



Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance Food for Life Campaign

IN THE BEGINNING

A theological reflection on agro-ecological farming

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***We must pay for the water we drink,
the wood we get must be bought*** (Lamentations 5.4).

In the beginning there was peoples' experience of liberation, collective and personal. God heard the cry of the oppressed and intervened in history, showing the road to freedom, social justice and harmony with all. It took some time for the people of God to put this experience into words and guidance for togetherness. It took more time to understand that the loving and liberating God is the one who gave existence to all things and beings.

If God was mighty to turn the sea into dry land for the afflicted Hebrews to pass, God also deserves to be praised by all nations and nature (Psalms 66; 104). God is the Creator of the garden we live in and are intended to care for. God made the universe and formed humans in God's image to be God's flagpole on earth and to act according to the divine preservative purpose. God's caressing breath into humans' nostrils shows that God's priority is relationship.

God's aim is goodness. All things and beings are very good when linked with God and in harmony with each other, no matter what imperfections they may have. And they are evil when divorced from God and in disharmony with God's creation, no matter how pleasant and perfect they may seem to be. God nourishes humanity, sending sunlight and rain to sustain the just and the unjust (Mathew 5:45). Even if creation is longing and groaning for deliverance, and we with it, the Spirit of God is at our side (Romans 8:19-23). It is not good to be separated from God in this concern of caring and preserving.

Goodness is broken when life is injured. Then the blood of the crushed cries to God from the ground. Noah understood that social and moral iniquity offends the Creator and causes environmental suffering. He developed an original way to save biodiversity. After Noah gave thanks for preservation, God put aside his warrior bow as the rainbow in the sky, promising that although human beings endanger both creation and themselves God will not finally allow creation and its natural order to be overturned or that living creatures be punished for the evil imagination and social chaos of arrogant mankind. Mercy and the sustaining patience of God are experienced in the incomprehensible complexity, bounty and resilience of the natural order in spite of human sin, as long as the earth remains.

However, creation theology alone has not been efficient or sufficient in committing Christianity to protect our planet against despoliation. All too often the violator makes the victim feel guilty for the abuse suffered. In the same manner, in our economic system nature is despised in its dignity, its sanctity, so that endless exploitation of its resources is assumed to be normal and good. When you borrow something you are expected to return it in good condition, but to the planet we return garbage and pollution. Consumerism and waste are applauded and encouraged. Land is depreciated as mere externality of agricultural production, not as mother earth on which all humanity depends. And individual prosperity over against social misery is even distorted as being God's blessing.



The only way to overcome these wrong attitudes and policies is to go back to the primary relationship with God, where we experience liberation and reconciliation with God and creation. God loved the world so much that God sent Jesus to serve and suffer for reconciliation and abundant life, in order that we may learn to love and serve each other (John 13:34). After defeating Satan's temptation, Jesus was in harmony both with God (Angels ministered unto him) and with creation (He was with wild beasts) (Mark 1:13). When we experience that God speaks to us with love and that he suffers when his creatures suffer, we feel challenged and are set free to be God's partners in the project of God's kingdom of social and environmental justice. When we realize the intensity of God's intervention in history we are led to social critique and committed to transformation. Then we struggle against abuse of the innocent and weak, as well as against the system that subjugates everything to market economy, reducing natural patrimonies such as land, water and energy to mere commodities for the benefit of few. We denounce false and monopolistic solutions and commit ourselves to solidarity economy and to healthy farming methods.

For agro-ecology the social and environmental aspects are related. If one does not respect the human being on earth he despises the environment and dehumanizes himself. Thus we take care of the garden because of ourselves, because of the consistency with our humanness, and because of our privileged condition as beloved interlocutors with God. Abundant life is always life shared with others, empowering the impoverished and strengthening the weak, as Jesus did and promised for all. Because to break a bruised reed, to quench a smoldering wick, and to expropriate truth and justice is not only contrary to human nature but primarily contrary to the character of God (Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20).

Thus agro-ecology is not only a sustainable farming method, but also a critique of the prevailing economic system and interests. It is based on free sharing of knowledge and resources, such as traditional seeds, as well as on respectful relationships of gender and age. It acknowledges the damages of the 'Green Revolution' in agriculture worldwide, in which a technology of domination with machinery and agrochemicals destroys traditional farming and biodiversity, pretending higher productivity. And it denounces unsustainable agribusiness of today that forces the citizens to eat 'our daily dose of poison' and that advertises genetic manipulation as a solution for the food crisis.

Regarding productivity, there are many examples of traditional and modern agro-ecological farming with higher yields than those of agrochemical agriculture. People also ignore that agro-ecological food is not only devoid of toxic and cancer-causing substances, but has also a higher nutritional quality.

Brazil's legal definition of healthy food as based on agro-ecology and biodiversity is being more and more accepted, and the movement of agro-ecological farmers and consumers is growing quickly. However, there is a great need for adequate policies to favor agro-ecology and not agri-business, to allow larger contiguous areas free of agro-toxic farms, to favor as much as possible food production and processing on family farms, and to organize exchange and commerce on short routes and on a fair trade basis. This requires both more networking at the grassroots and more pressure on the power structures. Biblical and ethical reflection has to undergird these efforts, since neither the Christian commitment to eco-justice and social equity nor our groaning planet can wait for a 'Rio+40'. In order that the universe may joyfully praise the Creator, we pray (with Psalm 104:30): "Send forth your Spirit, o Lord, and renew the face of the earth!"

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