I want to kill them! How do we live in a world where other creatures want to eat the same food we do? I go to the store, looking for fruit with no blemishes. But do you know what it takes to grow fruit with no blemishes? You have to spray it. That means no other creatures want to eat it – but we do. We're feeding ourselves this poison.

God is in the food and farming business, and faith communities should get in the food and farming business too.

The One-Night Stand

If we were to grow the food ourselves, we'd have to deal with these issues much more personally and up close. I'm trying to garden. I'm not an expert at it, but I am learning its hard lessons. We have been taught to believe food should be easy. And that's a lie. Food isn't easy. But, as modern purchasers of food, we show up when we want, with cash or

credit, make the swipe with the card, and walk away to enjoy. This is a world unimaginable to people throughout history, a fantasy world.

Wendell Berry calls this the economy of the one-night stand: We meet, we're anonymous, we pay our money, get what we want, don't ask questions, and leave. But we need to ask questions. Under what conditions was this food raised? Do we know if these ways of production can be sustained for long?

Behind the slick packaging of industrial modes of food, we find stories of abuse, shame, degradation, exploitation – poison going into our water, soil being eroded, farmworkers and animals who are abused as a matter of agricultural policy. This is our best thinking and practice about food production. Yet how are we going to be healthy in a poisoned world that pits people against each other? Can we keep buying those big beautiful strawberries if we know there are farmworkers in near slave-like working conditions? We don't know whether our food should be celebrated because it honored the land, the animals, and God as the provider of these gifts, or whether we should be lamenting and crying.

Never in human history have so few people had any intimate knowledge of the practices and affections required to grow food.

God's Delectable Delight

Faith has something to say about this. It helps us to ask fundamental questions. To start with one: What is food? Naming things is crucial. How you name things determines how you relate to them. Imagine if I presented you with a plant and called it a flower. You hear the word flower and you want to behold its beauty, get closer and observe its pedal structure, smell its fragrance. But what if I say, no, it's really a weed. Now what do you think about it? You want to eradicate it. A weed gets in the way of your bottom line. Or let's say the plant is something else again – a vegetable. Your response is not to behold it or eradicate but to take care of it, and soon you'll get tomatoes.

So the naming of a plant causes vastly different reactions. Think of how we name our food today. Food is a "commodity." Standing behind this word is the logic of consumerism, which sees the world as one big store or warehouse where we can go and pick out products. Consumer logic shapes our questions. Is the food cheap? Is it convenient? Does it look attractive? Can we get it in copious quantities?

The price of food *is* important. But the desire that food be produced very, very cheaply – probably the cheapest it's been in human history – imposes tremendous costs on people, animals, land, and water systems. It makes it extremely difficult for those who grow food. They are being squeezed at the margins where they can't make a living without a subsidy check from the government.

What would a theology of food look like? In Genesis 1 and 2, the story of the creation of the world in seven days, we find a description of God's desire that creatures multiply and be fruitful. This is amazing. God's desire is that creatures achieve the fullness of their being. By realizing their potential, they maximize the divine love. From the beginning, God delights in the vigor, variety, and vitality of life. God didn't have to make anything. God never created out of boredom or necessity. God creates as the one who loves material bodies and who offers those bodies as a perpetual invitation to joy and thanksgiving. As Robert Ferrar Capon has written, "God is eccentric; He has *loves*, not reasons. *Salute*!"[1]

This is an astounding idea – and important to understand, because when we think about God's creation I think many of us are basically deist: We think God made the world a long time ago and exited the premises. We fail to appreciate God's constant love and joy in a world that is beautifully, wonderfully, and mysteriously made.

This is the point of day seven in the Genesis story – God's own Shabbat. God rested in order to

ENVIABLE
By Robert Francis

Enviable, not envious, the little worm
Whose apple is his world and equally his home,
Who at his feasting hears no hint of doom.

Deep, deep in love he is, who could be deeper in?
He envies no one, he could envy whom?
I envy no one, I could envy him.

enjoy this world. We tend to think resting means simply stopping from activity, so the opposite of rest is work. But God's resting in the presence of the world is God's deep immersion in it through the experience of joy.

In our culture the opposite of rest is not inactivity but restlessness. It takes many forms. Restlessness means that what we have is not good enough, and where we are is not good enough, and the people we are with are not good enough. Because of this restlessness, we despise or ignore our places and lands and gardens. Ours is an anti-sabbath economy, an anti-sabbath culture, preventing us from experiencing the joy that is possible if we learned to attend our world.

Shouldn't it amaze us that we can live in a world that can taste so good? Food is not a commodity – it is God's love and delight made delectable. To regard our food this way will require some major shifts in our thinking. It starts with the realization that the world is a gift. The language of commodity obscures this. It says we can achieve what we need to live by our own effort. I *earned* my life. I *worked* for my food. I don't *need* to receive any gift. That would require humility. More than ever we need practices that help us live into a reception of the world as a gift. Gardening can help us restore an appreciation of that humility.

Divinity and Dirt

Turning to Genesis 2, the story of the Garden of Eden, we find an astonishing image of God: the depiction of God as a gardener. If you were walking into the scene you'd see God on God's knees in the soil, holding it so close as to breathe into it the breath of life. Because that's what you are – soil animated by God's breath. Compared to other ancient Near Eastern depictions of God and the creation of the world that presuppose violence and bloodshed, here we find a gardening God who is on intimate terms with the material bodies of this world.

God loves soil. God loves you and me, but God loves soil first. Because without soil, there is no you or me. Yet how many of us have ever heard a sermon about God the gardener? This is a foundational story. It teaches something of God's character and life. It's impoverishing our imaginations to have lost this understanding.[2]

Then, in the same chapter of Genesis, God takes the first Adam and says go into the garden and take care of it. Some think this is God's punishment of humankind for their disobedience. But this story happens before any punishment. It is saying that God invites us into the life of gardening work because that is the work that God is always doing. By gardening, we learn something profound about ourselves as creatures. We learn it is not easy and not always about happiness. It's hot out there in July and August, and I don't want to be weeding. But if I don't, the garden will suffer. What if God too were to give up on the garden? We'd all die. Amazingly, God never does that. In our gardens we learn something about God's patience and our impatience.

God is the prototypical gardener who leads us into a life of care. Every one of us eats. Each one of us is joined intimately through our bodies with the lives of all the creatures of the earth – a bewildering array of relationships that connect us to earthworms, butterflies, chickens, and co-gardeners.

Becoming Friends

How do we live faithfully with each other in such a world? In John 6, the story of the feeding of the 5,000 on a grassy hillside, Jesus blesses the food, distributes it to everyone, and has a lot left over. And the people there want to make him king. Here was a culture that was on intimate terms with hunger, then they meet someone who could produce food on demand. They want Jesus to be their king – their grocery store manager. But he wants something different. He doesn't want them to become passive ignorant consumers. He wants them to nurture each other. He wants them to be friends.

God loves you and me, but God loves soil first. Without soil, there is no you or me. Yet how many of us have ever heard a sermon about God the gardener?

I am the bread of life given for the life of the world, he says. What kind of bread is this? It is my own flesh, he says. He offers himself so that the bodies of others can be touched, healed, and reconciled. Where is Jesus' concern that souls get to heaven? You won't find that much. He cares about the health and happiness of bodies. He is part of a theological tradition that understands the material world to be loved by God, who wants creatures to flourish. That's why Jesus practices so much hospitality.

John of Damascus, writing in the seventh century, says God's act of creation can be seen as one lavish act of hospitality. God makes room within the life of God so that all these creatures can come into being and become themselves. God wants to teach us how to participate in this kind of hospitable love – the kind of love needed to welcome a refugee, or work a field so it will remain fertile, or care about a migrant worker who does work the rest of us despise.

