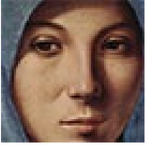

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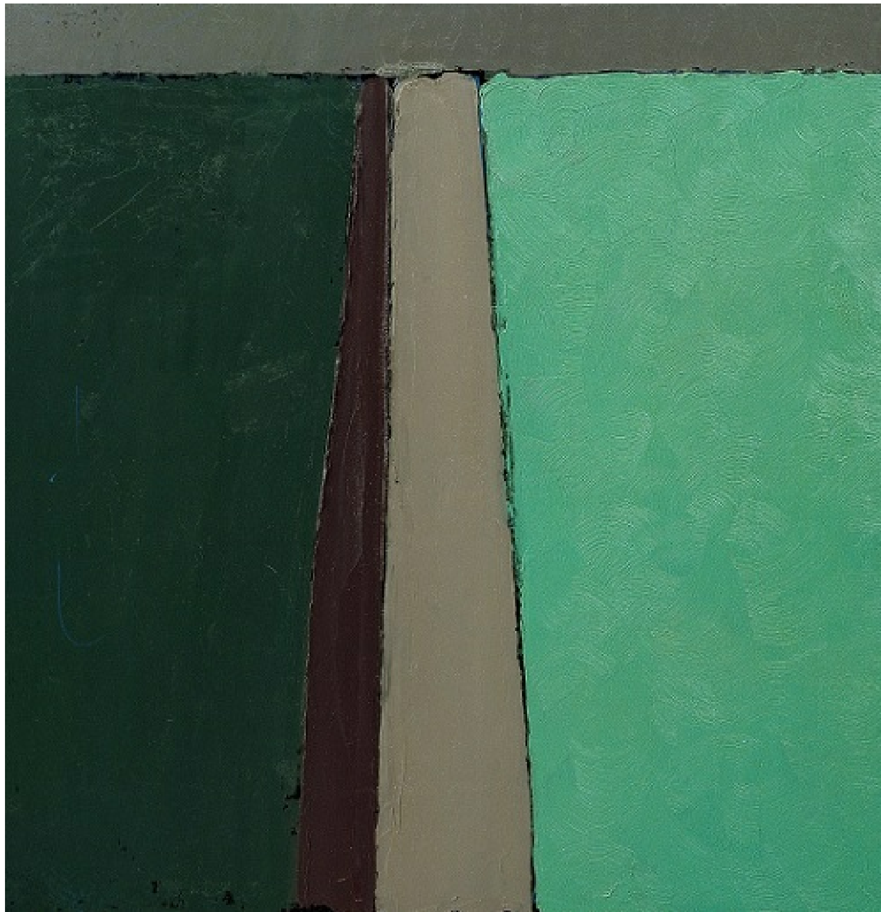
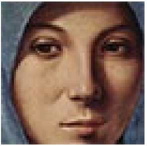
ISSUES IN FAMILY, CULTURE & SCIENCE

2016 - ISSUE TWO

Tilling and Keeping





Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

2016 - ISSUE TWO—TILLING AND KEEPING

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Tilling and Keeping

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

> The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.
> Genesis 2: 8–9; 15 (RSV)

In our second issue on ecology we take up the first work of man in the garden: "tilling and keeping." Here we consider two questions which that work raises: about the relationship between the "garden" and the "gardener," and about who—or what—is at the center of it all. The last question usually gets caught up in the either-or of the two bad alternatives discussed in our first ecology issue. But Virginia farmer Joel Salatin—whose Polyface Farm became a sort of mecca after his meteoric rise to fame with the appearance of The Omnivore's Dilemma—offers a way forward. This would take us beyond the choice between, on the one hand, the unchecked human "dominion" of nature, and on the other, the misanthropy which plagues so much of the environmentalist response to it. Tortured by the failure of his own evangelical world to bridge the gap between the value of human life and non-human life—not to mention the "anthropocentric" disregard of the latter, especially in the production of food—Salatin takes the "pro-life" outlook to the pastures, standing at the bridge "like Queen Esther," rooting, in his case, for a "community of beings" which nonetheless maintains the distinction between those beings.

Salatin is not a "tree-hugger" (his disclaimer). He recognizes that he is making the case for the "community of beings," that he is shepherding the non-human members of "the community," and that much of this is for the purpose of his food (and ours). The point that Salatin makes, both as farmer and as author, is not that every living organism is on the same level, but that in every case one is confronted with something or someone that is already something or someone—with a given nature—to which, therefore, attention must be paid, for its good, and then for ours (the eaters'). We are reminded of what Fabrice Hadjadj wrote on the origin of the idea of "matter" that the Greeks took from the "wood" (hylè) of a living tree, to which the

Romans later added the idea of maternal potency (mater, materia). Living plants and animals are not mere raw material. Each has its own inner capacity to bear fruit, having a "life of their own," so to speak. Salatin begins there, taking stock of that life. Then he raises his crops and animals in accord with it, in accord with the "pig-ness of the pig," as he calls it.

This is what the older farmer Masanobu Fukuoka (1913–2008) meant when he championed the activity of "not-doing," which, as our reviewer explains, is really "a human 'co-working'—a simple sophistication, involving precise timing of sowings, clever use of ground cover, and 'random' applications of straw." This has nothing to do with taking the "gardener" out of the picture ("biocentrically"). On the contrary, the same reviewer insists: "just because his approach is free of machines and chemicals does not make it any less the fruit of human intellect—indeed, it arguably makes it more so."

Calls to return to a proper relation to the nature of things—beginning with a recognition that there is such a thing—are not as obvious as one might suppose in an era dominated by talk of sustainability, biodiversity and organic farming. How else do we explain the fact observed by Pope Benedict XVI that "the manipulation of nature, which we deplore today where our environment is concerned, now becomes man's fundamental choice where he himself is concerned."[i] It is clear enough that the absence of a proper relation to the natural order is at the heart of the degradation of the natural world to which environmentalism is a response. But it may be that parts of the environmental movement itself suffer the same absence, especially where appeals for "mother earth" are made along-side campaigns for assault—chemical and otherwise—on the human mother. Human inconsistency aside, might it be that in this case the guiding principle is not so much a return to nature—and its "community of beings"—so much as recourse to short-term solutions for crises (rightly or wrongly perceived) in a world of competing subjects? This may explain, in part, the apparent schizophrenia, even among modern-day Mennonites who offer some of the best "back to nature" advice in their More with Less books, while, at the same time, being party to the promotion of population control in the missions.

It should not come as a surprise that, where a proper relation to nature (human and otherwise) is lacking, its effect will come either in the form of the abolition of the natural world, or the abolition of man, or both. As C.S. Lewis wrote:

> The final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by

> an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself. Human nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man. The battle will then be won. We shall have ‘taken the thread of life out of the hand of Clotho’ and be henceforth free to make our species whatever we wish it to be. The battle will indeed be won. But who, precisely, will have won it?[ii]

The antidote to this is what the Canadian philosopher Kenneth Schmitz calls “the new asceticism of power” grounded in a “new attitude to things which respects in them their interiority and their depth,” and a (non-sentimental) love of things “that sponsors our mutual well-being. . . a companionate love.”[iii]

Indeed, some new farmers are trying to re-establish this attitude by re-establishing the relationship between the family and the farm. In the footsteps of Wendell Berry, Patrick Fleming and Jesse Straight point to the mutual benefit between the two. On the one hand, the farm provides the family with a common project (beyond the much celebrated, but evidently fragile, affective bond) and a productive household (beyond the merely consumerist one, so prevalent today). On the other hand, the family provides the farm with an end other than profit alone. A family farm is, as Fleming says, a setting for a family’s life; and, as such, becomes the object of a particular concern and affection, likely an intergenerational one. This is true even for the back-yard garden when it provides a “little way” for practicing permaculture, as Meghan Schofield witnesses. Aside from everything else, where the family and the farm (or garden) come together, the land is not easily sold to developers! In sum, as Pearce suggests in his Small is Still Beautiful—an update of Schumacher’s classic—it will be the family that will put the break on the “giantist” tendencies that degrade the land and, not to mention, our health.

Finally, returning to the question of what stands at the center of all of this, we turn to neither of the two alternatives, but to the Source and Origin of each, represented by “the tree of life in the middle of the garden.” It is only by “re-ascending to origins . . . that we should be able to return with great spiritual knowledge, to our own situation,” observes T.S. Eliot in his classic essay “The Idea of a Christian Society.” But the re-ascent, of course, falls pre-eminently on the shoulders of the “gardener” whose unique freedom is called into play with the command about that other tree in the middle of the garden. As Angelo Cardinal Scola argues, everything depends on that drama between God and man. Will the garden—our world—be grasped at or received in wonder and gratitude?

It is in view of the way the drama played out in the God-man that Christians can consider farming to be "apostolic" as Catherine de Hueck Doherty proposes. Turning to her native Russian language which uses the same word for "farmer" and "Christian" (Krestianin), the foundress of Madonna House (in Combermere, Canada) conceives of farming as a form of the Christian Apostolate. For it is not the case that "anything will do" in order to meet others, or even to do good for them—feeding the hungry, etc. To work on the land is first and foremost to participate in the "restoration of all things in Christ." And that is reason enough for anything.

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Keep reading! Click here for Cardinal Scola's article, O beauty, O world drunk with eternal love and life!

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[i] Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2012.
[ii] C.S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1955), 72.
[iii] Kenneth Schmitz, The Recovery of Wonder (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 119.

O beauty, O world drunk with eternal love and life!

CARDINAL ANGELO SCOLA

This article was first published in issue 14 of Second Spring (2011). It is slightly abridged from the original version which can be found on the author’s website.

> O Schönheit! O ewigen Liebens,
> Lebens trunk’ne Welt!
>
> O beauty, O world drunk with
> eternal love and life!

These words that Mahler added to the text of the last movement of Das Lied von der Erde (1907–1909) arguably sum up the whole spirit of the work. They are fundamental concepts shaping the structure of the composition.

First, beauty. According to Prince Myshkin’s celebrated claim in Dostoevsky’s The Idiot, “Beauty will save the world.” But beauty, if separated from good and truth would, to use Dostoevsky’s words again, this time pronounced by Dmitri Karamazov, be “terrible because it has not been fathomed and never can be fathomed, for God sets us nothing but riddles… The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man.” And yet, as the great St. Augustine asks, significantly in De musica: “Tell me, I beg you, what else can one love if not beautiful things?”

The second key concept in Mahler’s phrase is the world, seen as the whole of reality. In this connection his reference to drunkenness requires close scrutiny. It is not meant as an allusion to the “third eye of the poet” pointing the way to other worlds, which the so-called poètes maudits in late 19th-century Paris (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud,

Mallarmé…) sought by drinking absinthe. It is an opening up to fullness, overabundance, and even the longing for. This brings us to love, the power which according to Dante "moves the sun and the stars," and often becomes a solace in life.

And lastly, life and eternity. Both because life is unquenchable thirst for eternity and because in every life there is something eternal.

Like all musical geniuses, Mahler alludes to an irreducible state of affairs. Reality speaks to man, and man is able to take in reality. Indeed, there may well be an intimate correspondence between the two.

Taking in the real

But where does the possibility of the relationship between man and the outside world come from? Is this relationship the involvement—albeit at qualitatively different levels—of all beings in a single nature, or the relationship that both have with a Creator?

Before attempting to answer this question, we must mention an important factor. Although the question concerning the relationship between man and the world is as old as humanity itself, today it has taken on an urgent new relevance. Unlike what happened up to the age of Kant, it now seems inconceivable that anthropological and ethical questions might come from cosmology. Considerations about the Earth no longer provide a picture in which man must find a place (anthropology); nor do they constitute an example to be imitated, or to which man must or can submit in some way. Man now appears literally to be im-mondo ("not of the world" or "unclean" and excluded from the sacred). The Earth often appears only to be a kind of inconsequential ornament. People confidently go about their affairs, but these affairs owe nothing at all to the cosmos. They are extraneous to it:

> But what we no longer know is whether or why it is morally good that there are men in the world; and, for example, why it is good that there continue to be men: is their existence worth the sacrifices it entails—for the biosphere, for their relatives, indeed, for themselves?[i]

Precisely on these grounds, deciding what kind of relationship man has with the Earth is an urgent, crucial issue.

Man and the Earth

An initial suggestion comes from the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople:

> It is a fact that the term 'environment' presupposes someone encompassed by it. The two realities involved include, on the one hand, human beings as the ones encompassed, and, on the other hand, the natural creation as the one that encompasses…we must clearly retain this distinction between nature as constituting the environment and humanity as encompassed by it.[ii]

Besides providing an essential initial description of the relationship between man and the environment, Bartholomew's remarks illustrate how this relationship belongs to the shared experience of life. Man experiences a living exchange with the created world and at the same time cannot avoid wondering about the meaning of being immersed in nature: where is that experience grounded?

In the Bible the environment in which man is created is represented by the figure of a garden (the Greek parádeisos), a place of beauty in which man's constituent relations—with self, with God, and all other living beings—are harmonious. Moreover, the "environment" itself has been created for man, who is called on to cultivate and care for it (Gen 2:15). He is also given the task of naming the living creatures (Gen 2:19).

Starting from theological thinking about creation, we realize how God's creative action is manifested not only in making the world exist, but also in making human beings free and therefore responsible for the whole of creation. The narrative of the Fall of man and woman is meant to signify that from the first instant of creation, our freedom is at stake. We cannot think of man separately from his freedom. And the Earth exists for man so much that the Church identifies the root of the environmental issue in original sin. Pope John Paul II described the issue in exquisitely anthropological terms:

> In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and, in a certain sense, create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the Earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though the Earth did not

> have its own requisites and a prior God given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of the creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him.[iii]

This is why, as Revelation still teaches us, the man-environment relation must be seen from the point of view of Redemption.

