

# *Food Today*

with Pat Bennett, "Turning Stones into Bread: Developing Synergistic Science/Religion Approaches to the World Food Crisis"; Varadaraja V. Raman, "Food: Its Many Aspects in Science, Religion, and Culture"; A. Whitney Sanford, "Why We Need Religion to Solve the World Food Crisis"; and Steven M. Finn, "Valuing Our Food: Minimizing Waste and Optimizing Resources."

## WHY WE NEED RELIGION TO SOLVE THE WORLD FOOD CRISIS

by A. Whitney Sanford

*Abstract.* Scholars and practitioners addressing the global food crisis have rarely incorporated perspectives from the world's religious traditions. This lacuna appears in multiple dimensions: until recently, environmentalists have tended to ignore food and agriculture; food justice advocates have focused on food quantities, rather than its method of production; and few scholars of religion have considered agriculture. Faith-based perspectives typically emphasize the dignity and sanctity of creation and offer holistic frameworks that integrate equity, economic, and environmental concerns, often called the three legs of sustainability. Faith-based perspectives can provide new paradigms through which to assess food, consumption, and production and the attendant social relations; assess our scientific, economic, and social approaches; and acknowledge the moral and religious dimensions of the world food crisis.

*Keywords:* agriculture; Buddhism; Christianity; ethics; food; meat; religion; social justice; sustainability

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Picture yourself walking through a typical supermarket in the United States, say a Publix, Kroger, or Pathmark. Piles of unblemished fruits and vegetables and fully stocked trays of sushi—even at midnight—are likely sights. Then there's the chip aisle—new flavors of pretzels and Doritos offer the illusion of choice and variety. The overflowing shelves and pristine aisles of our supermarkets, however, belie an uncomfortable reality: we face a global food crisis. Our choices about what we eat and how we grow our food are not sustainable nor are they equitable. And by us, I mean those of us who populate the global North and have the means to make

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choices about of food and its production. (The global North and South are primarily, but not exclusively, geographic designations and indicate access to resources.) So how do we feed a hungry world in a manner that is sustainable and just for all members of the biotic community, human and nonhuman? And what special resources do the world's religious traditions bring to the table?

Economists, policy makers, and agronomists, among others, have addressed this crisis, yet few approaches have incorporated perspectives from the world's religious traditions. Fundamentally, the food crisis is a moral crisis. Eating is a moral act, and our food choices—whether passive or active—are votes for a particular food system. Our current food system is broken; the costs to human, animals, and the environment are no longer bearable. We must move beyond the mantra of feeding the world—in which “feeding millions” is justification for systemic violence in virtually all aspects of food production (Sanford 2011). Since this is a moral problem, technological fixes themselves will not solve the food crisis, and here is where religious perspectives can help us.

In what follows, I will show how religious or faith-based perspectives provide alternate criteria to both evaluate the food we eat and how it was produced and then change policies and behavior. We can interrogate the social and environmental effects of food production, for example, by asking who benefits from our food systems, and who—or what—loses. Further, religious perspectives help us view humans, plants, and animals in holistic frameworks and typically emphasize the dignity and sanctity of creation and all beings, making it difficult to view other beings simply as means to an end, or dinner.

I am going to emphasize three main points. First, I will explore the concept of agricultural relations, the notion that food and agriculture are embedded in networks of relations. This concept of relationship leads to questions about the costs and benefits of different practices and questions about the quality of our relations with other beings. Second, I ask what metaphors—or language—structure how we think about our relations with the earth; for example, is agriculture a war on nature or a cooperative venture, as in agro-ecology? Third, religious perspectives can help us accept limits to our wants and desires. Those of us in the global North must limit our consumption, and that is difficult in our consumer society. Religious and faith-based perspectives offer holistic frameworks that integrate what are often called the three legs of sustainability, equity, economic, and environmental concerns. Focusing on relationships and evaluating the quality of our multiple relations can help us enhance our ecological or agricultural imaginations. Then we can imagine new scientific, economic, and social approaches to the global food crisis and, more importantly, create food systems that establish and support “right relations” among all beings. Finally, to bring this narrative into the realm

of practice, I will briefly describe a set of sustainability-focused intentional communities in the United States that are demonstrating that alternative life and foodways are not only possible but fulfilling.

### GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

I do not need to go into great detail about the global food crisis. Authors such as Michael Pollan, Anna and Frances Moore Lappé, and Mark Bittmann have popularized food concerns in books, articles, and blogs. Movies such as *Dirt*, *King Corn*, and *Food, Inc.* are screened in theaters, environmental film festivals, and classrooms, so the American public is more familiar with food issues than, say, ten or fifteen years ago. Today, a good portion of the world's population is either "stuffed or starved," to use author Raj Patel's words (2008). Problems of hunger, malnutrition, and obesity are rampant across the globe, and providing the world's population with affordable, nutritious, and safe food is becoming increasingly difficult. The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN) has projected that we will need 70% more food by 2050, and these estimates are likely to go up as more consumers around the world demand a first-world and meat-heavy diet (2009).

Authors including Wes Jackson, Fred Kirschenmann, and Tony Weis have questioned whether industrial agriculture can feed the world and if so, at what cost (Weis 2007; Jackson 2011; Kirschenmann 2011). In a talk on resilience, Fred Kirschenmann of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University identified four major threats to industrial agriculture: energy constraints, water shortages, climate change, and environmental degradation (Kalpa 2010). We have assumed that scientific and technological ingenuity will solve these problems—we'll just invent a new machine, seed, or process. But hunger, environmental degradation, abuse of farm animals, and over-reliance on fossil fuels are failures of vision and will, and technological fixes will not solve the global food crisis. We need new questions, new metaphors, and new stories, and here is where religious perspectives can help us. The first perspective is relationality or kinship.

### RELATIONALITY

All religious traditions address relationships in some capacity, for example, most religions offer models for our relationships with the divine, our relationships with each other, and our relationships with the earth. While traditions conceptualize these relations differently, most portray some variation of "right relations," that is, compassionate and sustaining relations between the divine, humans, and the biotic community. In my book *Growing Stories: Religion and the Fate of Agriculture*, I argued that agriculture, and by extension, food is inherently relational (2011). We grow food in

relation with the earth and soil, and eating is rooted in our social, ethical, and religious lives. We can choose how we want to enact these relations, and we can choose our guiding metaphors—domination or cooperation. Should we farm with harsh chemicals that rob the soil of its fertility and future generations of their livelihoods? Does our growing demand for cheap meat inflict suffering on animals? Or could we turn to Wes Jackson's ecosystem-based agriculture that grows food alongside—not in opposition to—natural processes, “consulting the genius of the place,” as Jackson phrases it (2011). The food crisis betrays a series of broken relationships, between humans, divinity, and the earth. The lens of relationship, as understood by the world's different traditions, offers a frame to consider how our food and agricultural practices affect others, human and nonhuman, whether our practices are exploitive or compassionate, and what role we play in relation to the earth and to other humans.

*Agrarian Thought.* Let us consider briefly the role of agriculture in environmental thought because, until recently, environmental ethics and environmental thought have tended to ignore agriculture. As above, agriculture is inherently relational, that is, we work with the earth and intervene in her processes to produce food. Most environmental thought, though not all, has focused on preserving wilderness and iconic species, such as elephants and polar bears. Farmland and pigs just haven't had the same appeal, and perhaps the idea that agricultural lands are “used” or somehow tainted has led many environmentalists to focus on more aesthetically appealing sites. However, Dana and Laura Jackson note that the North American Midwest has become an “ecological sacrifice zone” in which problems of soil erosion, loss of water, and contamination of soil and groundwater are perceived as compromises necessary to “feed the world” (2002, 14). Today many environmental organizations including the Sierra Club and Conservation International address agriculture and sustainable livelihoods in addition to wilderness preservation.