Message in a Bottle

By Christiana Z. Peppard

How have economic markets shaped global perception of fresh water? Several case studies from recent history are illuminating. Let's consider the birth of a fetishized commodity: bottled water.

Bottled water first emerged in the crystalline waters of the French Alps, born sparkling and still to the proud parents of Perrier and Evian.[1] It steadily grew into a luxury commodity for European elites. In glass and plastic, gallons and liters, bottles of water streamed across the Atlantic, found new niches in big-box grocery stores and corner markets, dazzled diners on the menus of elite restaurants, and quenched the thirst of high-expenditure guests at fine hotels. By the late 1990s, a fetishized commodity had come of age in the industrialized world.

New Enemy: Tap Water

The transatlantic market viability of bottled water unleashed a corporate stampede to conquer the potentially enormous consumer market. Multinational corporations realized that bottled water promised major profits not just as a luxury good, but also as a mainstream commodity. In some cases it is drawn from pristine mountain sources; in other cases, it is taken from municipal faucets, filtered, irradiated, and bottled for resale at extraordinary markup. To this lucrative domain, therefore, "the biggest enemy" to profit – as articulated by a PepsiCo corporate executive in 2000 – "is tap water."[2]

In many ways, bottled water has become a status accessory in a culture of conspicuous consumption.

We took the bait – hook, line, and sinker. In the first decade of the 21st century, bottled water sales constituted a nearly 30 percent share of the global bottled beverage industry. Global sales of bottled water remain in the tens of billions of dollars – upwards of $50 billion and perhaps as much as $100 billion.

Disposable plastic bottles are pumped with spring, artesian, or tap water; hermetically sealed; and shipped all over the world via plane, train, ship, or truck. The industry generates up to 1.5 million pounds of non-biodegradable plastic bottles per year.[3] Most of the consumption of bottled water occurs in the U.S. In some venues, the price of a liter of bottled water exceeds the price of a gallon of gas. Ironically, this ubiquitous elixir is, in most of the U.S., superfluous: Infrastructure and subsidies deliver fresh water to most homes for "pennies a gallon."[4]

Moreover, nearly 17 million barrels of crude oil are used annually to manufacture the plastic bottles that are used once and then discarded (an amount of oil that would "keep one million vehicles on the road for 12 months"[5]). And only 13 percent of those bottles are actually recycled after being discarded. The rest go to landfills, where they leach toxic chemicals into the land.

A Marketing Juggernaut

Of course, in some parts of the world, bottled water is a key aspect of survival – where water is contaminated or extremely scarce, for example. In these places, bottled water is an important means of survival and disease prevention.

But, by and large, the most prodigious consumers of bottled water have clean tap water at their fingertips 24 hours a day and are not in danger of drinking disease-ridden water. That is, those of us in the U.S. and western Europe do not need to drink bottled water in order to avoid cholera. It is a lifestyle choice, not a necessity for survival.

Despite growing concern about environmental effects from plastic bottle waste, bottled water

remains a hot commodity. Many investors and corporations seem to wager that, in the words of Arthur Van Weisenberger, a consultant for the beverage industry, "people don't go backwards ... once they've developed a taste for bottled water, they won't give it up."[6] Vested interests include major multinational corporations and a proliferation of smaller brands too.

Pure and Unsullied

FIJI Water was founded in 1996. Its first exports to the U.S. occurred in 1997, and it has remained a steady market presence. The company's water source is in the Fiji Islands. Plastic bottles travel from China to Fiji, and once filled with artesian water from the island, the product is transported from Fiji to countries including the U.S., Australia, France, and Mexico. The water is described by FIJI as "untouched by man," such that "until you unscrew the cap, FIJI Water never meets the compromised air of the 21st century, nor is it touched by another human being."[7] Clean, unsullied: the paragon of purity.

FIJI Water has proprietary access to an aquifer, such that "no human hands are allowed to touch it." As a matter of fact, FIJI Water is untouched by human hands in two ways: through the mechanization of the bottling process described above, and also because the local community is not entitled to access this water. Surely the water, thus protected from the vagaries of contact with the 21st century, is crystalline. But purity is a slippery concept when it comes to bottled water. For while bottled water is, of course, partly about the water, it's also about the bottles, the shipping, the branding, the profits: all the collateral that trundles along with the cycle of production of this commodity.

Nearly 17 million barrels of oil are used annually to manufacture plastic bottles – enough oil to keep one million vehicles on the road for a year.

Much of the criticism aimed at the bottled water industry is entirely warranted. Potential and actual costs of bottled water are assessed in ways that usually fail to encompass environmental concerns, issues of local rights of access, or the long-term interests of the community, ecosystem, and water sources from which the water is drawn. Profits benefit corporate shareholders far more than community stakeholders.

Granted, as journalist Elizabeth Royte acknowledges, multinational corporations do contribute to the local economy – even if only in the form of a few jobs in the short term. And there is something to be said for job creation. FIJI Water is a major employer on the islands that pays employees "twice the informal minimum wage."[8] But still, corporate responsibility in such situations is almost always entirely voluntary. And when the profit-driven interests of multinational corporations conflict with the interests of a local community or ecosystem, it is rarely the latter that benefit. Instead, it is local communities and watersheds that tend to bear the realized costs of any externalities. This is a problem of accountability, responsibility, and sustainability.

And sales have not plummeted. Instead, in many ways bottled water has actually become something of a status accessory in a culture of conspicuous consumption – desired by many, ubiquitously available in the U.S., with brands competing for celebrity endorsements. In this sense, bottled water is the single greatest marketing achievement in the history of civilization.

What kinds of issues are debated publicly when it comes to bottled water? Waste from plastic bottles, fossil fuel emissions required for transport, or the variable contaminant levels found in bottled water are among those that get attention, especially as

LIKE GHOSTS OF EAGLES
By Robert Francis

The Indians have mostly gone
but not before they named the rivers
the rivers flow on
and the names of the rivers flow with them
Susquehanna Shenandoah

The rivers are now polluted plundered
but not the names of the rivers
cool and inviolate as ever
pure as on the morning of creation
Tennessee Tombigbee

If the rivers themselves should ever perish
I think the names will somehow somewhere hover
like ghosts of eagles
those mighty whisperers
Missouri Mississippi

some municipalities and national parks have started to limit sales of bottled water on their properties. In response to public pressure, bottled water companies have adopted a range of responses. Some have sought to reduce the amount of plastic used in their bottles. FIJI Water has started a community foundation and rendered its production plant carbon-neutral. Others have offset carbon emissions. Still other bottled water companies attempt to couple sales of bottled water with charitable giving. The idea seems to be that, on balance, a consumer's potential discomfort over contributing to environmental degradation can be offset by the vague sense that this purchase is doing some kind of good, somewhere in the world – absolution by consumption, perhaps.

An Ocean of Plastic

But the problems with bottled water cannot be so easily assuaged. All bottled water floats upon an ocean of plastic and fossil fuels, which even a charitable donation cannot ameliorate. Moreover, there are fundamental assumptions built into the availability of fetishized bottled water – and these philosophical and political issues are less well-publicized than the problems of plastic or pollution. Those deeper questions have to do with property, especially the privatization of (and profit from) a resource such as fresh water. For most of us in our busy lives, it is easier to salute incremental progress, or impugn multinational corporations, than it is to engage in a discussion about what kind of thing water is. But this is a key part of the issue: Is

Only 13 percent of those bottles are actually recycled after being discarded. The rest go to landfills, where they leach toxic chemicals into the land.

fresh water properly understood as a natural good, a common-pool resource, an ecosystem service? Is it something amenable to private property regimes and management, or is it something that is best managed by the government? In particular: Who should have access to fresh water, and under what conditions? Who or what should be able to profit from it, and by what means?

What kind of thing is water? There is no simple answer to this seemingly straightforward question. Yet how we answer it will decisively shape the face of the 21st century.