New creation

Christ's resurrection ushers in a new stage in which the relationship between man and creation is set under the sign of birth or "labour," which is painful but positive because intended for the good in life. And this is above all anthropological labour, which affects however, as St. Paul points out, the whole of creation:

> For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labour pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. (Rom 8:19–24)

In this way anthropological labour and cosmological labour are interlocked in the ineluctable eschatological perspective. Thus in the second coming—already initiated on the path of the human family—what is already complete in Christ will be completed in us and in the world through the resurrection of our mortal body in our true body, in the new heavens and the new Earth. According to the Christian point of view, in this light we can look at the first creation and the new creation not as two separate realities which succeed each other mechanically, but as two moments which reciprocally embrace each other. The second assumes the first and gives its full meaning. The first would inevitably remain incomplete and not adequately intelligible without the other. Moreover, the historic-salvific path develops according to a plan conceived "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4), which will be realized in "the fullness of time" (Eph 1:10). With the new creation, Christ is revealed as the Head of creation itself.

Why did God create man and the world when he has no need of them? This question can be couched in metaphysical terms as: Why is there being rather than nothingness? The best answer we can give is that creation is the gift that God makes of himself. Through it, he freely brings into being and maintains creatures in life, who, although radically distinct from him, bear his indelible mark.

Two reductive versions of the man-nature relationship

This vision of existence enables us to eschew two inadequate conceptions—inadequate because basically incapable of fully accounting for human experience—of the man-environment relationship.

On one hand, an extreme anthropocentrism, whereby man is the absolute master of the cosmos. We know that some ecological thinkers base this line of reasoning on the precedence that the Bible accords to man over the created world. The argument comes from the first version of the Genesis narrative of creation, which takes the form of an order given to man: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth” (Gen 1:28).

Without entering into a detailed reply to this critique, we can simply refer to the “second narrative” of creation, in which the Biblical teaching is formulated as follows: “The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (Gen 2:15). Here there are not only two protagonists in the man-creation relationship—the human community and creation—but three, given that the relationship originates with the Creator. This leads to a further consideration. If man cannot rise to be the omnipotent master of the cosmos, he should not delude himself that he can save it from disaster through his own efforts, even by resorting to the remarkable discoveries and applications of science and technology.

Moreover, this prevents us from naively accepting a biocentrism or ecocentrism which sets out to “eliminate the ontological and axiological difference between man and other living beings, since the biosphere is considered a biotic unity with undifferentiated value”—so that “man’s superior responsibility can be eliminated in favour of an egalitarian consideration of the ‘dignity’ of all living beings.”[iv] But this view devalues both man, who is ultimately denied the status of a free agent participating in the activities of the Creator, and the Earth, which is stripped of all purpose except survival. In fact, as Pope Benedict XVI writes: “Human salvation cannot come from nature alone, understood in a purely naturalistic sense.”[v]

If the cosmos is reduced to nature in which we are absorbed, our relationship with it can at most be aesthetical; it cannot be ethical (Kierkegaard). Nature, however, is not only "a set of 'things' but also of 'meanings,'"[vi] through which human freedom is called to realize its own original vocation in searching for the face of the Creator.

Environmental conflicts as an anthropological issue

After this brief survey of the Christian vision of the relationship between man and creation, we may ask if and how this conception, and similarly those of the other great religions, can contribute to solving the current intense ecological conflicts. Are religions, as demonstrated by their influence in other fields in the past, able to mobilize the energies required for a thorough-going ecological conversion? After all, this would need billions of people to change their outlook. Can religious passions bring this about? This question contains a fairly overt invitation to frame in a radically new way the relationship between eco-logy and theo-logy in order to tackle openly the internal conflicts in these two worlds. I will only make a generic kind of suggestion.

I do not wish to go into the debate on the concept of nature. Almost everyone, in both the scientific and theological fields, seems to believe nature is doomed and considers this situation to be responsible for almost all the ills afflicting humanity. Personally, I believe that since something given is always given to someone, an ultimate ineffable element is ineliminable. And from Aristotle on, what has physis been, if not this multiple, dynamic actuality?

But we must bear in mind, and especially as far as Christianity is concerned, that we cannot speak of nature other than in the terms of creation. And it is effective thinking on creation that paves the way to reconsidering the relationship between ecology and theology. Creation brings the relationship into the picture. Post-modern man is faced with a painful alternative. Having left behind the age of utopias and the pitch darkness it cast on the last century, post-modern anthropology has taken on a strongly Pascalian character. It is pursuing the meaningful wager of a radical alternative: does third-millennium man only wish to be the experiment of himself or does he wish to be a self-in-relation?

To face up to this challenge, anthropology must be dramatic. It must accept that the insuperable one, of which the self consists, is always present in a twofold way. I am one, that is why I can say "I," but I am always one of two: one of body-soul; one of man-woman; one of individual-community, and one of man-cosmos. Hence otherness

makes “me” an internal dimension of self, which on these grounds cannot exist other than in a relationship. It is the self which openly demonstrates this dramatic or polarized character. This is why the correct way of referring to the self is as the self-in-relation.

The interlocking of constituent polarities reveals the authentic relationship of creation as the permanent loving relationship with the One who summons into being all reality (cf. Rom 1:20) and continues to accompany it. According to the Jewish and Christian traditions, God made the relationship of love the reason for his compromise with the human family throughout its history. For the Jewish people and for Christians, he is God with us, and the us brings into play all the constituent polarities-relationships that I have just mentioned. Acknowledging the ever-polar relationship of self with oneself, with others, with the cosmos, and with God is the only way we can say “I” in a humanly satisfactory way.

We inevitably see in this perspective the urgent task of inscribing the good relationship with creation within the intersecting circles of other constituent relations.

Conclusion

I realize that what I am suggesting is too general not to run the risk of being obvious. But I feel it does show that there is a bridge between ecology and theology. And the more judicious scientists are also building this bridge today, having abandoned an ecologist vulgate based on a mythical return to a good and innocent nature. Baudelaire’s exclamation, “Pan has come back!,” is empty. The way forward for the urgent, collaborative convergence between ecology and theology is to continue the logic of creation with love. This logic is scientific, religious, and political all in one. And consequently it is the logic of justice and of the complete development of humanity (the theme of Caritas in Veritate).

Religions can have something important to say on environmental issues when they are expressed through individual and social players willing to narrate the fullness of human experience and committed to putting forward valid arguments on its behalf. Mahler himself bears witness to this when he says: “My heart is eternally devoured by a torment: my immense yearning for you.”[vii] Or when he feels he is prey to the questions that inexorably arise from experience common to all people:

> Where have we come from? Where are we going to? Is it true, as Schopenhauer

> says, that I really desired to live before being conceived? If I was created free, why does my personality imprison me? What is all this suffering for? How can cruelty and evil be the work of a merciful God? In the end, will death reveal the meaning of life to us?[viii]

As he was to tell his faithful disciple, Bruno Walter, on looking back on life when death already had a hand on his shoulder:

> There are many—too many—things that I could say about myself; I cannot even begin. I've suffered so much in these last eighteen months [after his daughter's death and his own illness] that I can barely tell you about them. How could I try and describe such a terrible crisis? I see everything in a completely new light; I have undergone such an incredible transformation that it wouldn't surprise me to find myself in a new body (like Faust in the last scene). I'm more eager than ever to live and I find 'the habit of living' sweeter than ever.

He ends with a magnificent and particularly meaningful statement: "It is strange that when I hear music, even when I myself am conducting, I find very precise replies to all my questions and everything is perfectly clear and obvious to me. Or rather, what I feel that I perceive with such clarity is that they are not questions at all."[ix]

In short, after so many thoughts, desires and struggles, Mahler finds true solace for his suffering in music—a real opening to the Mystery. The realm of music is very close to that of faith.

It is an opening inviting us to appreciate the Mystery of creation as a whole.

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[i] Rémi Brague, The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 218.

[ii] Bartholomew I in N. Ascherson and A. Marshall (eds.), The Adriatic Sea: A Sea at Risk, a Unity of Purpose, Religion, Science and the Environment (Athens, 2003).

[iii] John Paul II, Centesimus Annus (1991), no. 37.

[iv] John Paul II, Address to Conference on Environment and Health, 24 March 1997, no. 5.

[v] Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate (2009), no. 48.

[vi] Cf. A. Scola, Buone ragioni per la vita in commune: Religione, politica, economia (Mondadori, 2010).

[vii] A. Liberman, Gustav Mahler o el corazón abrumado (Altalena Editores, 1986), 16.

[viii] B. Walter, Gustav Mahler (Editori Riuniti, 1981).

[ix] Ibid.

Cardinal Angelo Scola was the Patriarch of Venice before he was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI as the Archbishop of Milan in 2011.

Keep reading! Click here for T. S. Eliot's "The Idea of a Christian Society," delivered on the eve of the Second World War.

The Idea of a Christian Society

T. S. ELIOT

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Thomas Stearns Eliot was an essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic: but above all a ground-breaking poet, who in 1948 was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Born in 1888 in St. Louis Missouri, he moved to England in 1914 at the age of 25, later assuming British citizenship and remaining in England until his death in 1965. While Eliot is best known for his literary achievements, he was also a Christian convert who held strong views about the relationship between faith and culture.

The following extract is from Chapter IV of Eliot's The Idea of a Christian Society, which originated as a series of lectures given in 1939 at Cambridge University. Written on the eve of the Second World War, this work is interesting from the perspective of the current issue of Humanum because of two crucial insights. First, that only Christianity could stem the tide of ideological thinking that was devouring both Europe and Russia, and now plagues the entire world. And secondly, the fact that Christianity first grew and developed in a culture whose focus was rural rather than urban. Eliot's ideas about the role the Anglican Church (to which he belonged) should play in regenerating Western civilisation may now seem somewhat naïve, and his 'medievalism' has not always been taken seriously even by those who love his writing. Nonetheless The Idea of a Christian Society remains an important influence on those who are attempting, in our own day, to rediscover the bond between a respect for the natural world, and the fundamental needs of the human soul.

[It should be obvious that the form of political organisation of a Christian State does not come within the scope of this discussion.] To identify any particular form of government with Christianity is a dangerous error: for it confounds the permanent with the transitory, the absolute with the contingent. Forms of government, and of social organisation, are in constant process of change, and their operation may be very different from the theory which they are supposed to exemplify. A theory of the

State may be, explicitly or implicitly, anti-Christian: it may arrogate rights which only the Church is entitled to claim, or pretend to decide moral questions on which only the Church is qualified to pronounce. On the other hand, a regime may in practice claim either more or less than it professes, and we have to examine its working as well as its constitution. We have no assurance that a democratic regime might not be as inimical to Christianity in practice, as another might be in theory: and the best government must be relative to the character and the stage of intelligence and education of a particular people in a particular place at a particular time. Those who consider that a discussion of the nature of a Christian society should conclude by supporting a particular form of political organisation, should ask themselves whether they really believe our form of government to be more important than our Christianity; and those who are convinced that the present form of government of Britain is the one most suitable for any Christian people, should ask themselves whether they are confusing a Christian society with a society in which individual Christianity is tolerated.

This essay is not intended to be either an anti-communist or an anti-fascist manifesto; the reader may by this time have forgotten what I said at the beginning, to the effect that I was less concerned with the more superficial, though important differences between the regimens of different nations, than with the more profound differences between pagan and Christian society. Our preoccupation with foreign politics during the last few years has induced a surface complacency rather than a consistent attempt at self-examination of conscience. Sometimes we are almost persuaded that we are getting on very nicely, with a reform here and a reform there, and would have been getting on still better, if only foreign governments did not insist upon breaking all the rules and playing what is really a different game. What is more depressing still is the thought that only fear or jealousy of foreign success can alarm us about the health of our own nation; that only through this anxiety can we see such things as depopulation, malnutrition, moral deterioration, the decay of agriculture, as evils at all. And what is worst of all is to advocate Christianity, not because it is true, but because it might be beneficial. Towards the end of 1938 we experienced a wave of revivalism which should teach us that folly is not the prerogative of anyone political party or anyone religious communion, and that hysteria is not the privilege of the uneducated. The Christianity expressed has been vague, the religious fervour has been a fervour for democracy. It may engender nothing better than a disguised and peculiarly sanctimonious nationalism, accelerating our progress towards the paganism which we say we abhor. To justify Christianity because it provides a foundation of morality, instead of showing the necessity of Christian morality from

the truth of Christianity, is a very dangerous inversion; and we may reflect, that a good deal of the attention of totalitarian states has been devoted, with a steadiness of purpose not always found in democracies, to providing their national life with a foundation of morality—the wrong kind perhaps, but a good deal more of it. It is not enthusiasm, but dogma, that differentiates a Christian from a pagan society.