Considering our agricultural practices—or our interventions into the land—offers a tremendous opportunity to choose how we want to interact with the land. Conservation or preservation can mean simply leaving land alone, or using it lightly as exemplified in the “leave no trace” ethos of many backpackers. However, agriculture—or gardening—requires a certain intimacy or responsiveness to the demands of the partner; as a gardener, I can't simply impose my will on my garden. (Think of our language of tending or cultivating a garden.) I do want my garden to produce food, but I also need to think about what sort of gardener I want to be. My relationships with my garden, or, more broadly, my relationships with food, are embedded in a series of relationships, including relationships with other people, near and far. How we produce our food and our choices about the foods we consume reflect the quality of our relationships with others.

Religious and faith-based perspectives provide models to consider our relations with other being in a holistic manner. In one sense, a holistic approach would mean recognizing the broader effects of our food production systems on people and animals. Agrarian thinkers such as Wendell Berry, Fred Kirschenmann, and, more recently, Norman Wirzba have made us aware of the social consequences of contemporary food production, such as rural depopulation in the American Midwest. In response, they have asked us to think about our agricultural relations holistically, to move beyond profit and yields, questioning if higher yields result in less hunger. Where does all the food go, and who receives the food? Theologian John Cobb suggests that we focus on “planetism” or reverence for the earth rather than economism, our current obsession with productivity and consumption (Cobb 1993; Zuzworsky 2001, 187–88).

These Christian-oriented agrarians are echoed by voices from multiple traditions. Winona LaDuke, an Ojibwe activist from the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, argues that corporate control of food production and seed has severed the religious, nutritional, and agricultural relations associate with harvesting wild rice (2005). Similarly, Vandana Shiva warns us of the devastating consequences when farmers lose the cultural capital and indigenous knowledge associated with small-scale agriculture (2006). All of these writers claim that the industrial model of agriculture is broken and leads to increased hunger and environmental devastation. Despite representing multiple religious traditions, they are united in their call for a holistic approach to food production and renewed efforts to repair our agricultural relations.

I want to explore this concept of agricultural relationality a bit more deeply to see how it might help us approach the global food crisis. Although we can easily see a number of commonalities between different religious traditions, compassion toward animals for example, there is also considerable variation in how different religious traditions conceptualize relationships between humans, the earth, and the divine. To explore this concept a bit more deeply, I’ll look specifically at Christianity and Buddhism as examples to see how they might suggest different models or practices.

*Abrahamic Traditions.* Historically, Christians—as well as Jews and Muslims—have drawn on concepts of stewardship to determine how best humans should act upon the earth. In these traditions, a divine being who has created all beings has tasked humans with stewardship, the responsibility of caring for the earth and the beings of the earth. The Biblical tradition establishes a hierarchy, from God down to the lowliest of creatures, and over time theologians, scholars, and practitioners have debated how humans should fulfill this role. Christian thought has vacillated

between interpretations of stewardship ranging from domination to forms of benevolent tyranny to gentle nudges (Santmire 1985).

Lynn White's article "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," published in 1967, argued that historically stewardship has been interpreted, or at least enacted, as a form of domination, with little regard for the well-being of other created beings. In a subsequent article, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," Wendell Berry excoriated Christians for abusing the earth and stated that "Christian organizations, to this day, remain largely indifferent to the rape and plunder of the world and of its traditional cultures" (Berry 1993). But he also added that anti-Christian environmentalists (and some Christians) should, perhaps, actually read the Bible because it contains a multitude of passages affirming both the value of creation and our responsibility to maintain God's gifts. Today, many evangelicals have embraced Creation Care, recognizing that humans have a responsibility to care for all of God's creation, that to wantonly harm the earth is disrespectful to God, or sinful.

More recently, scholars and theologians, including Whitney Bauman, Forrest Clingerman, and Laurel Kearns, have explored human relations with the earth from the perspective of process theology, where the divine continues to be active in earthly processes (Kearns and Keller 2007). In his recent book *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, Norman Wirzba describes gardens as microcosms of "the complex array of relationships that join us to the soil and water and to creatures and God, relationships that have nurture and feeding at their root" (2011, 36). His extended meditation places humans, food, and gardens as "members in creation and community," and declares that to draw life from the garden, we must also serve it—and others (Wirzba 2011, 68). Service, humility, and responsibility lead to self-sacrifice, putting the needs of others ahead of our own (Wirzba 2011, 69). I will return to these concepts, but language and practices of self-sacrifice and self-discipline help us respond to challenges of limits and self-denial. These practices offer us structures to say no to food choices that unnecessarily harm animals or deprive others of food.