Christiana Z. Peppard '05 M.A.R., '11 Ph.D. is assistant professor of theology at Fordham University. This article is adapted from her book Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis*, newly published by Orbis Books.* Reflections *thanks the author and the publisher for permission to use this excerpt.*

Notes

1 For thorough treatments of bottled water, see Peter Gleick, *Bottled and Sold: The Story Behind Our Obsession with Bottled Water* (Island Press, 2010); Elizabeth Royte, *Bottlemania: How Water Went on Sale and Why We Bought It* (Bloomsbury, 2008); and Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (New Press, 2002), especially chapter 6. See also the award-winning documentary film *Flow*, written and directed by Irena Salina (2008), www.flowthefilm.

2 Annie Leonard, "The Story of Bottled Water," The Story of Stuff Project (2010), www.storyofstuff.org.

3 Leonard.

4 Suzanna Didier, "Water Bottle Pollution Facts," *National Geographic*.

5 Didier.

6 Royte, *Bottlemania*, p. 169.

7 FIJI Water, "The Water," www.fijiwatercom.

8 Royte, *Bottlemania,* p.154.

Water will become an increasingly scarce and contested resource, as groundwater is depleted and climate change amplifies regional patterns of aridity or deluge. How might global, pluralistic humanity sustain the integrity of our rapidly diminishing global fresh water resources? This is the foundational challenge of the 21st century.

Today, access to clean water tends to correspond to geographic position, military might, economic prowess, or hydraulic expertise. Put simply, ***clean water flows toward power***. This means, in general, that people living in poverty and other forms of structurally embedded vulnerability are most affected by fresh water's absence. Women and children disproportionately bear the burdens of this heavy liquid. Young girls often forgo education in order to help meet the basic water requirements of domestic life.

What is to be done, given the scale and pervasiveness of the problem? The facts demonstrate that less than 10 percent of global fresh water is used for domestic purposes, which means that individual water-saving efforts – while part of water conservation – will not solve global fresh water crises. Fresh water is a collective challenge.

This is not to say that individual responsibility is irrelevant. In super-developed countries like the U.S., for example, individuals can and should take shorter showers and turn off the faucet while shaving at the bathroom sink (and so forth). Lawns in arid climates should be replaced with ground cover that is regionally appropriate. Xeriscaping, for example, is a much better use of ground and water in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico than thirsty lawns (the same goes for golf courses). Yet the fact remains that shorter showers and xeriscapes can go only so far.

As such, corporations and governments should immediately cease presenting the issue of water conservation as an individual, domestic responsibility. Individuals should learn about the sources and delivery mechanisms of their water supply as well as what property regimes guide it and what long-term investments are made in the care of water and sanitation infrastructure. Economists and policy makers need to develop robust notions of fresh water as a public good. Governments and corporations need to take those specifications seriously in regulation and business practices. Socially oriented businesses should include fresh water responsibility riders as a limiting condition of their investment portfolios and practices. Agricultural and industrial corporations, which represent many consumptive uses of fresh water, must be held accountable by governments and citizens. Industrial agriculture must be overthrown in the interest of groundwater sustainability and soil health. The "bottom line" for vital public goods like fresh water should never be merely economic.

Everyone – individuals, governments, and the contrived, legal "persons" called corporations – bears responsibility for the preservation and wise use of this unique and essential resource. The challenges are practical, of course, but they are also conceptual. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but there are better and worse ways of proceeding. And there are some baselines. When rivers fail to reach their seas and aquifer levels decline precipitously beyond recharge rates, there is a real problem: Our consumptive water uses are unsustainable.

Here are some of the principles I propose:

- Access to water is a fundamental human right. Other moral concepts are needed too, including the language of nonnegotiable duties to future generations and the continued development of the insight that fresh water is a public good.
- Fresh water is not, first and foremost, a commodity. Economic evaluation must be subordinated to equity in distribution for individuals, future generations, and ecosystems. Similarly, market mechanisms guided by the profit motive are insufficient for distribution of fresh water. Privatization of the water supply may be considered and thoughtfully enacted, but only insofar as equity of access (for current and future generations) is always sought and ensured before corporate profit.
- Dwindling groundwater supplies indicate that the thirst of industrial agriculture must be mitigated. Regionally appropriate crops and practices must be implemented in the interest of soil health, water supply, and sustainable food production. At a bare minimum, irrigation systems must be made maximally efficient (for example, by moving away from center-pivot irrigation to drip irrigation). But there is much more that must be done.
- Government subsidies to industrial agriculture must be revised, for they encourage profligate water extraction, excessive application of toxic chemicals, and the planting of soil-exhausting monocultures.
- The precautionary principle must be the de facto position for hydraulic technologies. Because of the vital significance of groundwater, there must be full disclosure of any toxic compounds involved in technologies that may have negative downstream consequences.

Adapted from Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis *(Orbis, 2014), with permission.*

WATER GONE BAD

By Karen Schneider, M.D.

Looking out over the ocean, I marvel at how many times water has touched me today. Minutes after wakening I was brushing and flushing. The kettle provided a bit of morning comfort, and a faucet enabled me to clean the dishes. The flowers that add color to the porch received a drink. The ocean as a source of recreation cooled the body and refreshed the spirit. When I returned to the house a glass of ice water quenched my thirst. Then a shower washed off the sand and salty ocean water.

Never do I worry if there will be enough water. Never do I worry if it will be safe. This is my reality nine months of the year.

Then there are the other three months.

I am a pediatrician who travels to countries with limited infrastructure to care for rural children who have no access to a physician. It is here – in Guyana, Kenya, Nigeria, Peru – that water sometimes becomes the enemy. Children who just days before were running around and playing are brought to us with debilitating abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, dehydration, and weight loss, their lips cracked, their mouths pasty and their eyes sunken. Some are too weak to hold up their heads.

This diarrhea stems from a bad water source – rain water collected off a roof that animals and birds have stooled on, or an open basin contaminated by a dipping spoon left on the ground and then placed back into the basin, or a stream contaminated upriver with an animal carcass or feces. I could go on and on.

Most times there isn't the luxury of an extra piece of wood to bring water to a boil.

Along with pneumonia, diarrhea is the leading killer of children under five in developing countries, the World Health Organization says. Parents are told repeatedly to boil their water, but the poor have just a few pennies for a piece of wood to cook their meals. Most times there isn't the luxury of an extra piece of wood to bring water to a boil.

One country I frequent is Haiti, treating children and others in a cholera epidemic that has continued since October 2010. Cholera bacteria is spread by contaminated water, causing sudden, profuse diarrhea and dehydration. Although it has fallen out of the news, Haiti's cholera outbreak has led to more than 8,500 deaths, according to the Pan American Health Organization.

Two other water-related calamities worsen Haiti's health ordeal: hurricanes and floods. Within three weeks in late summer 2008, Hurricane Gustav, Tropical Storm Hanna, and Hurricane Ike devastated the country. Hundreds died and tens of thousands were left homeless. In September 2008, with a medical mission trip planned for Haiti, I anxiously watched the weather news. After three days of airport closure in the wake of Hurricane Ike, we were finally placed on one of the first flights to Port-au-Prince. As soon as we arrived, my phone rang. It was the Haitian Red Cross asking my team to help at a disaster site at Cabaret, a small town north of the capital.

Sitting north of Cabaret are deforested mountains, where the topsoil has washed away and the earth is hard and almost impenetrable, forcing heavy rain to rush down instead of being absorbed by rich soil. With these latest storms, the force of the water caused the river to veer off its normal winding course and charge straight through, taking houses and people with it.