I have tried to restrict my ambition of a Christian society to a social minimum: to picture, not a society of saints, but of ordinary men, of men whose Christianity is communal before being individual. It is very easy for speculation on a possible Christian order in the future to tend to come to rest in a kind of apocalyptic vision of a golden age of virtue. But we have to remember that the Kingdom of Christ on earth will never be realised, and also that it is always being realised; we must remember that whatever reform or revolution we carry out, the result will always be a sordid travesty of what human society should be—though the world is never left wholly without glory. In such a society as I imagine, as in any that is not petrified, there will be innumerable seeds of decay. Any human scheme for society is realised only when the great mass of humanity has become adapted to it; but this adaptation becomes also, insensibly, an adaptation of the scheme itself to the mass on which it operates: the overwhelming pressure of mediocrity, sluggish and indomitable as a glacier, will mitigate the most violent, and depress the most exalted revolution, and what is realised is so unlike the end that enthusiasm conceived, that foresight would weaken the effort. A wholly Christian society might be a society for the most part on a low level; it would engage the cooperation of many whose Christianity was spectral or superstitious or feigned, and of many whose motives were primarily worldly and selfish. It would require constant reform.

I should not like it to be thought, however, that I considered the presence of the higher forms of devotional life to be a matter of minor importance for such a society. I have, it is true, insisted upon the communal, rather than the individual aspect: a community of men and women, not individually better than they are now, except for the capital difference of holding the Christian faith. But their holding the Christian faith would give them something else which they lack: a respect for the religious life, for the life of prayer and contemplation, and for those who attempt to practise it. In this I am asking no more of the British Christian, than is characteristic of the ordinary Moslem or Hindu. But the ordinary man would need the opportunity to know that the religious life existed, that it was given its due place, would need to recognise the profession of those who have abandoned the world, as he recognised the professions practised in it. I cannot conceive a Christian society without religious orders, even

purely contemplative orders, even enclosed orders. And, incidentally, I should not like the "Community of Christians" of which I have spoken, to be thought of as merely the nicest, most intelligent and public-spirited of the upper middle class—it is not to be conceived on that analogy.

We may say that religion, as distinguished from modern paganism, implies a life in conformity with nature. It may be observed that the natural life and the supernatural life have a conformity to each other which neither has with the mechanistic life: but so far has our notion of what is natural become distorted, that people who consider it "unnatural" and therefore repugnant, that a person of either sex should elect a life of celibacy, consider it perfectly "natural" that families should be limited to one or two children. It would perhaps be more natural, as well as in better conformity with the Will of God, if there were more celibates and if those who were married had larger families. But I am thinking of "conformity to nature" in a wider sense than this. We are being made aware that the organisation of society on the principle of private profit, as well as public destruction, is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism, and to the exhaustion of natural resources, and that a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly. I need only mention, as an instance, now very much before the public eye, the results of "soil-erosion"—the exploitation of the earth, on a vast scale for two generations, for commercial profit: immediate benefits leading to dearth and desert. I would not have it thought that I condemn a society because of its material ruin, for that would be to make its material success a sufficient test of its excellence; I mean only that a wrong attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God, and that the consequence is an inevitable doom. For a long enough time we have believed in nothing but the values arising in a mechanised, commercialised, urbanised way of life: it would be as well for us to face the permanent conditions upon which God allows us to live upon this planet. And without sentimentalising the life of the savage, we might practise the humility to observe, in some of the societies upon which we look down as primitive or backward, the operation of a social religious-artistic complex which we should emulate upon a higher plane. We have been accustomed to regard "progress" as always integral; and have yet to learn that it is only by an effort and a discipline, greater than society has yet seen the need of imposing upon itself, that material knowledge and power is gained without loss of spiritual knowledge and power. The struggle to recover the sense of relation to nature and to God, the recognition that even the most primitive feelings should be part of our heritage, seems to me to be the explanation and justification of the life of D. H. Lawrence, and the excuse for his aberrations. But we

need not only to learn how to look at the world with the eyes of a Mexican Indian—and I hardly think that Lawrence succeeded—and we certainly cannot afford to stop there. We need to know how to see the world as the Christian Fathers saw it; and the purpose of reascending to origins is that we should be able to return, with greater spiritual knowledge, to our own situation. We need to recover the sense of religious fear, so that it may be overcome by religious hope.

I should not like to leave the reader supposing that I have attempted to contribute one more amateur sketch of an abstract and impracticable future: the blue-print from which the doctrinaire criticises the piecemeal day to day efforts of political men. These latter efforts have to go on; but unless we can find a pattern into which all problems of life can have their place, we are only likely to go on complicating chaos. So long, for instance, as we consider finance, industry, trade, agriculture merely as competing interests to be reconciled from time to time as best they may, so long as we consider "education" as a good in itself of which everyone has a right to the utmost, without any ideal of the good life for society or for the individual, we shall move from one uneasy compromise to another. To the quick and simple organisation of society for ends which, being only material and worldly, must be as ephemeral as worldly success, there is only one alternative. As political philosophy derives its sanction from ethics, and ethics from the truth of religion, it is only by returning to the eternal source of truth that we can hope for any social organisation which will not, to its ultimate destruction, ignore some essential aspect of reality. The term "democracy," as I have said again and again, does not contain enough positive content to stand alone against the forces that you dislike—it can easily be transformed by them. If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin.

I believe that there must be many persons who, like myself, were deeply shaken by the events of September 1938, in a way from which one does not recover; persons to whom that month brought a profounder realisation of a general plight. It was not a disturbance of the understanding: the events themselves were not surprising. Nor, as became increasingly evident, was our distress due merely to disagreement with the policy and behaviour of the moment. The feeling which was new, and unexpected was a feeling of humiliation, which seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance and amendment; what had happened was something in which one was deeply implicated and responsible. It was not, I repeat, a criticism of the government, but a doubt of the validity of a civilisation. We could not match conviction with conviction, we had no ideas with which we could either meet or oppose the ideas opposed to us. Was our society, which had always been so assured of

its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends? Such thoughts as these formed the starting point, and must remain the excuse, for saying what I have to say.

T. S. Eliot was an essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic, and ground-breaking poet. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

Keep reading! Click here for Patrick Fleming's feature article on "The Family Farm."

The Family Farm

PATRICK M. FLEMING

This essay is based on a talk given on the theme of "Farming and the Family" at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute on February 8th, 2016.

Since I didn't grow up farming, and since my wife did, the story of how I started farming is a love story. Elisa, my wife, is the fourth generation on the land purchased by her great-grandfather in 1916 in the heart of Amish country in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We met when we were 17 years old, and at the time neither of us imagined we would continue her parents' farm. Our sights were set on college and the limitless possibilities of the future.

When I say "the farm" what I mean is a beautiful 112 acres of cropland and pasture, on which we milk 25 cows and raise steers for beef. We have a few chickens and pigs for our own use, and a few goats who specialize in lawn care and/or destruction. The business is rounded out with a thriving Bed & Breakfast—hosting about 30 people each night over the summer—along with guided farm tours in order to share what we've learned about food, farming and family work to anyone who's interested (and, of course, to provide an opportunity to milk a cow by hand).

But Elisa and I did not imagine we'd end up here. It was not until I started reading Wendell Berry, G.K. Chesterton and the "distributists," Leon Kass' Hungry Soul, among others—that the possibility of going back to the farm became something real for both of us. We were attracted to a vision of an integrated life blossoming out of the home; we were attracted to combating the sense of alienation—from our bodies, from rooted community, from the sources that sustain us—that seems to pervade modern life; and we were attracted to escaping the sterile world of cubicles in Washington, DC.

So our love story took us back to the farm. Wendell Berry has written that there are only two reasons to farm, given the many challenges a farmer faces (from the uncertainty of weather, to the low prices of most agricultural products, to the daily grind of the work): "Because you have to, or because you love to."[i] Several years ago, a guest on the farm was taking our farm tour—he was clearly a banker type from New

York City—and he asked me why I was farming. I told him this line from Berry about necessity and love. He replied to me, in a heavy New York accent, “Don’t talk to me about love. I wanna know about the money.”

Suffice it to say, after looking at the accounting ledgers, both my wife and I are still farming for love. Not necessarily because we love farming itself every day of the year—it’s easy to romanticize, and I want to avoid that—but because we love family and many of the goods associated with farming.

In what follows, I hope to outline a few of the benefits of a farm for the family; in turn, the benefits of the family for a farm; and finally to address how recovering a sense of the world as created has practical implications for food production.

The benefits of a farm for the family

What are the benefits of a farm for the family? I’ll mention three.

1. A farm benefits the family by reminding us of the dignity of manual labor. A farm helps parents and children alike to turn off the smart screen, to leave the virtual, disembodied reality behind, and fix our attention on the tangible, living, breathing world that’s in front of our eyes. To borrow a phrase from David Crawford of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute, an authentically Catholic anthropology is no “angelic anthropology,”[ii] but recognizes bodily goods as true goods. And manual labor is not merely mindless, but engages the whole person as a body-soul unity.

Working with the body is also related to the natural rhythms of farm life, which recur on both a daily and a seasonal basis. These rhythms are natural and bodily—rhythms of reaping and sowing, waiting and fulfillment, fasting and feasting, which fit well with the rhythms of the liturgy and the Church calendar.

I don’t intend to romanticize farming at the expense of other trades. Learning about the importance of bodily work and engaging in natural rhythms doesn’t just happen through agriculture. These patterns of waiting, fulfillment and seasonality can be learned in a family setting through gardening, yard care, cooking, baking bread, brewing beer—all of these being excellent activities to do with one’s kids.

2. And this leads me to a second benefit of a farm for the family, namely, a farm provides meaningful work that involves children. It’s a rare thing today that parents can work alongside each other, let alone with their children. If we are attracted to a vision of the good life blossoming out of the home—as Elisa and I were, when we

contemplated leaving DC—then a farm offers one such way to live this life. When I asked Elisa what she thought were the benefits of farming for the family, the first thing she said was "being able to work together." Growing up, she worked alongside her parents, particularly her mother, and this instilled in her a love of work. From what I've seen, this willingness to take on hard work is not uncommon among people raised in farm families.

And it is not just about meaningful work for children. A farm can also provide meaningful work that involves grandparents, friends and neighbors. In fact, one learns pretty quickly in farming the tremendous practical benefit of working together with people you care about. My Amish friend and neighbor, Chris, once explained to me, "You don't need to be smart, if you have smart friends."

He's absolutely right. Family and friendship are not just necessary to fulfill emotional needs—though they are—but are also practical and economic, producing tangible results. A farm reminds us of this simple fact of life on a daily basis, providing meaningful work that can involve the whole family, indeed the whole neighborhood.

3. Finally, a third way in which a farm benefits the family is that bonds of affection are strengthened within a household that is productive, not just consumptive. This is one of Wendell Berry's points, and it resonates with me deeply.[iii] Households today have become almost exclusively places of consumption. The previous productive capacities of households, including the education of children, have almost all been outsourced one-by-one. And so all that's left today are bonds based on consumption, or affective bonds. Families come home from work and say hello; perhaps eating together, perhaps not; perhaps watching TV or Netflix; and then sleeping in the same house. And Berry's point is quite simple: witnessing the state of families in our culture today, perhaps family bonds based only on consumption are not strong enough! Affective bonds come and go, they have ups and downs. And when they are down, it is the productive bonds—the common project—that can carry a marriage and a family through. With a common project, you realize that your family is part of a larger picture, a larger "task," and each member is needed to complete it well. Of course, affective bonds can be very strong, and are irreplaceable. It helps to like your family. But the unity that comes from sharing a common project is perhaps more consistent. Family unity is strengthened within a household that shares a common productive project, not just consumptive interests.

The benefits of the family for a farm

If a farm is beneficial for the family, what can we say about the value of the family for a farm? As you've probably noticed already, not every farm promotes the goods mentioned above—the dignity of manual labor, meaningful work that involves children, and the strengthening of household bonds. In fact, it will come as no surprise to say that not even every family farm promotes these goods!

The reason for this is that it takes a conscious effort to achieve these goods. When you farm, and especially when you own or operate your own small business, it is easy to become a slave to activity. Then too there is the pervasive influence of the broader culture which tends to denigrate manual labor, separate the work and leisure of adults and children, and promote an economic system in which the "consumptive household" is the norm.

To achieve the goods mentioned above, it takes intentional effort. And in this regard a family offers irreplaceable gifts to the farm. I'll mention just three.

1. The first gift of the family to a farm, is the gift of keeping the farm centered in prayer. It is a certain type of family that makes all the goods just discussed possible. And it seems to me that a farm that is not centered in prayer will likely miss out on these goods, in the pursuit of expanding production, or simply staying afloat. The gift of elevating the farm in prayer is a benefit of the family for a farm—and it's a gift that only a family can provide, not a corporation, not an LLC. This in turn makes all the other goods we discussed possible.

2. Second, the family benefits the farm because it gives the farm an end other than profits, namely the flourishing of the family members, and the continuation of a way of life. With a family, there is a recognition that a farm's value is more than what it will bring for sale—it is a setting for family life. This is why the Amish, for example, never sell their farms to developers. The farm is not just seen as a resource, or an asset, but a setting for a particular kind of life, one which they see as very fitting for the continuation of their faith and culture. A family provides to the farm an end that is not just profit, but a way of life.

3. Third, a family farm exhibits intergenerational concern for a particular place. And now, we are touching upon not just a benefit of the family to a farm, but a benefit of the family to the land itself, to the health of our "common home," as Pope Francis would say in Laudato si'. The idea of love and care for a particular place, spanning multiple generations, is a profound point, and one that's often lost in our highly mobile culture. Why does this matter? I'll just note that we cannot love in the

abstract. Wendell Berry writes that we cannot love women, in general, without loving a particular woman. Similarly, we cannot love friendship, without having particular friends. And similarly, we cannot love the land without loving a particular piece of it.[iv] If we are to be good stewards of the land, and properly care for it for the sake of future generations, it seems to me this can only happen when we have intergenerational connections to a particular place—and I think history bears this out. Care for future generations, and the "health of the land," is no longer an abstract idea, but something concrete and visible.