*Buddhism.* Now let's look at the Buddhist tradition both because many North Americans are familiar with basic Buddhist concepts and also because Buddhist concepts about relations between humans, divine beings, and animals differ greatly from Christian views. Buddhist practice also provides resources to help us deal with desire and the frustration of limits. Unlike Christian theology which postulates a hierarchical structure both between creator and creation and within created beings, Buddhist thought depicts a cosmology in which all existence—deities included—are interdependent and existentially not different from each other. The qualities that comprise who I am at any given moment—my body, my thoughts, my personhood, for example—are transitory. Impermanence and change

is the fundamental state of all existence, and our desire for permanence is one cause of suffering. Knowledge of this existential condition is the first step to liberation and comprises one wing of the Buddhist tradition. Compassion for ourselves and for the suffering of all beings comprises the other wing. As the Dalai Lama states, “The whole purpose of religion is to facilitate love and compassion, patience, tolerance, humility, and forgiveness” (2001, 230). So, how do impermanence, interdependence, and compassion lead us toward a food ethic?

Compassion for all beings seems obvious; our human capabilities—that have given us the capacity for harm and destruction—also demand that we act to relieve the suffering of others. In addition, Buddhist concepts of impermanence and interdependence erase meaningful distinctions between beings, or myself and others. David Suzuki, geneticist, environmental activist, and Buddhist, likens interdependence (or interdependent co-arising, a Buddhist philosophical term) to physical cycles of decomposition and regeneration. Quoting his now-deceased father, Suzuki says, “I will return to nature where I came from. I will be part of the fish, the trees, the birds; that’s my reincarnation” (Suzuki and McConnell 1998, 198). Buddhist concepts of interdependence illustrate how our physical existence is intimately bound with ecological processes, and that clinging to our narrowly constructed selves causes suffering to ourselves and others. As Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön states, “somehow, in the process of trying to deny that things are always changing, we lose our sense of the sacredness of life. We tend to forget that we are part of the natural scheme of things” (2000, 74). Recognizing our connections, and showing compassion to others is a form of self-defense; we depend on healthy ecosystems just as three sticks need all three in order to stand (Hanh 1999, 221–49).

Vietnamese monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh illustrates our interconnections and interdependence in the social and economic realms in his poem “Please Call Me By My True Names” (1999, 72). I will just quote a few lines:

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,  
 my legs as thin as bamboo sticks.  
 And I am the arms merchant,  
 selling deadly weapons to Uganda.  
 I am the twelve-year-old girl,  
 refugee on a small boat,  
 who throws herself into the ocean  
 after being raped by a sea pirate.  
 And I am the pirate,  
 my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.  
 . . .  
 Please call me by my true names,  
 so I can wake up  
 and the door of my heart

can be left open,  
the door of compassion.

His poem illustrates the chains of complicity that make all of us both victims and oppressors and mutually complicit in the earth's tragedies. Recognizing the blurred boundaries and interconnections between all of us, Hanh's poem suggests, should help us develop humility and compassion.

I highlighted these aspects of Christian and Buddhist thought to show paradigms that might foster new ecological imaginary realms. Both these Christian and Buddhist paradigms highlight compassion and responsibility for others, but use different conceptual frameworks. Now I would like to consider how these holistic paradigms lead us to new questions about our agricultural technologies and practices.