The first casualties were children battered by the rushing water, knocked down, dragged, pummeled by stones and debris. They presented with fractures and large abrasions where skin was scraped away. Within 24 hours came a second wave of children, presenting with diarrhea. The river had been their source of water; now it ran muddy and deadly. I asked one mother whose child had severe diarrhea and fever what water she had given her young one. She said she had collected water from the river and "let it settle," spooning off the clearer water on the top. Even if she could find bottled water she had no money to buy it.

It took my "developed nation brain" a full day to realize that safe drinking water was now the urgent issue. People had no faucets to turn on. So instead of handing out the usual worm tablets and children's vitamins, we made sure every child we treated for the next couple of days received a full bottle of safe drinking water. It was like Christmas morning: Each child's eyes were big, with hands outstretched to grab the bottle and frantically try to open their gift.

Until the world's vulnerable people have safe drinking wells and other water sources – and a knowledge of waterborne disease and protection from bad ecological practices – the global traumas of water gone bad will rampage.

Sister Karen Schneider, a Sisters of Mercy, is an emergency medical physician and faculty member at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore.

Ancient Voices Speak to the Ecological Future

By Mary Evelyn Tucker

The plane arrived in one of the world's most polluted cities, Zhengzhou, in western China. My husband, John Grim, and I were here for a conference in Henan, a province of some 93 million people. If Henan were a nation-state it would be the world's 12th largest economy.

China's rapid modernization in a few short decades – on a scale unfathomable to most Americans – has resulted in staggering environmental problems.

The nation's bursting economy stands in sharp contrast to the setting of the conference at Songshan, the central sacred mountain of traditional China. Here the three religions of China – Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism – have given unique expression to their interwoven history. At Songshan there is not only the famous Shaolin Buddhist Temple, so closely associated with the "meritorious actions" (*kung-fu)* of the martial arts, but also the Confucian Songyang Academy and the Zhongyue Daoist temple. The region's majestic mountains are now often hidden in sulfurous acidity rather than the misty clouds of the traditional Song Dynasty landscape painters.

The price to pay for modernization is indeed high in China. The air, water, and soil are polluted. Food is tainted with pesticides. An entire nation is at risk.

Since I first came to China some 30 years ago, the environmental challenges have mushroomed. Henan is in the midst of a severe drought. We saw the burnt-out crops of corn and wheat. The local river, now channeled into concrete basins, has dried up from a lack of runoff from the surrounding mountains. We feel the air thick with smog and particulate matter. At times it is hard to breathe.

It is now obvious that the price to pay for modernization is indeed high in China. The air, water, and soil are polluted. Food is tainted with pesticides. Water for drinking or irrigation is diminishing. Infant formula has been contaminated and children have died. Families are trying to buy safe formula from abroad. The health of the Chinese people is being severely compromised. Everything about contemporary China invites rethinking "economic progress" and reimagining appropriate limits to growth.

What happens when more than a billion people seek the fruits of modernity – electricity, cars, refrigerators, television, cell phones? Sustainability and equity, along with food and water, are challenged on a vast, indeed planetary scale. China's resource demands are depleting forests and fisheries, along with oil and coal, around the world. China is drawing on sources across North America, including the tar sands in Canada. Even more will be extracted there if the proposed Keystone pipeline is built through the U.S.

Ecological Civilization

The environmental and social problems seem intractable. How can the life-support systems, which give us food and water, be preserved? Where can we find traction for sustainability?

Clearly we need science, policy, law, and economics to solve these issues. But spiritual and ethical perspectives of the world's religions must also be brought to bear. And so it is, against great odds, that some Chinese are trying to reconfigure their assumptions of endless growth and extraction and find a path toward a sustainable future. This is why we have flown 8,000 miles in 24 hours from New York to Hong Kong and on to the heartland of the ancient Yellow River valley civilization of China.

Why here? Why now? The pressing answer is that pervasive pollution across China is putting the entire nation at risk. In the last decade some Chinese have begun to reflect on the need to create not just a technologically sophisticated society but an "ecological civilization." A revival of China's religious traditions is underway – Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, all of which have significance for environmental awareness.

These traditions were nearly obliterated in the Cultural Revolution under Mao from 1966-76. He sought to destroy the past and create a new socialist future for China, with devastating impact on both society and the environment. Four decades later, politicians, academics, journalists, and ordinary people are exploring how Confucian moral philosophy and ethical concerns can be resuscitated to strengthen a sustainable future.

Confucian Revival

In November 2012, the government added the goal of "establishing ecological civilization" to the Chinese Constitution. The Governor of Henan and his ministers attended the Songshan Forum, where his finance minister called for an innovative "circular economy" that leaves no waste through the processes of production, consumption, and recycling.

Academics are exploring Confucianism and have translated books about religion by western scholars into Chinese. This includes the three volumes on Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism from the Harvard conference series on world religions and ecology we organized from 1996-98. A book on Confucius by media professor Yu Dan has sold over 10 million copies.

The 2014 Songshan Forum in Henan underscored the urgency of China's environmental challenges and the untapped potential of its Confucian heritage. The conference included a morning at the 1,000-year-old Confucian Academy. It was a beautiful day with uncharacteristically clear skies, a brisk wind, and the rhythmic chorus of cicadas. Seven Confucian scholars – five Chinese, two American, including myself – addressed more than 150 people on aspects of Confucianism for social inclusivity and ecological sustainability. I emphasized Confucianism's comprehensive cosmological worldview, its high regard for the value of nature, its relational view of humans as partners with nature.

This has been a long journey for me into the study of Confucianism and Confucian-influenced societies such as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Singapore. It began in 1973-74 when I went to Japan to teach at a women's university, and it continued in graduate school at Columbia University. I was fascinated by how these Confucian-based countries organized their societies in a communitarian manner and managed their environments with government oversight. Though ideals were not always realized historically, studying the religious traditions of Asia has broadened my understanding of the variety of environmental ethics in cultures around the world.

It has been sobering to watch China over the last four decades struggle to feed large numbers of people and have fresh water for drinking, irrigation, and hydroelectric power. Veering now toward unsustainability and facing 100,000 environmental protests a year, the Chinese government and some of its people are trying to steer a different course.

The Great Triad

Thus in the midst of immense challenges, Confucian ecological philosophy and environmental ethics are emerging. A revival of Confucian values is growing. The future of our planet may well depend on the pace of that growth – not in material wealth, but in moral values that return us all to the essential Confucian virtue of humaneness.

This virtue implies that people belong to a larger whole, the great triad of "Heaven, Earth, and Humans": Humans are part of the processes of the cosmos and of nature and are responsible for completing the triad. They can do this by creating the foundations for humane government, harmonious societies, flourishing agriculture, and moral education.

No wonder there is a growing interest in a new Confucianism for contemporary China. No doubt there is something we in the West can learn from this rediscovery as well.

Mary Evelyn Tucker is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale, where she teaches in the joint master's degree program between the Divinity School and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. She directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with her husband, John Grim. Their writings include a new book, Ecology and Religion *(Island Press, 2014). In 2011 they released a multi-media project called* Journey of the Universe *with evolutionary philosopher Brian Swimme, drawing on the work of historian of religions Thomas Berry.* Journey of the Universe *includes a book from Yale University Press, an Emmy-award winning film available on Netflix, and a series of 20 interviews with scientists, historians, and environmentalists. A conference called "Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe" will be held at YDS Nov. 7-9. See info at www.journeyoftheuniverse.org.*

God and Nature, Then and Now

By Joel Baden

There is no explicit concept of "care for the environment" in the Hebrew Bible. The ancient Israelites who wrote these texts were, quite frankly, in no position to do any substantial damage to their environment in the first place. The heaviest equipment they could muster was the plow. They made their houses of mud brick or stone, with only the grandest dwellings, like the royal palace, requiring lumber. No trees were harmed in the making of this book.