These are three benefits, at least, of the family for a farm. But we should deepen the first point. Why does it matter for a family to elevate a farm in prayer? Because it helps to recover the idea of creation (and stewardship of creation), which is essential for the health of agriculture and food production today.

Agriculture in the "grammar of Creation"

Recovering a sense of Creation involves discerning a meaningful order in the world as it's given. There is a logic to nature, a language of the body, a "grammar of creation."[v] And if these are to be more than poetic metaphors, it is only because the world was first thought by an intelligent Creator, and not merely the result of a confluence of random forces. When faced with the profound mystery of our origins, we are left with a choice. Is the world the result of a loving decision, or is it not? Is the world, and each of our lives, the result of a blind interplay of chance and necessity,[vi] or is it not? The way we answer this question changes everything.

Some of the most profound elements of Pope Francis' recent encyclical on ecology, Laudato si', are precisely concerned with this idea of recovering a sense of Creation. Francis writes that we are to discern "a message contained in the structures of nature itself" (LS 117). He writes about living in harmony with "a reality which has been given to us, which precedes our existence and our abilities" (LS 140).

A farmer understands this. When walking outside at 6:00 AM, on a bitterly cold morning, to discover the pipes in the barn are frozen and you can't open the door because of a snow bank—you sometimes wish to shout "Yes, I get it! There's a larger reality that precedes me!" Sometimes you want to argue with the "message contained in the structures of nature." But you know it's in the interest of your long term beatitude to cooperate. As farmers, rather than "foolishly beat[ing] our head against the way nature likes to work,"[vii] it is better to pay careful attention to the order and logic at the heart of creation.

So what is the practical significance of all of this for food production? Several things come to mind.

First, with a sense of Creation you view the value of your work, and what you produce, intrinsically, and not just instrumentally. The products of farm work include living beings—plants, animals—and the food that sustains us. To quote Joel Salatin, a farmer must learn to respect the "pigness of a pig," and the "cowness of a cow." In other words, there is an intrinsic quality and way-of-being for each animal or plant, which can guide our agricultural decisions. This provides another criteria for thinking about food production—along with the conventional criteria of productivity and profits—that promotes the long-term health of a farm and a community. Moreover, the quality of the bread itself matters, and not just, as Adam Smith would say, the baker's regard for his own self-interest.[viii] Bread—like each type of food—has an integrity of its own, that you can honor (or not) through your work.

Second, a sense of creation arouses in the farmer an attentiveness to the logic of nature. One begins to notice, for example that, in nature, herbivores are constantly on the move. Might this be healthy for them, for the soil, and for the plants they eat? The practices of rotational grazing and mob grazing grew out of this attentiveness to the natural behavior of animals. One notices, too, that animals move to stay ahead of bacteria (thus preventing the need for lacing animal feed with antibiotics, and thereby protecting the efficacy of antibiotics for when they are truly needed).

The list could go on: Creation provides non-arbitrary criteria for making a distinction between a farm and a factory, an animal and a machine, what's natural and artificial… But a full treatment of the practical implications of Creation for agriculture will need to wait for another day.[ix]

To conclude, I've lately been thinking that the most important practical significance of Creation for food production—particularly in today's economy and culture—is the indispensable value of the Sabbath. One of the aforementioned differences between an animal and a machine, or the natural and artificial, is that nature has the capacity to heal. If a cow is sick, and you give her proper care and an opportunity to rest, her body will heal. Her body wants to heal. The same can be said for the land. The same can be said for our own bodies. But if your tractor is broken, you can let it rest, talk nice to it, give it lots of tender loving care, but it will be just as broken as when you started.

And so rest, the Sabbath, remains an integral part of food production—for the sake of the healing of animals, land, and people (the enduring significance of Leviticus 25:4; 2

Chronicles 36:21; among others). There comes a time when all our work and toil has run its course, and the most fundamental act of freedom is a simple and prayerful letting be.[x] A time when our own work of harvest must halt in absolute deference to the Kingdom of God.

…

The themes of farming and the family are connected in intimate ways in human culture. A farm provides real and not just sentimental benefits to a family: by reminding us of the dignity of working with our bodies and detaching us from the disembodied reality of the smart screen; by allowing parents and children to work together in meaningful ways; by rooting the affective bonds of a household in a common productive effort. And families can provide enduring benefits to farms and to any culture's food production system: by centering the farm in prayer and a sense of stewardship of creation; by providing criteria other than profits for agricultural decision-making; and by exhibiting concern for particular places that extend beyond a single lifetime. Given this mutual support between a farm and the family—support that existed through much of human history—it is perhaps no coincidence that the farm household and the family in general have declined in tandem. Our task is to renew a culture of permanence and an attentiveness to creation in both our families and the sources of our food.

[i] Wendell Berry, Hannah Coulter (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2004), 129.

[ii] David S. Crawford, "Of Spouses, the Real World, and the 'Where' of Christian Marriage" Communio: International Catholic Review 33 (Spring 2006): 100–16, especially 116.

[iii] Wendell Berry, "Feminism, the Body, and the Machine," in The Art of the Commonplace (Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), 67–71.See also the essay "The Body and the Earth" in the same volume, in particular pp. 108–11.

[iv] Wendell Berry, "The Body and the Earth," in The Art of the Commonplace (Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), 117–18.

[v] David L. Schindler, "Habits of Presence and the Generosity of Creation: Ecology in Light of Integral Human Development," Communio: International Catholic Review 42 (Winter 2015), 574–93, especially 577–81.

[vi] Joseph Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004)

[originally published in 1968], especially p. 151–58.

[vii] Communio: International Catholic Review 42 (Winter 2015), 791.

[viii] Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Book 1, Ch. 2, “Of the Principle which gives occasion to the Division of Labour.”

[ix] In the meantime, see Jesse Straight’s recent article in Communio, 789–95, for how attentiveness to the logic of creation can be manifested on a farm.

[x] “Habits of Presence and the Generosity of Creation,” 578, and footnote 13.

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Keep reading! Click here for Meghan Schofield’s moving witness on “The Little Way of Gardening.”

The Little Way of Gardening: Discovering Permaculture

MEGHAN SCHOFIELD

Looking out of the window I can see the hedge that lines the driveway and, beyond that, a mass of garden, weeds, trees, and shrubs. Threatening dark clouds loom on the horizon. It can't decide if it's going to rain or not. The gray and blue and black of the sky is punctuated by towering pines, honey locusts, and weeping willows. The chickens are snug in the coop with a rain tarp over them—just in case—and I hope that the woodchucks that seem to have taken up permanent residence here, in the Farwell Road garden, will stop dropping by for a salad bar lunch.

No matter how many years go by, the beauty of this place never seems to get old.

This is the place my parents bought when they were first married. They've never moved.

It was here, on this property, that my love for the outdoors and my first intuitions about "tilling and keeping" the land were fostered. It's not a farm. It's an old historic New England house that sits on a few acres of land: a large backyard, and at least as much forest, tipping down to the old Boston & Maine railroad tracks, right along the Merrimack River. Almost every weekend I can remember, my parents worked on projects related to the house (it was a real fixer-upper) or the landscape. My mother has a wonderful eye for flowers and always has lovely beds scattered around the property. My father started our vegetable garden. He always begins the seeds indoors, while the chill is still in the air.

When I was young, if I wasn't doing school work, I was almost certainly outdoors. Spring, summer, fall, winter—my four siblings and I always found a way to play, whatever the weather. Memories of hot summer days at a lake, adventures in the woods with my dad, sledding down the treacherous back hill (which was strictly forbidden, as it was full of trees, making the fun all the better in our eyes and deviating my brother's septum at least once). This is where New England got deep into my bones. The topography, the landscape, the colors, the smells. . . and it was all ours, it was what we had been given. Tromping down the railroad tracks, riding the "horse

tree," collecting "bootle-beetles," spotting owls, foxes, raccoons, hawks and other wildlife, standing in the middle of the woods looking upward and around and feeling so small, so free and so safe: These were the impressions that captured my imagination and inspired my love for the world in its wild and unadulterated state.

It was probably in my early college years that my interest in cultivating the land (and not just enjoying its beautiful natural state) was first kindled. There wasn't any big or monumental reason for this. I just liked it. I liked being outside and working after a long year of being in the classroom. I liked being a part of what my parents were working on. I liked feeling the ground under me—I hate gardening in shoes and unless there is poison ivy or chicken poop around, I am barefoot!—and the hot sky above me. I liked the quiet and the head space that it afforded to me. I wanted to learn everything I could about agriculture, the best way to grow things, and help make something beautiful.

Oddly (or not so oddly) enough, it was during my graduate studies in theology that my interest in sustainable agricultural models and humane animal husbandry practices blossomed. Everything that I was taught (particularly metaphysics and bioethics) made so much sense and helped me to articulate concepts that I had merely intuited before. If being is gift, that changes everything. God's creation is the physical, visible manifestation of His Love, and the forerunner of Incarnate Love Himself. "Heaven and earth are full of the glory of the Lord." God is always-already holding everything in existence, at every moment giving all being life. As the Byzantine Liturgy sings, "He is everywhere present and filling all things." Far from a strange form of pantheism, this vision brings creation to its rightful place in the hierarchy of being, and shows the supreme dignity of the role of man in bringing the things of the earth to their true final end. The world, and all of creation, is God's gift to humankind, to tend, keep, and till. There is a mutual relation of dependence (within a hierarchy) between man and the land. On the one hand, we are dependent on the land to bring forth our food. Yet in order to bring forth that food, the land is dependent on man to cultivate it and guide its growth. This is only one of many "theo-ag" concepts that made me passionate about agriculture. In a way, cultivating land is a participation in the ongoing work of creation, and, in that sense, it is an experience of the Divine.

It was a dear friend from graduate school who introduced me to the whole world of permaculture. After graduate school she and I both taught theology (though in different places) yet we both took every chance we could to learn more and be involved in agriculture. In fact, that summer I volunteered at a local organic CSA farm. After graduate school, we both taught theology but took every chance we could to learn and

be involved in agriculture. That summer I volunteered at a local organic CSA farm. She called and asked if I wanted to join her in getting trained and certified as a permaculture designer. It would involve webinars, a textbook, and spending ten days in a tent in Illinois in the dead of summer. Of course I agreed.

Permaculture is defined in many ways, though the term itself originated as a combination of the words "permanent"[i] and "agriculture." It is basically a way of going about agriculture in "closed-loop,"[ii] permanent, sustainable systems—the idea being that the more permanent the structures, the healthier the soil, the healthier the land, the healthier the animals, and the healthier the people. One of its common catch-phrases is: "Care of Earth, Care of People, Care of the Future." There are several defining characteristics of a permaculture system: for example, the goal of maximizing yield while minimizing human effort. This requires attentiveness to the patterns of nature, the particularities of your place, and mimicking it as closely as possible for the benefit of all involved. It's important to note that much of what permaculture offers is simply a retrieval of wise, traditional practices that have gone on for centuries, and have been obscured by modern agricultural practices. However, permaculture also offers innovation in certain techniques and methods that better fit the contemporary situation, as well as providing principles that pave the way for genuinely original practices.

I got certified and—then what? Did I go on to buy fifty gorgeous acres of land, start my own permaculture farm, make my own soaps and dyes, run a CSA, and save the global environment? Nope. I packed my bags and took a plane back to Austria, to keep teaching.

Since finishing graduate school, I have lived a rather unusual and transient lifestyle: I live and teach in Gaming, Austria during the school year (living in an apartment with no land) and summer at my family's home (with a few acres of land, and an opportunity to garden). I love the land, but I am an educator at heart, and, for now, full-time agriculture is on the back-burner. But the point here is that if you love something enough, you make it happen, even if it is in "little ways" and on a small scale. This is a profound truth, with spiritual and ecological implications. G.K. Chesterton once said, "If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing badly." I love that. It frees you from the pressure of perfectionism, and it doesn't give you room to hide under the excuse that you don't have the ideal conditions. I suspect that most of us will never have "ideal" conditions to pursue our dreams and goals in life. But if we wait for the ideal to come, we will never do anything. The questions we really should

be asking are: what do I love? And, what have I been given? Then we can work our way out from there.

What does that way look like for me? Mostly, it's "the little way of gardening." No fifty-acre mega projects, no cattle or bees. But a garden. It's amazing what can be managed in a small space. This year it's berries, beans, zucchini, pumpkin, tomatoes, and peppers (everything else became lunch of the aforementioned woodchucks). We also have a variety of herbs that I've dried for teas and cooking. I love trees and shrubs, and have air-layered several from our property—that is, propagated them from existing branches using a special permaculture technique. A few of them didn't make it; they never quite took. I'm waiting on two hazelnut shrubs to produce nuts in the next two years. I finally have lupines for the first time and am currently saving their seeds to re-plant next year. Our kitchen scraps are quickly filling the compost pile we've begun for next year. I've been to great conferences on organic farming, found work on already existing farms, been consulted on a future farming project involving alpaca, and have become a permaculture designer—all while teaching full-time. The point is that it's important to do what you can, and to remember that even small projects are worthwhile and rewarding. This summer I am keeping my first flock of chickens, twenty-five meat birds that my family and I will process ourselves with the help of some neighbors and friends. I've become more and more convinced that if I myself cannot implement more humane animal husbandry, I should (to the extent I am able) support those who do. This is another "little way" for me to live what I love, and a useful rule of thumb: either do it yourself, or support someone who does it well.