#### CREATING ALTERNATE METAPHORS AND PARADIGMS

The second perspective explores alternate metaphors and paradigms. Frameworks that emphasize compassion and interconnectedness offer novel insights into how we can—and should—produce and consume food. Viewing our food system holistically is certainly more complicated because it means understanding how food and production fit within multiple systems and relationships. To draw a parallel, the study of ecology or ecosystems is similarly complicated because we cannot simply isolate one piece of information. Many scholars and practitioners including Fred Kirschenmann and Carolyn Merchant have critiqued the Western scientific paradigm, based on a Cartesian paradigm that views the body and the earth as machines (Merchant 1980; Kirschenmann 2005). “In this view, the natural world is like a machine, and by knowing the roles and functions of the component parts, it is possible to understand how the machine works and, more importantly, how to control it” (Sanford 2011, 36). Suzuki argues that this modern view has alienated us from the world, and that abstractions and fragmented knowledge obscure the consequences of our actions (Suzuki and McConnell 1998). “In this schema, data is extracted and isolated from its situatedness in more complicated sets of relationships” (Kirschenmann 2005, 3). For example, if the sole marker for judging corn production is the number of bushels produced per acre, its yield, then we exclude a range of other markers which include beneficial factors such as fodder for animals, the impact of fertilizers on soil and water health, and the effects of monocultures on rural economic health. “The fragmented systems of modernity do not take into account the relationships and social situatedness of agriculture” (Sanford 2011, 36). Kirschenmann notes that the machine metaphor forces us to overlook vital pieces of information about our world—information about relationships, interdependencies, and emergent properties—all vital, as it turns out, to economic, social, and ecological sustainability (Kirschenmann 2005).



Changing metaphoric realms opens up new questions and new possibilities in how we understand the body, agriculture, and ecology. Consider the body as an organic self-regulating or homeostatic entity. The organic metaphor instead suggests that the constituent parts and processes of an organism operate interdependently; what you do to one part of the body affects the rest (Johnson 1987, 127–35). The organic metaphor raises questions about the relationships of the various processes and their interactions. Organic agriculture, restoration agriculture, and agroecology, for example, reflect homeostatic rather than mechanistic frames.

Agroecological practices stress interactions between the various biological and nonbiological components of the system. By creating a functional biodiversity, processes occur that provide ecological services such as the activation of soil organisms, the cycling of nutrients, the enhancements of beneficial insects and antagonists, and so on (Altieri 1998, 88).

Viewing agriculture through language that emphasizes our interconnectedness provides the imaginative space to explore the conditions of these relationships, that is, to ask what are the costs and benefits of various practices and technologies. Who wins, in other words, and who loses? Focusing solely on yield, for example, does not answer the question of who benefits from those yields. In a post-NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) world, Oaxacan farmers have not benefitted from higher U.S. yields in corn; instead, they have lost their livelihoods (Cummings 2002). Mohandas Gandhi offers a useful frame: “Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him” (Johnson 2006, 158).

#### RELIGION AND SCIENCE

These alternate frames, relation or compassion, for example, are not anti-science or regressions to some mystic past, but they can help us ask different questions of our research. We have been trained—and persuaded—to believe that intensive, chemically and product-driven, industrial agriculture is the *only* way, not simply *a* way, to feed the world. Instead, Wes Jackson’s research on perennial polycultures that mimic the prairie ecosystem offers an alternate—and still data-driven—approach. These perennial polycultures, designed to “regenerate the soil into a healthy ecosystem,” exemplify principles of interdependence and reciprocity between humans, soil, and plants (Willard 2008). These qualities of interdependence, regeneration, and reciprocity are fundamental to alternative agricultures such as agroecology and restoration agriculture. Agroecology, for example, is good science; yields and soil health, for example, can be verified by data and are not simply a matter of belief or opinion.

*GMOs.* These new frames also help us wade through the muddy and contentious debates about agricultural technologies such as genetically modified organisms or transgenics. Battles over GMOs are waged in metaphoric language that evoke the paradigmatic realms in which these arguments are embedded; while some proponents invoke salvific language of “feeding the world,” detractors warn of “playing god” or “runaway genes”—all of which do point to very real concerns, but this language does not lead to meaningful discussion about potential benefits or their potential social, economic, and ecological consequences. For example, farmers in groups such as Via Campesina, an international peasants’ rights organization, as well as farmers in India I have worked with, question the benefits and consequences of GMOs, citing concerns about ownership of germplasm, loss of landraces, costs of technological packets that accompany transgenic seeds, and loss of control of their food supply. If these seeds are not drought-resistant, for example, and require intensive inputs, then these seeds replicate the problems of monocultures in addition to the adding new problems of ownership and patents. (One persistent critique is that such seeds have not been designed to adapt to specific conditions and locations, mostly because it is too expensive for companies to do so.) While these concerns about control, exploitation, and entitlement to resources affect anyone who eats, they have the greatest effect on marginalized peoples who pay the greatest social costs and reap the fewest benefits from expensive technologies.