Rather, the ancient Israelites were keenly aware that they were at nature's mercy. Because of where they settled, in the highlands of Judah and Israel, they were forced to develop technologies that would allow them to preserve every last bit of rain that fell: rock-cut cisterns to capture and store the water, and terracing along the hillsides to prevent the rain from washing the soil and crops down the slopes.

Who's in Control?

As technology has progressed over the millennia, and with it our capacity to do more and more damage to the environment, that sense of being at nature's mercy has largely evaporated. When we search the Hebrew Bible for verses that speak to our relationship with nature, all too often Gen 1:28 is invoked: "Fill the earth and subdue it." Some read this as a mandate for taking advantage of the earth's natural resources; some as an admonition to care for the earth, as a loving king cares for his people.

Both readings, while quite opposite in intention, agree that it is humanity that controls the earth. For the ancient Israelites, it was exactly the reverse.

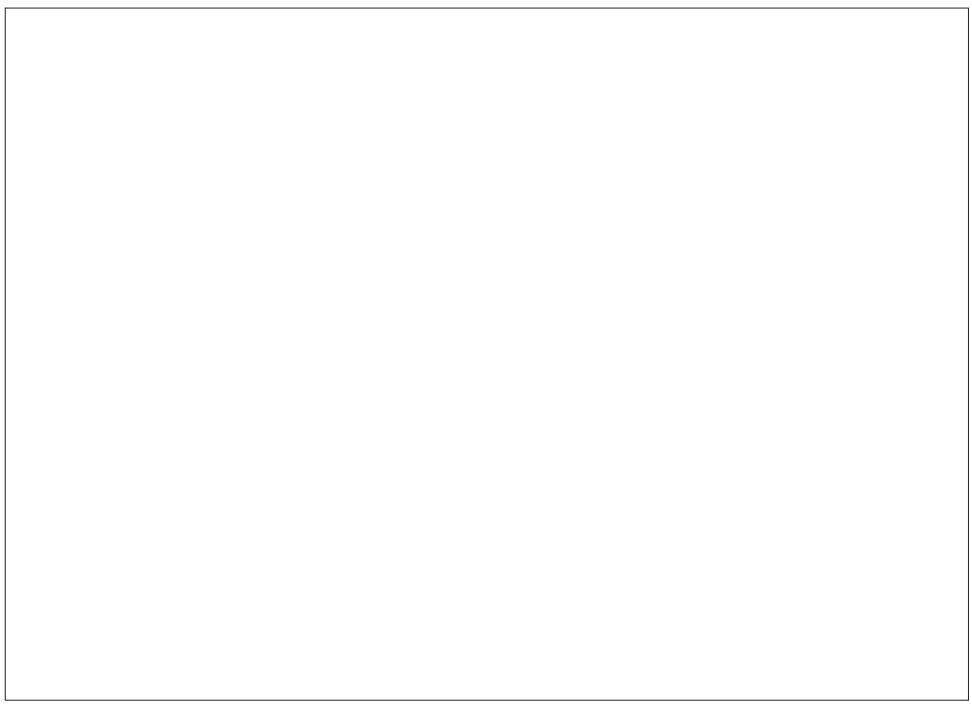
What we lose by claiming authority over nature – aside from the obvious sense of humility before creation – is the fear that nature could simply turn on us. For most of human history – and certainly in the Hebrew Bible – nature was a manifestation of divine power. It is God who brings the rains or withholds them, or who, once upon a time, brought them far too heavily.

And with the identification of God and the forces of nature, some semblance of human control – or, better, responsibility – is, perhaps unexpectedly, asserted. Though we may not be able to command the rains to fall, or the land to be fruitful, we are charged with creating the conditions that will permit nature to work for our benefit. For the biblical authors, this meant obedience to the divine law. Thus the blessings of nature were a reward for obedience: "If you obey the commandments that I command you this day, to be faithful to the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and all your being, I will grant the rain for your land in its season" (Deut 11:13–14; see also Lev 26:4).

We seem to be edging ever closer to that turning point when the land will have had enough and spew us out until it can heal itself in our absence.

"Dry Earth Shall Fall"

Disobedience, in turn, brought climatological punishment: "The Lord will make the rain of your land dust, and dry earth shall fall upon you from the sky until you are destroyed" (Deut 28:24); "I will make your skies like iron and your earth like copper" (Lev 26:20). At the end of this path was the ultimate horror for the ancient Israelite: the land becoming so polluted that it would no longer tolerate human life (Lev 20:22).



What the biblical authors realized, and what they built into their theological system, was that although these blessings and punishments were collective, it was the responsibility of the individual to safeguard against them. There was no relying on any governmental agency to make things better, nor was there such an organization to blame. Each one of them – and, by extension, each one of us – was obligated to prevent these disasters from transpiring. Individuals were expected to act on behalf of the community.

What was once explained theologically is now understood scientifically and practically. The notions of sin, impurity, and disobedience that were employed by the biblical authors to create a sense of human responsibility for the climate and agricultural success are no longer needed for such a purpose, though they are with us still in many other respects. We know that mishandling an incense offering does not prevent the rains from falling, and we hope that our deity would not use the blunt instrument of drought or famine, flood or mudslide, to punish the innocent along with the guilty.

Owning Up to Misconduct

Rather, we today claim direct human control over the environment, of a kind that the biblical authors could never have imagined – and with that control, responsibility beyond that depicted in the Bible. Surely, however, we must admit how painfully we remain at nature's mercy: drought and famine, flood and mudslide, and more, and increasingly so, it seems, year upon year.

The ancient Israelites would see this all as a sign of their own misconduct, their failure to obey God's will. But they had no other explanation. God's will is perhaps less known to us now than it was to the biblical authors. That the skies are turning to iron and the earth to copper, however, remains very much a sign of our own misconduct.

We should remember the feelings of powerlessness and humility that constituted the daily existence of the ancient Israelites.

The more control we appear to have over the environment, the more distant we become from that fundamental fear that ultimately drove the theology of the biblical authors. But we see the world changing for the worse around us, and we seem to be edging ever closer to that turning point when the land will have had enough and spew us out until it can heal itself in our absence.

Surely now, even – or especially – with all the great technological power available to us, we should not triumphantly point to the biblical verse that reaffirms our dominance over the earth. We should instead remember the feelings of powerlessness and humility that constituted the daily existence of the ancient Israelites. And, too, the belief that we bear responsibility, individually and collectively, both for the state of the world and for its future.

Joel Baden, professor of Hebrew Bible at YDS, is a specialist in the Pentateuch, biblical Hebrew, and disability theory in biblical studies. His books include The Historical David: The Real Life of an Invented Hero *(HarperOne, 2013),* The Promise to the Patriarchs *(Oxford University Press, 2013), and* The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis *(Yale University Press, 2012).*

CONGREGATIONS AND THE GOOD EARTH

Eating is a moral act, says Catholic Rural Life (CRL), a nearly century-old organization that serves rural churches.

What can congregations do? CRL suggests ideas on its website, including:

- **Get to know family farmers who are good stewards of the land and practice good animal husbandry.**
- **Buy locally grown food for church-sponsored events.**
- **Distribute flyers in the congregational bulletin or in mailings with information about area farmers.**
- **Establish a farmers' market in the church parking lot.**
- **Set up a field trip to a farm, either for a seasonal event or through vacation Bible school.**
- **Sponsor a food fair to support local food growers.**
- **Look for Fair Trade foods or join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).**
- **Encourage youth group fundraisers to purchase CSAs or locally grown food for neighbors in need.**

To locate a nearby CSA, see www.localharvest.org.

The Catholic Rural Life website, ncrlc.com, links to other action resources: Bread for the World, Presbyterian Hunger Program, ELCA World Hunger, United Methodist Committee on Relief, Society of St. Andrew, Oxfam America, Feeding America (Second Harvest), Heifer Project International, and others.