One of the principles of permaculture that I love is that each element in your landscape (be it animal or vegetable) should have at least two or more functions that it performs in relation to the whole. This is not only for the sake of efficiency, but also something that forces us to slow down and look at the interconnectedness of all things. Let's take my chickens, for example. They require food, water, shelter, and dry conditions. In return, they give us meat, fertilizer, minor pest control, and the pleasure of working and caring for something. How can these requirements and gifts overlap to our best mutual advantage? When they are old enough, we put the chickens in an outdoor, movable structure, which gives them a bit of forage and fresh air, while allowing us to systematically fertilize an area that will be used in the future for an orchard and/or a gardening plot. We're getting compost and meat, and they get a happy life in the great outdoors. Even our hawk "problem" has its silver-lining. I can't let our chickens free-range unless I am watching them, otherwise they will get snatched. But their need for protection overlaps with my desire to enjoy and be with

them (and my desire to sunbathe with a book and a cup of coffee)!

It's important to remember that no matter what you do, there will be epic fails. Just this week I killed some herb cuttings that I was trying to re-grow and pot. Our "smell-free" chicken tractor needed some adjustments and extra work in order to deliver. Our "fool-proof" berry net isn't, well…fool-proof (no blueberries this year!). By mid-July weeding had settled to the bottom of my priority list, and only got attention recently. But shouldn't we be brave enough to go for it anyway—despite the fails, especially since the fails are really the learning-curves for future successes (how's that for a cliché)? This is why I am passionate about what I do, both in education and in permaculture. You don't have to have a corporate paycheck to do marvelous things. And that is one of the gifts I learned in my childhood on Farwell Road. The tremendous impact of simple and beautiful things. It all starts in small, humble, and less-travelled ways that are walked with great faithfulness.

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[i] Permanent refers to permaculture's focus on perennial—vs. annual—plants and vegetation. Re-planting annuals each year means that the soil is (traditionally) disturbed, which compromises the topsoil and requires the use of additives to keep it fertile. Perennials also typically have deep and stable root systems that bring vital minerals to the surface, thereby aerating the soil without disturbing it. Also, "permanence" brings to mind the future—a reminder that one should put structures in place that will benefit generations to come.
[ii] "Closed-loop" refers to the fact that what you need to give to the land/animals are things you yourself can produce. It means minimizing what you purchase off-site in order to sustain your system. A synonym could be "sustainable." For example, if I keep animals, I should try to grow the food they need, as opposed to buying it, thus finding a way to overlap my needs with what I can produce.
Keep reading! Click here for a review of the popular More-with-Less Cookbook, and its sequel Living More with Less.

Is "More With Less" Enough?

JOSEPH C. ATKINSON

Longacre, Doris Janzen, More-with-Less Cookbook (Herald Press, 1976, updated ed. 2011).

Longacre, Doris Janzen, Living More With Less (updated ed., Herald Press, 2010).

The More-with-Less Cookbook and its sequel Living More with Less, both by Doris Janzen Longacre, are early contributions to what would come to be known as the green movement. Each book seeks to address the question of how a Christian can live out the Gospel integrally in affluent Western societies when so many in the world are suffering deprivations of basic necessities. 35 years ago, Doris Janzen Longacre began engaging this question when the Mennonite Central Committee [MCC] asked its constituency to evaluate its lifestyle, especially regarding the consumption of food. The books are an attempt to develop a Christian response from within the Anabaptist tradition to the crises around food and energy supplies, especially their unequal distribution, coupled with the West's overconsumption of them. Summed up, they are an exhortation to experience "more" of reality by using "less" of natural resources, and a guide to those who experience the "holy frustration" of wanting this but don't know how to do it. More-with-Less has been enormously popular and influential, well beyond the confines of the Mennonite denomination. Both books resonate strongly with many who have a sense of malaise in the face of an increasingly technological society, the lack of meaning, and global injustices.

When taking up either of these two books people might think that they have opened an interesting organic cookbook or an exhortation about living more simply and naturally. Not so. In addition to political and economic calls-to-action, well beyond the change of personal cooking and eating habits, it is clear that we are dealing with nothing less than a theology. In Living More with Less, Melinda Berry, one of the section contributors, writes:

> A leap from the five standards to a theology is really a small step.... A more-with-less theology, then, is the way we verbalize the connections we make between

> God's unified presence in the universe and our response to God.... More-with-less theology gives special attention to the ways that economic patterns and systems help or hurt this response to God and all that is around us. (36)

More-with-Less

Longacre's first 'statement' (as she calls it) is a cookbook wherein she attempts to show people how to use foodstuffs that are natural and nutritious, rely on simple, readily available food staples, and use ingredients that do not stress the global environment. The recipes were culled from Mennonite and Brethren periodicals in the 1970's which were then tested by home economists, and finally compiled into book form. It is an excellent resource that could be a substantial addition to any household. (We are on our third copy.) The book deals with the major food categories: 1) Yeast and Quick Breads; 2) Beans, Soybeans and Lentils; 3) Gardening and Preserving, etc. Each of the chapters begins with a thought-provoking essay which helps to re-orient the reader's thinking about that specific category of food in different and sustainable ways. For instance, in the chapter on Meats and Fish, we are encouraged to use less meat by learning to combine smaller quantities of meat with tasteful vegetables. This idea was garnered from the author's stay in Vietnam. It points out that North Americans over-eat protein and that we can easily get our protein from non-animal sources (165). These section-introductions are both practical and challenging to commonly held assumptions.

The cookbook has a real "back-to-the-land" feel to it which includes recipes for making your own soap and sprouting your own sprouts, encouragement to use non-processed foods, suggestions to take up gardening, etc. There are numerous helpful features, such as the "Gather Up The Fragments" section at the end of the chapters which show how to creatively use left-overs; a several-pages long chart that lists foods, their average serving sizes, the calories consumed, and ANDI scores (Aggregate Nutrient Density Index); and helpful conversion tables. In addition, time-saving recipes are clearly marked for busy cooks. Finally, the back index is excellent, enabling one to find recipes easily.

We were thrilled at the help this book gave us in the early years of our marriage—particularly as it helped us not only have good, healthy meals, but also eat more economically. Using More-with-Less, we had a sense that we were regaining some control over our relationship with food, and the global environment.

That said, the un-nuanced theme of "taking control," featured only subtly in More-

with-Less, seemed already to be a willing servant of the very logic which had arguably contributed, at least in part, to the problem that inspired the cookbook in the first place: a distorted relation to nature. Wishing, above all, to address world food shortages, the book lists overpopulation among the three major contributing factors (19). And, lamenting "snail-paced family planning programs" (24), Longacre advocates for "family planning programs around the world" as a solution to world hunger. Joining in what had become the mantra of the time—that children were the reason for global problems—this "cause" is simply taken as fact. (We note here that in 2016, the United Nations World Food Program stated that the world produces enough food for the world's 7 billion people and that one third of all food produced is never consumed.)

Indeed, the MCC has been increasingly moving in a direction which "would probably have perplexed its founders in the 1920s," as the professor of political science John Redekop noted. In its interest in influencing political outcomes by providing solutions to global problems, above all the world's food crisis, the MCC listed as its number one priority: "broadening and strengthening rural development and family planning programs in developing countries." Tragically, Mennonites take extraordinary measures to ensure that poor countries develop a stringent contraceptive culture. The MCC Report of 1981 states that,

> MCC with the government of Bangladesh jointly provided sterilization services to the people in the Saidpur community. The MCC Noakhali Family Planning Project… has the following as its objectives: to achieve a contraception acceptance rate of 33% and a 20% decrease in the prevalence of pregnancy…an extensive field worker and clinic system has been developed. There are a total of 12 female and 12 male field workers. Family planning service delivery continues to be a major part of the project. Oral contraceptives, Emko foam and condoms are delivered to clients at home. Depo-Provera injections are provided at subcenters and mobile clinics. IUDs are inserted at subcenters.

The embrace of contraception by the author can be found more explicitly in her second book where she brings forward two personal witnesses. The first significantly reduces openness to procreation:

> Years ago I wanted to have four of my own [children]. But because ours is a different world from that of our parents, my wife and I decided to stop at two. We wanted to use the world's limited resources wisely… every North American baby born claims 25 per cent more of the world's resources than a baby born in India.

> Since our Christian ideas call us to share equally, our decisions concerning the size of our families are important. (165)

An earlier witness considers intentionally circumventing procreation altogether:

> Barb and I decided to adopt children rather than have a biological family. In our world of limited resources, many children exist who are receiving inadequate care… we believe that having biological children would betray homeless children worldwide… We do not feel all should agree with us. (275‑76)[i]

Given the fact that some contraceptives act as abortifacients and are, of course, in every case, a disregard for the natural unity of the unitive and the procreative dimensions of sexual relations, it is difficult to see how these forms of "taking control" offer an integral Christian response to a crisis which, again, was arguably a symptom of the same form of "control": a perverse relationship to nature itself and a rejection of the will of the Creator. Then too, one wonders if these books aren't assuming a starting point that dominates much of the environmental movement, but which is not Christian: the idea of two competing spheres which forces a (false) choice between, on the one hand, the stewardship of the natural order or, on the other hand, the procreation of a human being made in the image of God. It is hard not to wonder if the proposed "solution" doesn't shift the moral energy away from where it is most needed, especially in the West: less consumption of disposable goods.

Thus, while More-with-Less does provide challenging commentary on how we think about food and eating, and the use and distribution of resources, one has to wonder why there is such a rigorous embrace of principles that contradict the reverence for the life and the created natural order that Mennonites claim to serve.

Living More with Less

A few years after More-with-Less, and having sold nearly 200,000 copies, Doris Longacre thought the time was ripe to "make another statement" (LMWL, 19). This time the theme went beyond food issues and attempted to help North American Christians become better stewards of all of God's resources and, thereby, "live more interdependently with the poor" (21). In both books the idea was that more-with-less meant that "by using less we actually gain more for ourselves" (29). There are five "life standards" by which to judge whether or not one is "living more interdependently with the poor":

• The first standard of Living More with Less is: do justice. The concern here is that we never buy or use anything again "without thinking of the poor" (42). LMWL sees the interconnection between all people living on the earth—this, of course necessitates a moral response, especially from those living in the West. However, the book warns against simplistic "solutions" and sentiments to a complex issue. Of course LMWL is a sequel to a cookbook promoting individual responses which "offer a realistic place to start" (43). However, it is also clear that this is not enough. Longacre's bottom line is that "solutions for their needs [those of the poor and the hungry] will come primarily through economic and political change" (43). And it is clear that for Longacre the desired political change is meant to come from the West, on the assumption that the problems being addressed have been wrought by the West. As one contributor to the book wrote, "superpowers continue to impose their hegemony over other people" (41).

• The second standard is: learn from the world community. Here, the 'living-more-with-less' movement is at its best as it takes seriously the life experiences of all people and encourages the sharing of ideas and concerns, especially those coming from poorer countries. As is noted: "Many of the world's poor survived for thousands of years with none of our technology. That feat takes wisdom worth learning about." Unfortunately, though, this section comes across simply as a litany of condemnations against North American lifestyles without due recognition of the advances that the West has contributed, such as life expectancy and general standard of living. Nor does it take into account the fundamental problems in other countries, such as religious and political tensions, lack of hygiene and medicine, etc. Such a critique of American culture needs to be more nuanced and root evils examined along with the positive contributions.

• The third standard is: nurturing people, "[n]urturing including all actions that bring others to this full life and growth in the kingdom of God" (61). The contrast Longacre makes here is between nurture and exploitation. As Wendell Berry understands it, "the standard of the exploiter is efficiency; the standard of the nurturer is care" (61).

• The fourth standard is: cherish the natural order, which seeks to make us aware of our relationship to creation. The criticism which is rightly made by LMWL is that instead of working with nature, we have sought to dominate and exploit it. Longacre writes: "Today we own the machines for full-scale plunder of our environment. For our future we need a modern 'organic technology.' We need a blend between the peasant's ecological skill and our contemporary knowledge of what is possible" (72).

This is good advice.

• The fifth standard is: non-conform freely. The logic here comes from Paul's admonition in Romans 12: "do not be conformed to this world." Longacre explains the necessity of this non-conforming to the Christian witness: "[The church] must seek for values and norms not shared by society. In short, it will either recover the Christian doctrine of non-conformity or cease to have any authentic Christian voice" (80). Key to this non-conforming for LMWL is the need "to appreciate the freedom of not being enslaved to material things" (81). Longacre notes how much we are brainwashed on a daily basis through commercial advertisements which are "equal, if not more powerful than, the political posters and slogans of totalitarian governments" (81). She juxtaposes the choice to become mastered by money and materialism alongside of the choice to live in simplicity which is "a narrow road of self-discipline" (82). One way of combating the insistent demands of modernity to have that which is bigger and better is "building a common life" which is seen as "a solution to personal greed (that) is an old and well-tested practice" (85). As with the other standards, the call to non-conformity is an important and indeed prophetic challenge that needs to be heeded. However, as with the other standards, the critical question becomes what principles inform the contents of this standard. What are the criteria for non-conformity? Here, again, we note the MCC's lock-step conformity with one of the most egregious forms of environmental degradation in the very first environment, the womb. Its promotion of sterilization and pharmaceutical birth control is hardly countercultural! Then too, there are other hints at "non-conformist" conformity with the spirit of the age, such us gender-neutral language for "Godself" (90).