These criteria reflect anthropologist Ruth Meinzen-Dick’s (CGIAR, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) assertion that until recently agricultural research has focused on increasing yields of staple foods rather than poverty alleviation. In assessing agricultural technologies and practices, she advocates the “livelihood” approach that includes dimensions such as vulnerability, risk, social status, and gender that go beyond quantitative economic measures (Adato and Meinzen-Dick 2007, 20–55). These evaluative frameworks include disaggregating regional and household access to food, technology, and money, asking, for example, if men gain sole access to new technologies and cash at the expense of women who have retained local knowledge about species and inter-cropping methods. Food democracy and social justice—asking who benefits, who loses—provides criteria to guide use and development of such technologies that do not either cede judgment to a narrative of inevitability and technological progress or, on the other hand, surrender to dystopic scenarios of monsters and “wild genes” that render consideration of new technologies almost impossible.

#### ACCEPTANCE OF LIMITS

The third and final point—the idea of limits—might be the most difficult for those of us in the United States. We are a nation of consumers, and our

institutions—whether retail or government—will go to great lengths to ensure that Americans continue to consume food, fuel, and other resources. Recall, for example, President George W. Bush’s post-9/11 suggestion—“go shopping.” Historically, values such as “thrift” helped earlier generations navigate the Depression and WWII, and today more people are experimenting with voluntary simplicity, but, for the most part, those are small experiments. Today, we waste food at unprecedented levels, at all stages of food production, from production to processing to storage (Stuart 2009). Sushi trays remain stocked even at midnight, for example, because stores must avoid the illusion of scarcity. When I volunteered at Cherith Brooth Catholic Worker in Kansas City, Missouri, they routinely made entire meals out of produce stores and consumers had deemed inedible because of some dings and dents.

If we want to feed the world in a just and sustainable manner, residents of the global North must reconsider and change what we eat and how we produce food—at the large-scale and policy level, not just as individuals. (On the other hand, residents of the global South, abroad and in the United States, should have the means to scale up their consumption.) Similarly, if we don’t produce our food sustainably, the poor and marginalized will suffer further as they will have less access to arable land and water, an increasingly scarce resource. Religion has labels for these practices, including greed, desire, and gluttony. Fortunately, most traditions also have tools to help us with self-discipline and restraint.

*Buddhist Economics.* Let me return to the Buddhist tradition to discuss consumption, desire, and happiness, drawing on economist E. F. Schumacher’s Buddhist economics introduced in his collection of essays *Small Is Beautiful*, first published in 1973. The purpose of modern economics, he claims, is consumption, and higher consumption leads to greater happiness. Buddhist economics, on the other hand, is based on simplicity and nonviolence. Why simplicity? Endless variation and novelty, for example, lead us to crave more and more, and these foods and goods don’t make us happy because we can never have enough. *The New York Times Magazine* recently ran an article that described how scientists at food companies design flavors and products so that we will become addicted to junk food (Moss 2013). Products such as Gogurt have transformed the generally healthy yogurt into a dessert product, with twice as much sugar as the children’s cereal Lucky Charms. So, in a time of rampant obesity, we have added sugar to a food that should need minimal processing. And, further, most sugar production, at least in the United States and the Caribbean, is done under extremely oppressive conditions, so we’ve added a dose of violence to yogurt. Can we learn to be satisfied by plainer and simpler foods, perhaps seasonal produce or foods lower on the food chain?

*Should We Eat Meat?* For many in the United States, eating meat, especially beef, is part of being an American. Suggestions to eat no meat or even less meat are an affront to cultural identity. Meat production, though—meaning primarily factory-farmed meat production—carries enormous environmental, health, and social costs and is responsible for unspeakable animal suffering. Thich Nhat Hanh writes that “by eating meat we share the responsibility of climate change, the destruction of our forests, and the poisoning of our air and water. The simple act of becoming a vegetarian will make a difference in the health of our planet” (Hanh 2008). On the other hand, “of the 880 million rural poor people living on less than \$1 per day, 70 percent are partially or completely dependent on livestock for their livelihoods and food security” (World Watch Institute 2013). Changing how we eat meat (if we choose to eat meat), less meat or switching to organic pasture-raised meats, would significantly impact multiple arenas, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, supporting pastoral livelihoods, and improved animal care. How do we impose limits, voluntary simplicity, on ourselves when so many see eating meat as a God-given right?