Source: Catholic Rural Life

Worrying About the Food Movement

By Willis Jenkins

There is no more iconic image for the food movement than the farmers' market. The image of neighbors meeting across crates of field-fresh produce is a rebuke of nearly every opaquely profitable link in the vast mercantile chain that distances farmer from eater – fields sown with biotech "solutions," government subsidies to "big ag," ruthlessly efficient industrial processors, food products intricately keyed to the neurology of craving and irrationalities of consumer choice.

To the citizen who is uneasy about the conventional food economy, a farmers' market appears to offer relief.

Yet I worry that a fondness for farmers' markets may distract otherwise conscientious consumers from more difficult reckonings with the relation of food and markets. Has the food movement allowed us to think that we can eat our way to justice? That perhaps the best thing we can do about the malnourishment of people and land is enjoy some local heirloom tomatoes?

I ask that question of my own affection for farmers' markets, and for local heirloom tomatoes in particular. I've read enough about the connections between conventional tomatoes and human trafficking of farmworkers to avoid them in the supermarket. When I can't grow enough for myself, I look

Has the food movement allowed us to think that we can eat our way to justice?

forward to buying them at the weekly market in my neighborhood. And, indeed, I regard that experience as more than niche provisioning. I think about it as participating in an alternative food economy that does a better job at nourishing citizens, supporting farmers, and caring for land. But I wonder if that is too easy.

In the U.S., farmers' markets have made a remarkable resurgence over the past two decades. One mark of their success lies in the way conventional supermarkets have begun to mimic their images. Global food marketers now seek the appearance of authenticity by emphasizing the provenance of their ingredients and labeling items as "craft" and "artisan."

Icon of Social Criticism

The attraction runs deeper than a shift in culinary aesthetic. The farmers' market also serves as icon for many currents of social criticism. In response to American malnourishment and child hunger, for example, some reform projects seek more access to field-fresh produce. New initiatives are establishing farmers' markets and community gardens in food deserts and working to get local produce into subsidized meals and food banks.

The farmers' market as icon of social criticism carries over into academic books on social justice and sustainability, where an appeal to its alternative economy illustrates some possibility of challenging global capitalism (including in my own recent book).

One reason for this interest is that farmers' markets seem one of the few places that citizens can exercise meaningful influence over economic relations otherwise determined by globalizing structures of capitalism. When citizens organize exchanges that honor reciprocity or celebrate landscapes, they have a chance to reorder a part of the economy to serve common goods. A farmers' market may then perform a broader political hope: making markets work to feed people in ways that nourish earth and society.

However, there is a danger to letting enactment of an alternative economy substitute for broader reforms of market capitalism. Frustration with the absurdity of the conventional food economy may discourage hope that any reform is possible.

Observe how the "feed the world" slogan of industrial agriculture justifies faster global flows of food commodities and more intensive technologies, even while U.S. grain producers are happy to let 40 percent of the American corn crop feed our cars. Cynical capitalism that offers world hunger as rationale for agricultural production that feeds the cars of the affluent certainly dispirits reform efforts.

Affluent people generally pay less for healthier food and safer water, while poorer people must pay more for worse food and riskier water.

The Loudest Signals

Nonetheless, there are important *ethical* lessons that the food movement could learn from the way the conventional food economy moves. One lesson lies in the implication of missing demand. Grain will continue to fill empty gas tanks before empty bellies as long as the demand of drivers is better organized than that of hungry people. The reason that vineyards cover the earth when there are malnourished children on every continent is that those children can't send a stronger demand signal.

The reason for perverse demand signals is simple and political: We permit stark inequalities to exist and allow them to have dire consequences. So a first lesson for the food movement is this: Complaints about agricultural priorities amid malnourishment must address the economic inequality shaping those priorities.

For example, responding to American food deserts should not stop with efforts to bring community gardens and farmers' markets into those areas. The primary reason food deserts exist is that the people living there are poor. Food and water flee poverty and run to wealth. That is simply how markets respond to demand, and it makes for a systemic trap: Affluent people generally pay less for healthier food and safer water, while poorer people must pay more for worse food and riskier water.

The consequences often increase inequality: Hungry children cannot pay attention in school, parents of children with waterborne diseases cannot go to work, and so on.

A second ethical lesson comes from the supply side, and lies in tension with the first. Because environmental governance remains underdeveloped, many of the ecological costs involved in producing food are not reflected in its price. Most food is too cheap, in that sense, because its price does not reflect the real costs of producing it.

For example, the price of beef would be much higher if it included the cost of its impacts on nitrogen and carbon cycles. (Most visibly, the "dead zones" in the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico remain an unmeasured, unaccounted cost of livestock production.) The remedy requires a political commitment to make prices reflect ecological costs.

Foodie Hipsterism

A neighborhood patch of homegrown tomatoes and a farmers' market might even make things worse, insofar as such projects imply that the major problems with our food economy are matters of individual choice. They might make it seem that empowered people should decide to grow food more conscientiously and make it more available while poor people must learn to make better food choices. But that just moralizes a dysfunctional institutional market, substituting hip foodie consumerism for serious politics.

At their best, however, attempts to strengthen alternative economies can be a start toward a politics that confronts poverty head-on. The food sovereignty movement is a good example of how local food reforms can energize broader demands for the end of systemic impoverishment.

What goes on in countless church basements is another: making food pantries and soup kitchens sites of culinary embrace and humanizing beauty. These projects may never transform daily democratic politics, but they surely can rise out of the Saturday basement and into prophetic sermons and collective witness.

The icon of the farmers' market gathers real and lasting power only if it pushes attention beyond itself. It must stir a prophetic restlessness to bend market relationships toward friendship and convivial economy. It must inspire citizens to look beyond consumer choice toward an ecologically sane and pro-poor politics.

Food is a defining issue of our time. The future of food is the future of soil, the future of economy, and it will go a long way toward determining the human relationship with earth. The food movement faces a big question: Will it be the site where inequality is addressed, or where it is merely reproduced?

Willis Jenkins is associate professor of religion, ethics, and environment at the University of Virginia. He is the author of The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity *(Georgetown, 2013).*

Eating Food and Justice

By Christopher Carter

For two years I served as the senior pastor of First United Methodist Church of Compton, CA. The commute from my apartment in Claremont, a beautifully landscaped college town 30 miles east of LA, to Compton, a low-income predominantly African-American and Latino community, provided the stereotypical contrasts between a suburban and an inner-city environment. The most profound contrast was not always visible or discussed – the food options available to local residents.

Claremont has one large and two medium-sized supermarkets for a population of 35,500. Compton, with nearly 98,000 people, has only two markets, both located on the far edges of the city. Compton instead is saturated with fast-food chains. McDonald's, Domino's, Subway, and three other fast-food restaurants are all located within a block or so of my church, which is located next to an elementary school.

In their book *Food Justice*, Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi define food justice as "ensuring that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly."[1] For my community in Compton, and other predominantly black and brown communities in the U.S., I believe food justice is a life-or-death social justice issue. We suffer from higher rates of food insecurity, obesity, and diet-related preventable diseases than Euro-Americans.

Neighborhood Scarcity

To be sure, environmental racism plays a decisive role in creating the food gap that exists in poor, predominantly black and brown communities. Environmental racism has far-reaching consequences: It is felt not only by the *placement* of incinerators and landfills within communities of color but also encourages the *displacement* of vital goods and services within those communities.

Thus supermarkets in low-income areas have been replaced with fast-food restaurants. Families who rely on public transportation are left without equal access to what many Americans consider a basic human right – healthy food.

Questions confronts us as religious leaders. What role should we play? How should our communities participate in this justice movement? How might we eat both food and justice? For those of us who are committed to a liberationist interpretation of the Gospel – a vocational calling to dismantle systems of oppression – we believe our communities should be centrally involved in any food justice movement.