Conclusion

As a family, we have used the More-with-Less Cookbook for years. A number of its recipes are part of our family culture. (Shoo-fly pie is incredible!) We have composted for years, have a small garden, made and used cloth diapers for all of our children. (That's a real test of commitment to ecology!) My wife has made our own jam, ground wheat berries to make flour to make our own bread. I have done the house carpentry and repairs since we were married, etc. We do this simply because it makes sense to eat good food that is as close to nature as possible, and to care for God's creation in sensible ways. We think such practical things work with the nature God has given us and therefore must be good for both us and for the world. Our family has benefited, therefore, from much of the more-with-less philosophy, including its ideas for living simply, saving energy, and, of course, growing and making food. For this I am thankful. But there are underlying currents—not always explicit—which appear to

come from worldviews antithetical to the Biblical one the authors purport to have, the one which assumes competing spheres (natural and human), and which is driven more by emergencies—real and perceived—than by a correct relation to nature, both human and non-human. When the proper relation of man to nature is no longer the criterion of stewardship, then stewardship itself becomes a form of mastery.

These two books taken together could almost have been a prophetic challenge to our society. But unfortunately at critical points they simply buy into the zeitgeist of modernity. The cookbook (More-with-Less) does this much less so and by itself is worthwhile to have as a food preparation resource on many levels. Living-More-with-Less, while providing five excellent (and indeed prophetic) standards of living as developed by Longacre, unfortunately becomes entangled uncritically with modern ideologies. The preface to the new edition of LMWL speaks of allowing "the voices form the past and from the present to merge into a great cloud of witnesses" (15). While there is much good in these books, there is also much which only echoes the value of a fallen world, at times pitting itself against life and the created order. These books are full of many witnesses, but about what are they ultimately witnesses of? I would propose that our great need to-day is a return to the Biblical basis of all genuine stewardship: the position of creaturely humility before God who is Father and Creator.

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[i] This witness was only part of the first edition of the cookbook and it was this testimony that alerted us [the reviewer and his wife] early on that there was something seriously wrong with More-with-Less's worldview.

Keep reading! Click here for a review of Masanobu Fukuoka's The One-Straw Revolution.

Does Humanity Know Nothing At All?

MICHAEL CAMACHO

Fukuoka, Masanobu, The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming (NYRB Classics, 2009).

The title of this book can be misleading. "Revolution" calls to mind an uprising, an overthrow, a call to action. But the author of this little treatise on "do-nothing" farming makes clear that what is needful today, in the face of unbarred activism and ceaseless striving for "progress," is to "bring about a 'movement' not to bring anything about" (159).

This epitomizes in many ways the core of Masanobu Fukuoka's thought, in all its paradox and, perhaps especially to us Western readers, all its apparent passivity: man's task in this world is precisely not to act. This insight came to Fukuoka in a flash, following an acute illness as a young man that brought him near the brink of death. The 24 year old plant pathologist, trained in all the rigors of modern science, had spent his days laboring over microscopes and his nights "fooling around." And then, all at once, he woke up. Like a second Siddhartha, he came to consciousness—literally and figuratively—beneath a tree, struck with the sudden realization that "all human understanding and effort are of no account" (4). The following 70+ years of his life spent as a farmer were merely an attempt, as he put it, "to give my thoughts a form," to incarnate them in a life, and so to see if they were true. "All I have been doing, farming out here in the country, is trying to show that humanity knows nothing" (19).

Rather than dismiss this bizarre claim out of hand—humanity knows nothing? nothing at all?—we would do well first to try to understand it. Fukuoka's insight begins to take on light when we situate it in terms of the center of things, as he understands it, which is not man but nature. "Nature" here is not simply the biological or the non-human—or perhaps, in the context of food and farming, the "non-processed" (the author has some pointed remarks on the way in which everyone is in favor of "natural food" today, without once stopping to ask what nature itself is).

Nature, for Fukuoka, is "the unmoving and unchanging center," "the non-moving point of origin," "the source of things." It bears a certain distant resemblance to T.S. Eliot's "still point of the turning world." To the extent that we human beings separate ourselves from nature (which, for Fukuoka, usually happens when we think we are closest to grasping it in thought), we spin off into darkness and ignorance. If, instead, we elect to abandon our "human will" and simply follow nature, allowing it to guide us rather than us trying to guide it, nature will respond by providing everything. "Serve nature and all is well. Farming used to be sacred work" (113).

A deep, almost unconscious religiosity and reverence run through Fukuoka's work, and life. The author is, by his own confession, not particularly concerned to attach himself to any "religious group," and at times certain tensions, if not outright contradictions, emerge in the underlying principles of his worldview. Still, on the whole, Fukuoka's outlook seems fairly close to traditional Taoism, and Fukuoka himself seems representative of an earnest, Eastern homo religiosus. Nature is eternal, not in time but in being. It precedes us, ontologically. All that we have comes forth from its hands. All that we do should be done in its light. Nature, in other words, is in some ways—speaking roughly, and passing over significant differences—identified with the one we call "God": not as transcendent Creator (which makes a difference!), but as immanent principle operative in all things.

This is why, despite Fukuoka's strident claims that man knows nothing—a polemic that would seem better directed against the piecemeal, instrumentalizing logic of the modern (scientific) intellect than against human knowledge as such—, the whole of Fukuoka's life and work is premised on seeing nature, on carefully attending to it, on striving to catch sight of the "natural pattern." Likewise, his radical call for man to "do nothing" is in fact at root a call for man to serve nature, to live attuned to it, rather than to manipulate, impose and dominate it from without.

Fukuoka offers two recurring models of what it means to "do nothing." First, there are the animals, for whom it is enough to eat, sleep and play. They inhabit a world of undivided reality, rather than the dividing—that is, abstracting and reducing—world of intellect. (The author differentiates the distinguishing and the non-distinguishing intellect, which are roughly comparable to ratio and intellectus, although with a negative and positive connotation, respectively. Perhaps a more apt analogy is Hegel's Verstand and Vernunft.) Second, there are children, who "see without thinking, straight and clear" (25). They apprehend without trying to analyze or categorize. "Just playing or doing nothing, children are happy. A discriminating adult decides what will make him happy. He conditions his taste to what he thinks will taste good"—a cup of

instant noodles from the vending machine, for example (137). “Originally,” however, “human beings had no purpose”—no purpose, that is, determined by volitional choice or striving. “Now, dreaming up some purpose or other, they struggle trying to find the meaning of life.” But this is the wrong question. “You would do well to ask the children whether or not a life without purpose is meaningless” (163).

If I have devoted so much space to Fukuoka’s fundamental worldview, this is precisely because it is so fundamental. Without understanding this, one cannot really understand what he means by “natural farming.” It won’t do, in other words, simply to leave to one side the author’s “philosophical-religious” views, as curious but ultimately unimportant, in order to focus on the “concrete” and “practical” effects he had on food and farming. This would be to miss entirely the point of his “revolution.” No: anything he did, and any wider effect he had, flows from, and is internally informed by, his principles.

It is not surprising that farming, for Fukuoka, is not in the first place a matter of technique, but of outlook or philosophy. What does it mean to farm? What makes farming natural? What is man’s proper place vis-à-vis nature? It is part of the inner telos of farming to try to answer such questions, by learning to see the world rightly. “The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings”—human beings, that is, who know their place in nature and who see nature for what it is (119). It is entirely possible to make use of “natural farming” techniques while remaining stuck within a “distinguishing,” utilitarian mindset. “Unless people become natural people, there can be neither natural farming nor natural food” (147).

The principles of natural farming can be articulated easily enough. As Fukuoka puts it, the method he practices is more of a non-method: to shepherd nature in such a way that you allow nature itself to work. The point is to step back, to undo any damage or disorder caused by man, to restore nature to itself by stripping off unnecessary accretions. It is telling that the principles Fukuoka advocates all take a negative form: no cultivation of the soil, no chemical fertilizers, no weeding or herbicides, no dependence on chemicals.

Particularly striking, from a farming perspective, is the author’s emphasis on not plowing or cultivating the land (a practice which, since the book was written some 40 years ago, has become common place, even in conventional farming in the United States). Farmers plow in order to prepare soil to receive the seed: to make sure the seed does not get eaten or washed away, to uproot weeds in order to make space for

the plant-to-be, and to aerate the soil and work in plant matter present on the surface of the ground. But chance seeds which fall and sprout in a natural, non-cultivated field do not fall on plowed soil. In keeping with his vision of things, Fukuoka sought to farm in this way. He came to see, in fact, that plowing is not only unnecessary, but that it in fact weakens crops. In addition to creating extra work (which today means extra fuel and emissions), and in addition to the massive soil erosion that can result, plowing and tilling provide a kind of artificial environment of loosened topsoil for the young plant which does not help it to root well and deeply.

As Fukuoka sees it, the earth, if properly cared for and allowed to return to its natural state, can better cultivate itself than we can cultivate it, through the activity of microorganisms, worms, small animals, and the penetration of plant roots. Left to themselves—which means, significantly, not simply abandoned, but judiciously guided so as to achieve and maintain their proper balance—the plant and animal communities naturally present in any field will keep the soil healthy and fertile. Plowing and tilling disrupt these communities, as do, to a much greater extent, chemical herbicides and fertilizers.

Fukuoka's method is also notable for emphasizing the need to control weeds, rather than wholly eliminate them. He achieves this through the growth of companion ground cover, and by mulching the ground with last year's straw. Other plants are thus allowed to grow up together with the planted seeds. In addition to reducing pests, which are more likely to devastate a monocrop that stands alone in the field and makes of itself an easy target, the co-growing of various non-harvested plants provides natural nutrients to the planted crops (what Fukuoka calls "green manure"). The weeds and mulched straw also help hide newly sown seeds from being eaten by the birds.

How is it possible to avoid pests without the use of pesticides? Fukuoka noticed that many plants suffer disease and insect damage because they are already weak: either because their roots are not strong (due to "unnatural" plowing, as well as unnecessary irrigation on the part of the famer, both of which cause shallow roots because the plant does not have to work as hard); or because the seed variety has been "improved" for greater yield, which often makes it less hardy; or because the seed is planted in an unsuitable climate or at the wrong time. Many other modern farming practices—the use of chemicals, the indiscriminate clearing of land—serve to wipe out pests' natural predators. The best way to prevent disease and insect damage is simply to grow the right vegetables at the right time in healthy soil.

Fukuoka sees our current dependence on insecticides, herbicides and fertilizers as an instance of a much larger pattern: we resort to "technological" solutions to problems that are themselves caused by our use of technology, or more generally, by our technological (controlling, abstract, "discriminating") mindset. The author compares this to a man who breaks the tiles of his own roof: the roof leaks, he gets wet, and sets about to fix a problem that he himself created. He gives the example of a Japanese engineer who, in response to high levels of pollution in Japan's in-land sea, proposed building an enormous pipeline in order to pump fresh water overland from the Pacific Ocean. Such an unthinking, reactionary response is based on far too narrow an understanding of what is wrong. "Until the modern faith in big technological solutions can be overturned, pollution will only get worse" (84).

In farming contexts, a technological mindset often goes hand-in-hand with a profit-centered, "agribusiness" approach. The governing criteria become efficiency and productivity—how much one can make, how cheaply and easily one can make it—rather than the concrete, well-defined good of the food and field before you. "To be worried about making money, expanding, developing, growing cash crops and shipping them out is not the way of the farmer," but the way of the manufacturer. "To be here, caring for a small field, in full possession of the freedom and plenitude of each day, every day—this must have been the original way of agriculture" (111–12).

It is no surprise that food that is "manufactured," rather than grown, tastes poor. A chicken that never sees the light of day, raised in a confined environment with hundreds of other chickens (because it is "more efficient"), fed artificial, nutrient-enriched feed (because it makes the chicken "more productive"), will inevitably produce eggs inferior to those of a chicken allowed to forage freely, according to its own inner nature and instincts. A commercial chicken's egg "is not a product of nature but a man-made synthetic in the shape of an egg," just as commercial vegetables, increasingly grown in hothouses out of season in order to meet consumer demand, are nothing but "a watery chemical concoction of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potash, with a little help from the seed. And that is just how they taste" (94).

Food and farming are two sides of the same coin. If farmers grow foods out of season, or use a coloring agent, or apply artificial sweeteners or paraffin wax, this is in response to consumer's preferences and buying habits. And the average eater today has truly become a consumer, just as the farmer has become a manufacturer. We no longer care—perhaps we no longer even know—what tastes good; we care about what is cheapest, and what looks best. We care for size, appearance, convenience, novelty and selection far more than we care for quality. This is what leads farmers to dye beef

and salmon, to bleach and polish eggs, to pick tomatoes while they are green and apply ethylene gas to ripen them in transit. The overall driving factor, of course, at least in the United States, is price: Americans spend less money than any other country in the world on groceries and food eaten at home—on average, a mere 6.5% of total household expenses (in Japan today it is 13.5%, in France 13.6%, in Italy 14.2%).

The question of food brings us back to the question of culture, which is fundamentally the question of man's place in the world. Is it really the case that man can know nothing and do nothing?

Does man have nothing to contribute to nature, nothing that would in the best sense "exceed" nature, not from without but from within? At root, this question is inseparable from the question of what nature itself is. If nature, as Fukuoka thinks, is "the all," which properly and rightfully includes man within it, then it makes no sense to ask if man can "contribute" or "add" to nature: that is already to wrongly distinguish the two. Man has no special standing in himself. Insofar as he stands "beyond" nature, he has already alienated himself from it.