Rose Zuzworsky, in “From the Marketplace to the Dinner Plate,” draws upon Christian theological resources to consider how we eat meat and asks how we might apply concepts of justice, care, and mercy to the treatment of food animals (2001, 184–85). As she notes, applying these abstract ideas to practice regarding food animals is difficult and complex; so, for example, how should we consider feral hogs, a tasty menace in Florida? This invasive and destructive species roams wild until they are hunted—unlike animals in CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations). She quotes John Cobb on the concept of justice: “It is time to call for a justice that is better expressed in the Hebrew term *shalom*, a right relation to the land and all that dwell therein,” again recognizing that all beings are ultimately connected and interdependent (Cobb 1993, 184–85; Zuzworsky 2001, 184–87).

The contentious issue of meat will continue to challenge us on limits. Americans’ overconsumption of meat contributes to environmental devastation, hunger, and animal suffering. All religious traditions address greed and violence—consider the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Sermon on the Mount*, and they provide practices and disciplines to help us deal with the reality that we can’t have everything we want. Instead, practicing restraint can move us toward re-establishing right relations with the earth and other beings, human and nonhuman.

## CONCLUSION

How do we move from values to practice? Recently, I’ve been exploring how people translate abstract values, such as nonviolence and voluntary simplicity, into practice in terms of food and agriculture. What choices

do people make, and what are the trade-offs? Nothing is perfect, and reality is messy (Peterson 2005). To do this research, I have conducted fieldwork in a series of intentional communities in the United States that draw broadly upon a cluster of values that many associate with Gandhi, including self-sufficiency, participatory democracy, nonviolence, and voluntary simplicity. These communities include cohousing groups, Catholic Workers Houses and Farms, and Ecovillages, and they consciously have created holistic frameworks to govern their material, economic, and spiritual lives. Most would feel right at home with John Cobb's planetism or Schumacher's Buddhist economics. They are experimenting with alternate forms of energy and food production and re-introducing—and adapting—skills such as plowing with draft animals and grafting that have languished over the past fifty years. These communities are not trying to go back to the good old days—this is not nostalgia but recognition that, to go forward, we will need to adapt our lifestyles to meet the existing challenges such as climate change.

These communities recognize that the world cannot sustain the appetites of North Americans, and changing how they eat and grow food is an issue of social justice. These communities are small, and none of them claims to have figured it all out. But each community is a test-lab, experimenting with alternate agricultures appropriate for their own regions, alternate food practices, and alternate human-based economies. And these individuals are not wearing hair shirts—this is not painful. Their food is good, their community lives are rich, and they are active and healthy. Their experiments provide models for transitioning to alternate food systems, easing the environmental and social pressures imposed by our industrial food system.

At the outset, I suggested that religious and faith-based perspectives illustrate holistic paradigms to help us address the global food crisis—and our role in it. The frame of agricultural relations—or even kinship, in some cases—helps us consider the broader social and environmental effects of the food we eat and the way in which it is produced. Alternative agricultures such as agroecology, biodynamics, and perennial polycultures invoke metaphors of mutuality and cooperation rather than domination and a war on nature. Finally, religious perspectives offer frames and techniques to accept and embrace the limits to consumption, at least in the global North. The food crisis is a crisis of conscience, and we need to enhance our ecological imaginations to repair all of our relations, with animals, with other humans, and with the earth. The intentional communities I visited demonstrate options of paths forward to creating sustainable and just food systems.

## NOTE

This paper is based on a contribution to the Summer Conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, “Scientific, Spiritual, and Moral Challenges in Solving the World Food Crisis,” held at Silver Bay, New York, July 27 to August 3, 2013.

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