Progress for justice will be made only if religious communities develop something unfamiliar to many of them: a theology of eating.

Three Virtues

I have spent the past four years researching and discerning, both in the classroom and in church life, how Christian communities can incorporate food justice into their ethical practice. How can we subvert the embedded racism in our food system? There are no easy answers to complex problems, but progress will be made only if religious communities develop something unfamiliar to many of them: a theology of eating.

Thinking theologically about our food and where it comes from is the first step in addressing structural inequalities of our food system. Whenever and wherever we eat, we should take the time to ask ourselves if the food on our plates enables or inhibits the collective flourishing of Creation. To confront food system injustice, Christians seeking a theology of eating should embody three virtues: *embracing our soul*, *justice for food workers*, and *care of the earth*.

The second and third virtues – justice for food workers and care of the earth – can only be embodied if religious communities initially seek the first virtue of *embracing our soul*. The word "soul" has deep resonance within Christianity and especially within the African-American religious tradition. Embracing our soul requires us to reflect upon our past and build upon ancestral wisdom in order to forge a new future.

Facing the Past

The way religious communities embody this virtue will necessarily vary. In any case, it takes courage and self-scrutiny. For Euro-American Christians, reflecting on the past requires identifying the historical injustices that still languish within the American food system. Surveying the history of food production in the U.S., they'll learn that African Americans specifically, and black and brown folk in general, have been denied access to land, agricultural technology, government subsidies and insurance, and labor protection in the form of agricultural unions.

I have found that when dealing with issues of race, people of privilege often make the mistake of envisioning "who we want to be" without sufficiently examining "who we currently are and how we got here." I believe Euro-American Christians will make long-term changes to their food politics and help subvert structural racism when they accept that their privilege perpetuates an inhumane and unjust system.

To confront food system injustice, a theology of eating should embody three virtues: embracing our soul, justice for food workers, and care of the earth.

Confronting the past makes plain that the future of food must be radically different. As a person of privilege one has the power and arguably the obligation to influence real change in our food system.

For African-American Christians, embracing our soul requires that we challenge habits of black food culture that are destructive to our goal of liberation. The collective spiritual wisdom of the black church tradition compels us to take a theology of liberation seriously in all areas of our life – in this case, how we eat. We have to allow our notion of black soul – and soul food – to evolve. A more diverse understanding of soul food, one that embraces vegetarian, vegan, organic, and healthier ways of eating, benefits our community, helping us move beyond fixed social and cultural identities. In this way soul food becomes a tool of liberation in our fight against oppressive food systems.

Dynamics of Soul

Indeed, for the sake of our own survival, black culture has never had a static definition of soul, and we need not hang on to static notions of soul food today. By embracing the legacy of African-American soul, the black church leaves room for our definition of soul food to deepen. Soul food, in its truest sense, is food prepared by African Americans who utilize their collective wisdom.

Developing a theology of eating that incorporates these three virtues, people of faith will spark a food justice movement within the church. When we think theologically about our food, I believe we make better food choices that mirror our theological convictions.

If we really believe that God desires all creation to flourish and our Christian vocation is to dismantle the systems of oppression that limit flourishing, then perhaps we should all take a look at our plates to determine if we are indeed feasting on oppression.

Christopher Carter is a United Methodist pastor and a Ph.D. student at Claremont School of Theology, focusing on theological ethics, Africana studies, and eco-theology and ethics. His dissertation focuses on "Eating Oppression: Faith, Food, and Liberation."

Notes

1 Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice: Food, Health, and the Environment* (MIT Press, 2010), p. 6.

Rousing Us From Inattention

By Christopher Fici

Food is life. Food is death. Food is something we share. Food is something we hoard. Food belongs to all. Food belongs only to some. Food unites us. Food divides us. Food is a necessity. Food is a luxury. Food is a source of injustice. Food is the vehicle of justice.

Food is a right.

In my previous work as a Hindu monk, I taught the art, ethics, and spirituality of vegetarian cooking to students at Columbia University and New York University.

Currently as a Hindu student at New York's Union Theological Seminary, I endeavor to make compelling, compassionate, and clear connections between the realms of food justice and theology.

As a community organizer for the Corbin Hill Food Project in Harlem and the Bronx, I help bring naturally grown produce to communities where access to such food has been made too difficult, too costly, and too caught up in the prejudices that propel our misunderstandings around race and class.

All too often, we who are socially and economically privileged *eat without looking up.*

Each of these hats I wear is distinctive, yet they all come from the same fabric. Food is a spiritual substance as much as a material one. The way we grow, share, and eat food together must be based on the eternal principles of justice and equity. In the 21st century we have lost sight of this.

Rare Generosity

All too often, we who are socially and economically privileged *eat without looking up*. Eco-theologian Sallie McFague, in *Blessed Are The Consumers: Climate Change and The Practice of Restraint*, notes how important the practice of paying attention is to French activist/mystic Simone Weil. Paying attention is how "God's love is manifested in our love for others," McFague writes. She quotes Weil: "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. It is given to very few minds to notice that things and beings exist. ...The root of all evil is daydreaming."

By daydreaming, McFague says, "We do not 'look' at something or someone; we 'eat' it: we are like 'cannibals' consuming the world for our own benefit."[1]

The power of paying attention applies to how we ourselves eat – how we grow and distribute food, how our eating habits either honor or dishonor our relations with our Mother Earth, and how we may deny the right to eat healthy food to others. Food justice is at the heart of our existential ecological crisis.

How we confront this injustice will determine the kind of people we are. The more mindful we become about the ethical compromises of our global food system – and the less we daydream – the more we will contribute to the work of justice and the more we will realize the sacred nature of food.

Vision of the Sage

In the Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna tells his dear friend, the deeply conflicted warrior Arjuna, what constitutes a truly spiritual and equitable vision of paying attention.

The humble sages, by virtue of true knowledge, see with equal vision a learned and gentle br¯ahman.a, a cow, an elephant, a dog and one who has been outcast (Chapter 5, Verse 18).

More than any other, this teaching of Krishna's guides my work as an activist. If we see with the vision of the sage, if we see with equal vision, and if we act with that vision in our life and work, then we can understand the spiritual substance that is foundational to all living beings. Then we begin the journey toward acting without prejudice. We move toward the just life, removing conditions that force living beings to be outcast. We make the material substances of our lives, like food, into something sacred.

Corbin Hill Food Project is not an explicitly spiritual or sacred project. But every time we supply naturally grown vegetables and fruits from our network of organic farms in upstate New York to our 21 Farm Share sites across Harlem and the Bronx, we are doing much more than trading commodities for cash. We are combating a dominant economic model that has denied less-affluent communities their God-given human right to access to healthy food.

I was tremendously naïve about what it means to be in an insecure and unjust food situation, until I began my work with Corbin Hill.

Food Deserts and Mirages

Remedying this problem comes with its own hazards. In trying to improve conditions in the "food desert," we may create, as Vann R. Newkirk II has so eloquently and bluntly stated, "food mirages," where the sudden appearance of seemingly easy access to natural and organic foods precedes the onslaught of gentrification.[2]

We nevertheless have no such ulterior motive. We simply strive to do what our motto says: "supplying fresh food to the places that need it the most." And it is rewarding in a distinctly sacred fashion that I've rarely found outside of my work when I was a monk.

I recently spent time with an older African-American woman who lives in Harlem and happened upon one of our Farm Share sites. She was not only intrigued but deeply moved to see what we were doing. Living in a household with eight family members, a household she had lived in for over 40 years, she described the daily struggle to feed her family in a way that would embolden their bodies and spirits.

Meeting her put a human face on the abstractions of food justice/injustice. In my entire life I have never been anywhere close to food insecurity. As much as I may think about it, write about it, or pray around it, I was tremendously naïve about what it means to be in an insecure and unjust food situation, until I began my work with Corbin Hill.