Still, and on Fukuoka's own terms, the image of shepherding or cultivating can be helpful in thinking about what it means to farm, and so, in a more general sense, what it means to act—and what human action might "add" to nature. Human activity, understood as a "shepherding of being," entails, first, seeing what is, and second, fostering what is. Fukuoka's farm, in point of fact, is different from an unkept forest or field. A human intellect capable of receptively grasping the form of things can aid this form in a way that magnifies and furthers it beyond what it would be without the co-working of man. There is an element of simple sophistication in Fukuoka's method: his precise timing of the sowings, his clever use of ground cover, his "random" applications of straw to the fields "every which way," which, unlike a straight and precise application (which serves only to smother the crops, as he learned), insulates and provides compost while allowing new seedlings to sprout through. Just because this approach is free of machines and chemicals does not make it any less the fruit of human intellect—indeed, arguably it makes it more so. Similar to the methods of American farmer Joel Salatin, Fukuoka's approach to farming is at once smart and simple. His solutions to the problems that confront him stem from deep familiarity with the things before him, and from genuine thinking about things before he acts.

John Paul II is well known for his claim that "man is the way of the Church." Fukuoka, on the basis of what is ultimately a reduction of man to man's own reductive idea of knowledge as power, sees no such place for the human being: "It is generally thought

that there is nothing more splendid than human intelligence, that human beings are creatures of special value, and that their creations and accomplishments … are wondrous to behold. … [My thought] was a denial of this" (4–5). In the face of modern anthropocentrism, Fukuoka proclaimed a nature-centrism that would seem scarcely reconcilable with the vision of the Catholic Church. Still, it's clear that what Fukuoka was seeking was a true "return to nature," which, given his understanding of the world, is not so far from a return to something like God. But, without pretending to resolve this difference, we are still left with the question as to which is true: anthropocentrism or theocentrism?

Joseph Ratzinger, in a commentary on Vatican II's Gaudium et spes, provides the key for thinking a way forward: the radical "anthropocentrism" of Christianity, he says, is and must be a radical Christocentrism, which is itself a radical theocentrism: "on the basis of Christ, [the Council] dares to present theology as anthropology, and only becomes radically theological by including man in discourse about God by way of Christ."[i] If the center ("head") of man is Christ, the center of Christ, the Son, is God the Father (1 Cor 11:3). In the end, on a Catholic understanding, Christ, and every human person in him, offers himself and the world to the Father in a "cosmic liturgy" of praise. Paradoxically, the world, like Christ himself, has its center beyond itself.

For the Catholic, man is the priest of the world, the one who consciously knows, as Fukuoka puts it, that "human life is not sustained by its own power," that "food is a gift of heaven. People do not create foods from nature; heaven bestows them" (143). Man is thus the one who alone in the world can fully receive the gifts of heaven. But heaven gives still more than this. On a Catholic understanding, God gives man himself a share in the exchange of gifts: not only to receive, but also to give, and to give back. Man has his own "self-standing" in the world, and so is not in any simple way reducible to nature, or to God. But this "distinction" need not be, contra Fukuoka, a "separation," a spinning off from the center of things. Rather, it is the possibility of a real co-operation and co-working. Man works with nature. If, as Fukuoka says, the relationship between man and nature is like a marriage, then the fruit of their co-working rightly exceeds them both. But this is indeed to act, to "bring something about." This is true creativity.

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[i] Joseph Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, vol. 5, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 159.

Keep reading! Click here for a review of Catherine de Hueck Doherty’s Apostolic Farming.

Care of the Earth, Care of the Soul

CONOR B. DUGAN

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Apostolic Farming: Healing the Earth (2nd ed.) (Madonna House Publications, 1991).

In Apostolic Farming: Healing the Earth, Servant of God Catherine Doherty, in her punchy and aphoristic manner, sketches a vision of farming as a path to holiness. Doherty, the foundress of the Madonna House community of lay men and women and priests, calls this path "apostolic farming." It involves understanding nature as created, the earth as given, and a quiet humility that sees farming as a way of communing with God. While the book is hardly systematic, it offers nuggets and gems that can serve as a basis for deeper reflection about what true Christian farming should look like. Indeed, Doherty's thoughts were eminently practical; they translated into concrete action in the form of a farm, St. Benedict Acres, at Madonna House and then later farming activities at other Madonna House apostolates.

Doherty was born in Russia, and she dedicates the first pages of her book to memories of her family's Russian farm. The farm, which had been in her family since the twelfth century, taught her much. For instance, she recounts the bearded farm superintendent whose way of talking of the land made one think that "he was talking of a person" (15). He explained to Doherty's father that their field was sick because they had failed to "put back into it what we had taken away from it" (15). From this, Doherty gleans the "law of soil fertility," which she will employ the rest of her life: "you must put back what you take away" (16). Ultimately, Doherty learned in Russia that farming must be an act of love and a way of life—a Christian way of life. She writes that in Russia "the farmer was called Krestianin, which simply means 'Christian'" (26). She states that this is right because "farming should be the epitome of a Christian" (26).

These Russian lessons become the basis for the way of life Doherty establishes in Combermere, Ontario, where Madonna House is located. Establishing St. Benedict's Acres, as part of her apostolate, is the natural fruition of Christian love: "[W]hoever is

in love with God must incarnate or live out their love immediately" (29). She terms the sort of farming they engage in as apostolic farming because an apostle is "one who is sent on a special mission" (35). Apostolic farming, then, is farming "to spread the Good News by bringing God to everyone who sees or hears of our farm. We bring the Good News by living the gospel, and there is no better place to live the gospel than on a farm" (35).

Apostolic farming necessitates a closeness to and tenderness for the land and animals. The apostolic farmer is "one who seeks to make a farm richly productive by the simplest means and the least possible amount of money" (39). Apostolic farming also requires living in the Truth. Doherty eschews the factory and chemical-based farming that have characterized the modern age. This sort of farming is a kind of "deception" that "brings sickness, not only of the body . . . but also of soul and mind" (66). A true farmer cannot be deceptive. Doherty writes that it is much "better . . . to have fewer eggs and be truthful than to have more and be liars before God" (66). By living out the original plan for creation in Genesis, a farmer preserves and restores rather than pollutes. By living the truth of God's creative order, an apostolic farmer helps to restore God's plan and helps to draw men and women to Christ. This is the vision of farming that Doherty bequeathed to Madonna House and her followers.

The final section of the book includes reflections from Madonna House farmers—the men and women who have tilled the Combermere fields and tried to live out Doherty's vision of apostolic farming. They aren't romantics. They tell of the struggles and hurdles they have faced in attempting to live out Christian farming. They recount June frosts and poor soil, swampy land and the trial and error whose fruit has been wisdom and knowledge regarding the land. Despite the challenges and the steep learning curve, one of the Madonna House farmers writes that for him "farming is mainly a work of the heart" and that farming is ultimately a "work of love" (82).These farmers recognize that their lives aren't their own and that by farming in the way sketched out by Doherty, Christ comes alive within them. In following the little way articulated by Doherty, the Madonna House farmers, in her words, "show the face of God in little things" (46) and help to restore all things in Christ.

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Keep reading! Click here for a review of Joseph Pearce's Small is Still Beautiful.

The Revolutionary Role of the Family

MICHAEL ROESCH

Pearce, Joseph, Small is Still Beautiful: Economics as if Families Mattered (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006).

More than thirty years after Small is Beautiful, Joseph Pearce's Small is Still Beautiful is at once an introduction, a commentary and an update to E. F. Schumacher's work. While much has changed in the decades since Schumacher's classic, Pearce demonstrates that his message remains as relevant as ever. Helpfully, Pearce makes plentiful use of quotations from Schumacher, as well as his influences and those influenced by him. Pearce is noted for his literary biographies, and while this work is clearly not biographical in nature, he brings in key aspects of Schumacher's life: from his studies under John Maynard Keynes, to Gandhi and Buddhism, to the Catholic social doctrine that ultimately led to his conversion to Catholicism.

Pearce's book is divided into five parts. "At What Price Growth" focuses on the basic inconsistencies of contemporary economics and the drive toward continual growth. Then, in "Economics and the Soul" he explores the relationship between conventional economics, free trade, and globalism, through to materialism and consumerism. Next, in "Size Matters", he deals with alternatives to economies of scale. "Grounded in the Land" focuses on the relationship between economics, the environment, agriculture, and technology. Finally, "Living Legacy" looks at the practicalities of a human-scale economy, and what steps need to be taken to get there. A recurring theme in Pearce's book is that, while the contemporary drive toward "giantism" provides a surface appearance of prosperity for those who reap its benefits, it also nicks away at the virtues and cultural dispositions needed to undergird society itself.

Agriculture and the environment take on a special significance for Pearce, as areas where the giantist economy is especially taxing, and this runs throughout the book, not just the chapters specifically dedicated to these topics. Due to the endless drive for more efficient technology that has exploded since Schumacher's time, the

environmental effects (and, in turn, the effects on rural parts of poorer countries) have become more pertinent to the economic discussion. This is probably most clear in Pearce's sharp criticism of the failure of the United States to ratify the Kyoto treaty, and the overall stance of the US as the largest consumer and polluter in the world. That Pearce continues Schumacher's criticism of the United States in the first part of his book makes this a tough read, even for a sympathetic American. For the reality of the situation is that we in the US are accustomed to reaping the material benefits of a global economy which favors giantism. But, as Pearce argues, reality is quickly becoming a facade: "Reality is being replaced by virtual reality. The real is being sacrificed to the sub-real. How can humanity address the urgent problems confronting the real world when it is being simultaneously stimulated and stupefied by electronic fantasies?" (xvii).

When it comes to the environment and usage of land, Pearce echoes Schumacher's threefold hierarchy, emphasizing health, beauty, and permanence: "[Agriculture] should keep us in touch with living nature, of which we are and remain a highly vulnerable part; it should provide expression for our creativity, enabling us to ennoble our wider habitat; and it should bring forth the foodstuffs and other materials needed for a becoming existence" (166). In Schumacher's view, the first two goals should naturally lead to the third result. The problem with today's approach to agriculture and technology is that it places significance only on the productive aspect, which causes both the environment and humanity to suffer. More and more people turn away from the land to move to the cities in order to find employment (while replacing the natural beauty they have lost with artificial leisure activities). Meanwhile the rich flee to the suburbs, or even further out into the country, leaving greater poverty behind them. Of course, compounding this human problem are the greater effects that this emphasis has on the land itself. Pearce discusses the harmful effects of the overuse of chemicals and antibiotics in farming, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and other technologies that are having significant impacts on both plant and animal life. Pearce uses the effects on farmland bird and butterfly populations as examples: now we might add the mysterious decline of bees as an even more troubling effect.

Pearce also points to some positive signs that have emerged in the decades since the publication of Small is Beautiful, particularly in the chapters dedicated to "small beer," organic farming, and cooperatives. Indeed, the proliferation of micro-breweries—and now nano-breweries, and smaller producers of wine, cider, mead and pretty much any sort of alcohol—has grown at an even faster pace in the ten years since Pearce was

writing: these have not only exploded in the Great Britain of Pearce and Schumacher's focus, but also in the US. The same holds true for the organic farming movement. Pearce notes that, at its then-current pace, 30% of agricultural land in Europe would have been farmed organically by 2010 (205). While that plateau may not have been reached and there remains a long way to go where both business and government are concerned (issues such as labeling and regulation of GMOs come to mind), the demand for organic goods has also grown in the United States, with most major supermarkets now stocking organic lines.

One of the most curious things about Small is Still Beautiful is that Pearce's subtitle is "Economics as if Families Mattered," in homage to Schumacher's "Economics as if People Mattered." This is an interesting change because, apart from a brief discussion in the introduction, Pearce rarely mentions the family, and on a cursory reading there is no discernible reason why his emphases would amount to a more familial focus than Schumacher's original work. I believe that the concluding chapters may shed some light on this. Pearce considers a key element to recovery from giantism to be an emphasis on philosophy. He writes that Schumacher criticized the modern study of science as "know-how" without the benefit of wisdom, leading us into the errors of economic Darwinism (enshrined in different ways in both Marxism and capitalism), relativism, and positivism—all ultimately variations on the sort of self-centeredness that has caused the problems discussed. Pearce's concluding chapter is a discussion of the virtues needed to combat this selfish materialism.

The surest antidote to this selfishness and the best source for the needed wisdom to grow in these virtues surely lies with the family. If we assume that Pearce's audience is of a more religious and traditional bent, which has nonetheless, for a variety of reasons, been duped into the mentality of giantism, then the family may be precisely the avenue which will give us the courage to fight for these issues. There is a long list of issues for which traditional Christians are on the front lines in the name of human dignity and the family. As Pearce puts it, "Families teach us to be selfless and to sacrifice ourselves for others. It is these very virtues that are necessary for the practice of the economic and political virtues advocated in [Schumacher's] work" (xvi). The centrality of the family thus seems crucial to the renewal of the movement in favor of the small and beautiful.

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Keep reading! Click here for a review of Wendell Berry's A World Lost.

Firmly Rooted in One's Place

JESSE STRAIGHT

Berry, Wendell, A World Lost: A Novel (Counterpoint, 2008).