She gratefully signed up for a weekly share, and we assisted her with our "Money Match" program, which adjusts the price of the share to the income level of the household.

Maybe our work isn't that remarkable in the grand scheme. We aren't putting Monsanto out of business or striking at the heart of the massive ecological pollution of the global industrial food system. We are working as simply and directly as we can. In that simplicity, we are giving back to people who have been outcast because of prejudice and injustice.

At Corbin Hill, our vision is one of paying attention to the deeply rooted fact that food is a right. We are paying attention to the circumstances that prevent so many, too many, from exercising their right to good, honest food, and we are doing our humble best to change that. If that isn't sacred or spiritual, I don't know what is.

Christopher Fici is a Hindu eco-theologian graduating next year with a Master in Sacred Theology from Union Theological Seminary. He helps run the Edible Churchyard, a eco-theological urban agriculture and food justice program at Union. He is also a community organizer for Corbin Hill Food Project in Harlem.

Notes

1 Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are The Consumers: Climate Change and The Practice of Restraint* (Fortress Press, 2013), p. 55.

2 See http://gawker.com/irrigating-the-food-desert-a-tale-of-gentrification-1617679708.

By John O'Sullivan

In 2008, a critical shift came to pass: For the first time in human history, most of the world's population was living in urban settings. This city migration has placed profound stresses on the globe's two essential components, its food systems and its access to clean, fresh water.

Climate volatility only intensifies a sense of crisis, heightening risks for food production, water delivery, and storage.

Habitually, the big-picture problem gets boiled down to increased production and corporate solutions: Who will feed the 10 billion? Yet the real problem today is not sufficient quantity of food.* The problem is access to – a fair distribution of – healthy food and water.

There's a rush to give over our food choices to short-term corporate returns and long shelf life of processed foods. Discounted are people on the local scene who are engaged in food system decisions every day. There's no long-term solution without them.

We could start a shouting match right now about the future – about greenhouse gases, weather extremes, glacial melt, GMOs, water insecurity. It's a long list made worse by our hard partisan lines and sound-bite solutions.

Let's start elsewhere: How will we feed ourselves, using the particular resource mixes – soil, labor, infrastructure, local traditions – where we live?

What I have learned after 30 years in agriculture is: Agricultural production is very much site-specific and heavily dependent on farmer decisions. In spite of the impression left by modern marketing, all food is produced somewhere local.

When I began in the North Carolina farm business in the 1980s, we faced much convulsive change. For starters, the tobacco support system was being eliminated. It had provided the economic base for almost 75 percent of our farms. In response, agriculture teaching faculties across the state partnered with officials to create the Center for Environmental Farming Systems in 1994. This 2,000-acre research facility aimed to enhance local agriculture by researching new production methods – soil systems, organics, alternative swine and beef production, grass-based dairy, alternative enterprises for small family farms. (See www.cefs.ncsu.edu.)

Our work forced us to confront hard realities. Local markets urgently needed investment. For decades, food distribution had gone mega-size and global. So we focused on rebuilding local-scale processing and distribution.

Sustainability thinking didn't stop there. Health leaders were sounding new alarms about obesity and diabetes. Was the food that our system was producing actually good for us? What if we can feed everybody yet the ironic result is a health burden, not a dividend?

We faced other questions. What if we produced healthy food but only a few could afford it? What if community access to affordable good food was curtailed in some neighborhoods for reasons that can only be described as structural racism? Grocery store chains and others pull out of poor neighborhoods, leaving food deserts. Sustainable agriculture must include resistance to persistent racism that reinforces poverty. Sustainability without access makes a mockery of the values we're defending.

There was a competing challenge. If food is too cheap, farmers cannot make a living. This question of a "value chain" – a fair return for all – extends to the farmworker who harvests the food and the restaurant worker who prepares it.

My adventures in sustainable farming led to many unanticipated, interlocking problems, grassroots solutions, and interdisciplinary partnerships. We're learning from the experience of those displaced North Carolina farmers. They teach us to engage truly the whole person in the whole system.

Our cultural and commercial tendency is to look for the "right" answer, the "power" solution – but the big picture is always chaotic, incomplete. We are not going to find all the answers quickly.

We need instead a wisdom solution. Local people represent a thousand points of light in the global quest for food sustainability and justice.

So take a centering breath and discern your own ethical base. Even from its far edge, find an entry point into food systems – gardening, justice work, acquaintance with farmers at local markets. Learn. Share stories. Experience. Clarify your own vision of a meaningful life without recrimination. We all share in the remaking of food systems that make up this beautiful planet.

John O'Sullivan was a co-director of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems from 2009-14. He recently retired after a long career in cooperative extension and as a university professor of sustainable agriculture and local food systems.

---

* See, for example, Eric Holt Gimenez, "We Already Grow Enough Food For 10 Billion People -- and Still Can't End Hunger," *Huffington Post*, May 2, 2012. "Hunger is caused by poverty and inequality, not scarcity," he writes. "In reality, the bulk of industrially produced grain crops goes to biofuels and confined animal feedlots rather than food for the one billion hungry. The call to double food production by 2050 only applies if we continue to prioritize the growing population of livestock and automobiles over hungry people."

Back to the Garden: A New Asceticism

By Fred Bahnson

Gardens will not save us. They will not fix our broken food system, redraw the lines of social disparity, or halt climate change. Why, then, do we put so much trust in them?

Around the country a growing food-and-faith movement is planting gardens to feed the hungry, increase public consciousness around healthy food, empower low-income families, provide people with meaningful work, and turn that wasted space known as lawns into food production centers. In North Carolina where I live, one county alone boasts over 100 church-supported community gardens. That's just one county, in one state. Gardens now are everywhere.

Distraction in the Dirt

Yet I fear that planting gardens as a way to fix our social ills falls short. As a garden advocate, I've realized how often I've slipped into a kind of magical thinking: *If only everyone planted a garden, all our problems would be solved.* But I worry that this recent beehive of garden activity among churches has become a cultural anodyne, a distraction from the one issue we dare not face.

Just now my view overlooks a lovely half-acre hillside in western North Carolina where my wife and I cultivate our own fruits and vegetables. For the past 10 years I've been a public advocate of communal food gardens. In 2005 I co-founded one, and in the years since I've spoken at scores of churches, universities, and sustainability conferences around the country about the benefits – nutritional, psychological, spiritual – of growing food in community. I've traveled the western hemisphere visiting model organic gardens like the polycultural Mayan *milpas* of Quintana Roo or the 22-acre Vivero Alamar, an urban garden in Havana. I've written two books and numerous essays on the spirituality of gardens, and at the divinity school where I now teach, my classes often meet in one.

But 10 years later, I've realized that what ails us on a planetary scale is too big to be overcome with a little more dirt under our fingernails, a little more arugula and broccoli in our food pantries, or a bit more justice in the food system. My thinking has too often stopped at the garden gate.

113-Inch Rainfall

Perhaps it's simply the scale of the problem that makes it difficult to apprehend. Who can really grasp, after all, that the very "dome in the midst of the waters," as Genesis describes our atmosphere, is changing?

I'm not sure if I can point to a moment when I woke up to climate change, when my fear had moved from a vague worry over the world my grandchildren would inherit to the throat-constricting fear of the present that wakes me in the night. Maybe it was the unprecedented 113 inches of rainfall our county received last year and the realization that even our little garden cocoon was not exempt.

Perhaps at this point in Christian history the garden is the new monastic cell. In the garden we can unlearn those slothful, consumptive habits of industrial living.

But reading the third National Climate Assessment, which came out in May, has at least brought immediacy to what had seemed distant and abstract. What that report confirms is that nearly all of scientists' earlier predictions about the pace of climate change have been confirmed. "The only real surprises have been that some changes, such as sea