I rolled my eyes at Wendell Berry's A World Lost—before I read it. It was 2005, I was 23, I had only heard bits and pieces about Berry, and a friend sent a copy to my wife, Liz—the kind of friend who would send the kind of books that elicit eye-rolling. She read it and said I really should. I reluctantly did. And I loved it. In the next year, I greedily devoured every bit of fiction Berry had ever published, sometimes at stop lights while driving. At the time, I was a conventional Protestant, suburban-raised 23-year-old, just married, and just graduated from UVA. Like many recent grads, I was wringing my hands about the weighty decision facing me: What should I do with my life? Berry played a critical part in my vocational decision. I am now the farmer and owner of Whiffletree Farm where we raise and sell chickens, eggs, turkey, pork, and beef in my hometown of Warrenton, Virginia—all raised on fresh pasture, non-GMO feed, no antibiotics, no chemicals, no hormones, no chemical wormers, and our beef is 100% grass-fed. Liz and I, who both came into the Catholic Church in 2009, have 5 kids under 8 and farming is our only livelihood. A story worthy of some eye-rolling!

What was it about A World Lost that so affected my undisposed, 23-year-old self? The story is told from the perspective of 9-year-old Andy Catlett. The immediate focal point of the story is the tragic loss of Andy's beloved and bedeviled and winsome Uncle Andrew, his namesake and hero. Alongside this loss is the parallel theme of Andrew's struggle to come to know the whole, his love for the whole, and his suffering for the whole. What I mean by this is that Andy has been born into an integrated life—a life that is unusual and under attack in our contemporary context. His was a life rooted in his rural, agricultural hometown, with extended family, family friends, worked land, animals, farm, home, neighbors, and future all integrated into one comingling whole. This is in dramatic contrast to the structure of modern life which disintegrates these elements. With an ever-more-transient workforce, people are rootless, separated from family and place. Home has become a shell of its true self. Rather than a place for the production of good and beautiful things, it is merely a place where the family returns

to consume, indulge, and sleep. School is outsourced, children are outsourced, almost all of true “homemaking” is outsourced. Families, extended families, family friends, and people and their hometowns are separated from each other. Coming of age before these developments have taken hold, Andy comes to know and more fully appreciate the wholeness of his life, while he is also coming to know the forces that might pull it apart. His is a beautiful, integrated world (though with its inherent flaws, like un-ignorable family members who are destroying themselves), that is under attack by these modern forces that fragment the most important parts of lives like his. “I saw how beautiful the field was, how beautiful our work was. And it came to me all in a feeling how everything fitted together, the place and ourselves and the animals and the tools, and how the sky held us” (139).

Why did this so resonate with me? Well, of course, I was a hand-wringing idealist—again, worthy of a hearty eye roll. And in being so, I longed for this integrated life, even if I could not articulate it very well at the time. I knew I did not just want to endure an unsatisfying job to pay the bills, with shallow connections to the people and places that constituted my every day. I had been raised well enough to know that God had made the world for love and He had made it whole—where all its parts had a fundamental intimacy. Essentially, nothing was disposable; all was made by God and had its existence by His love. And, thankfully, my upbringing protected me from a cynical despair of participating in that intimacy. I had been given the knowledge that I should find my happiness in a life of love and intimate connection with God and His world. Therefore, I wanted to do some good in the world appropriate to my context, gifts, and privileges. And I wanted all the parts of my life to so overlap that they—much like Andy Catlett’s—all became an intermingled whole. Not school over here, work over there, church over here, children over there, home over here, wife over there, hometown back there, extended family over there, family friends back there, neighbors over there, old people over there, young people in there, etc. Historically, geographically, socially, necessarily--all intermingled and inherently concerned with each other!

So you see, Berry spoke about the things for which I longed. The characters of A World Lost desperately care about this life I wanted—their anti-modern, small town, rural, rooted life of theirs. They enjoy it. They work hard for it. The pass it down for it to live on. They suffer dearly for its losses and tragedies. And in my reading, their enjoyment is utterly unassailable and their work is compellingly noble and their suffering is admirably honorable. Berry spoke of a dream I found worthy to dream. Berry’s Wheeler Catlett (Andy’s father) had a “dream bound to sustain damage and to cause

pain, and yet he never gave it up, and he passed it on. He dreamed, simply, of a world intact, the family together, the place cared for, and all well" (67).

Jesse Straight is the farmer and owner of Whiffletree Farm in his hometown of Warrenton, Virginia, where he and his family live and sustainably raise and sell chicken, eggs, turkey, pork, and beef.

Keep reading! Click here for a review of Joel Salatin's The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs.

Joel Salatin: Taking the Pro-Life Movement to the Pastures

MICHAEL TAYLOR

Salatin, Joel, The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs: Respecting and Caring for All God's Creation (Faithwords, 2016).

The great Catholic author Flannery O'Connor, who wrote from Andalusia Farm in Milledgeville, Georgia, said that she thought of herself as a "hillbilly Thomist."[i] Joel Salatin, who writes from Polyface Farm in Swoope, Virginia, could easily appropriate that soubriquet, though he never would; he describes himself as a "Christian libertarian environmentalist capitalist lunatic farmer" (xiii).

As an introduction for those who don't know him, the description is dead-on. He is, in a nutshell, the guru of the natural, entrepreneurial approach to farming and raising animals based on pasturing rather than factory-farm containment; on synergistic and symbiotic relationships between soil, grass, animals, and people; on local markets; and on the home-based business side of the multigenerational family farm—a "non-chemical, compost-centric, free-range chicken, homemade raw milk organic-embracing place" (2). He is also a powerful polemicist against excessive government regulation, exploitative food systems, and Leviathan agribusiness. Salatin was brought to the attention of the wider public by Michael Pollan's The Omnivore's Dilemma, and Wendell Berry said that he needs to be read by "everybody interested in the survival of authentic farming and farmers."[ii]

As for the word "Christian" in Salatin's self-description: while the Catholic fiction writer and the Protestant farmer might seem to have little in common (though the fiction writer also raised fowl of various kinds, and the farmer authored ten books, including The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer and Everything I Want to Do is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front), their vocations are strikingly similar. O'Connor began, like Aquinas, with the senses and the concrete, seeking the "transfiguration of the natural," "the sense of mystery deepened by contact with reality, the sense of reality deepened by contact with mystery"[iii]; for Salatin, "the

spiritual mandate to bring glory to God has an object, something physical in which to participate… promoting and protecting the pigness of pigs is the visceral starting point in our mission to the Godness of God—His glory" (32).

Salatin's most recent book, The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs: Respecting and Caring for All God's Creation, sums up much of what was said in his earlier books on the practice and philosophy of food and farming, but is his most overtly theological. The title unconsciously channels Aquinas—on the mysterious and unique essence by which all things are constituted—and three recent popes on the care of creation, but two comments that give Catholic (and Orthodox) readers pause must be dealt with before turning to the book itself.

First, Salatin says that while theologians have written about the stewardship of land and animals, they are lacking when it comes to the Protestant author Francis Schaeffer's question, "How shall we then live?" — that is, the question of practice. But there is a rich history of Catholic work and writing on real-world issues, including agrarian ones, dear to Salatin's heart, from the Distributists and Vincent McNabb to Dorothy Day and Catherine Doherty to the National Catholic Rural Life Conference to the writings of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace on food, farming, genetic modification, deforestation and more—not to mention 15 centuries of monastic farming tradition.

Second, Catholics and the Orthodox, from the very beginning, implicitly and explicitly, through praxis and doctrine, have been sacramental in the sense of employing the physical to make present the spiritual, to meet, as O'Connor put it "the mystery through manners."[iv] Yet Salatin, in the face of a great cloud of witnesses, remarks of Schaeffer that "of all the great Christian apologists he [alone] dared to wrestle with the physical/spiritual connection" (xiv). Salatin sees as "trappings" those realities — "costumes" (his word for liturgical vestments), "pilgrimages," "cathedrals," "icons," "rites," and "sacrament" (173, 221) — that are the very signs of the Catholic and Orthodox insistence on there being no Manichean "conflict between the physical and the spiritual…[but rather] symbiosis between the two" (xv). Of course, individuals of any, or no, faith can lapse into dualism, and we could all be better encouraged to live out the symbiosis. In the end, not only Catholics and Orthodox, but all readers might keep in mind that, by his own admission, his book is "targeted to…[those] Americans who call themselves evangelicals, the religious right" (xiii), and that might be the best explanation for these apparently discordant comments.

The book covers a great many topics. Bookended by an opening biographical chapter

(“Who Am I?”) and a closing clarion (“Altar Call”), it consists of 19 chapters of contrasts: “Biological vs. Mechanical,” “Pattern vs. Caprice”, “Participation vs. Abandonment,” “Freedom vs. Bondage,” etc. Each chapter begins with Biblical quotes, stories, and parables, and then asks and answers a question that exposes the relationship between the spiritual and practical, variations on “How can I participate in food and farming in a way that exhibits the righteously transformative power of spiritual participation?” (82).

So, for example, in “Beauty vs. Ugliness” he asks, “If the hand of the Christian is to touch the world with beautiful artistry that illustrates the creative genius of a magnificent God, what does such a farming and food system look like?” (117), answering that it includes diversity, spontaneity and discovery, and an invitation to beauty. In “Integration vs. Segregation” he asks, “What does an integrated physical life look like that exemplifies an integrated spiritual life?” (107) and answers that integrating plants and animals into our lives “bathes us in object lessons about responsibility, relationship, faithfulness, expectation, perseverance, diligence, and unconditional love” (111). In “Relational vs. Separational” the question is, “If we agree that God wants relationships, both vertically with Him and horizontally with others, what does a farm that exhibits these goals look like?” (186). It would not be, he answers, a person-less industrial or monocrop farm; “by definition, one-dimensional anything is not very relational.... [I]f anything expresses relationships, it’s nature. The complexity, synergy, and symbiosis captivate our attention for lifetimes” (189).

In many ways, the book reads like an implementation plan for much of Pope Francis’s encyclical Laudato Si’—On the Care for Our Common Home. Both are inspired by the same Biblical sources, the same underlying vision of each creature bearing a harmonious message of the greatness of the Creator. The two, despite their wildly differing tones, and despite some great differences, could fruitfully be read together.

Pope Francis’s “Integral Ecology” refers to the integration of human ecology, used by John Paul II and Benedict XVI to include the protection of human life from conception to natural death and everything in between, and natural ecology, the care of God’s gift of the whole created order. Salatin is a sanctity-of-life Christian opposed to abortion and euthanasia, and the care and healing of creation is his stated vocation.

Laudato Si’ draws on the long history of the Catholic critique against mechanical reductionism in general, and that by Romano Guardini against technology in particular. Salatin’s own critique of technology and reductionism runs along parallel tracks; he stands against a “reductionist compartmentalized fragmentized

disconnected democratized individualized systematized parts-oriented culture…great at figuring out the how of things, but not the why" (9). When he rejects "the idea that life is fundamentally mechanical rather than biological… a repair or rework mentality rather than awe and wonder" (224), when he notes that "[i]t's the truth of a beauty that draws people" (128), he could be channeling not only Pope Francis and his predecessors, but Hans Urs von Balthasar and Luigi Giussani, among many others.

Even on more practical grounds there are correspondences. One could draw dozens of parallels between the encyclical (and the writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI) and Salatin on economic issues, on environmental degradation, on the web of relationships between "farmers, consumers, civil authorities, scientists, seed producers, people living near fumigated fields, and others."[v] To take just one example, Pope Francis notes that

> Attempts to resolve all problems through uniform regulations or technical interventions can lead to overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community. New processes taking shape cannot always fit into frameworks imported from outside; they need to be based on the local culture itself.[vi]

Salatin brings this rather dry language to life with his painstakingly detailed and often humorous accounts of his absurd encounters with the government bureaucrats who visit his farm; he rails against blind and counter-productive regulations by distant functionaries, arguing passionately for a Catholic notion of subsidiarity without ever using the term.

In the interest of full disclosure, this reviewer, who is working to implement integral ecology in urban communities through a Catholic understanding of the relation between the person and nature, and who also raises chickens and organic fruits and vegetables, has been immensely enriched by Salatin's books. Especially enlightening is Salatin's view of himself as a "grass farmer" or even a "soil farmer"; he sees soil as a "pulsing, thriving, community of beings (51)" linked at the microscopic level to the level of the grass that thrives on the invisible minerals and organisms to the chickens and cows that eat the grass to the communities that benefit from the farm products.

Salatin compares himself to Queen Esther, standing as a bridge between two worlds. He knows God could save the Jews with or without Esther, but He wanted her to be faithful to her unique position; he also knows that God doesn't need him to "save the

planet" (256). But he "counts it a privilege to bridge the tension between the Christian and the environmentalist" (256). If he sometimes does this with strong or startling language ("greenie weenie commie tree-hugger foolishness" [91]; "Christians marching off to sanctity-of-life rallies send our kids off to college…to go work for multinational corporations dedicated to adulterating God's creation" [68]), and mixing practice with polemics, it is only because, in one of O'Connor's most famous lines: "To the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures."[vii]

Ultimately it comes down to love—of God, of all His creatures, of neighbor:

> My heart breaks for the Christian testimony when we're universally perceived as planet destroyers. My heart breaks for gully-scarred hillsides and farmers struggling with antibiotic-resistant super-bugs and herbicide-induced super weeds. My heart breaks for animals confined in fecal particulate quarters, unable to express even their most rudimentary uniqueness. This is not to replace an evangelistic heart toward the lost. It is to augment it, to put feet and hands on it. And to build God's claim to everything—my soul, my food, my vocation, my farm. Ultimately, they're His. (257)

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[i] Flannery O'Connor, The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979), 81.
[ii] Wendell Berry, "Letter," in Joel Salatin, The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer (Swoope,VA: Polyface Inc., 2010), x.
[iii] Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 79.
[iv] Ibid., 153.
[v] Laudato Si', 135.
[vi] Ibid., 144.
[vii] Mystery and Manners, 34.