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## Agriculture and the Kingdom of God

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### The Dilemma

Recently, in Ethiopia, a Christian relief and development organization completed a “successful” agricultural project. The project, funded by USAID grants, had called for increased agricultural production to raise family income so that the children in families could have better nutrition, basic clothing, and pay school fees. At the end of the project, family income was up. Pictures were taken, reports written and the project was graded A+ by the USAID granters. Is this a success story for agricultural development? It is, only if you did not go back a few months later. Doing a post-project evaluation would have revealed that the farmers spent their increased income on alcohol, prostitutes, and gambling. When the farmers returned from their binge, their wives were furious that they had wasted resources intended to help their children. The “successful” projects actually left the families and community in greater poverty.

About twenty years ago, evangelical missionaries moved into the unreached agricultural communities of the poorest province of Guatemala. They journeyed there to evangelize and plant churches. The people they were working with, the Pokomchi, were the poorest people in the poorest province of one of the poorest countries in the Americas. Many people came to Christ. Churches were planted. By mission standards, the task was done. The missionaries moved on to other communities. But, in one sense, little had changed. The Pokomchi were living in as much poverty after the missionaries left as when they arrived. What was different? Now, the people were *waiting to die*! They had hope for heaven. Praise the Lord! But they had no hope for *today*! Is this a picture of “success”? Is this what the Great Commission all about?

These stories are replicated all over the world. Well-meaning Christians work in missions and private voluntary organizations to bring hope and help to poor agriculturists around the world. These farmers are usually physically and economically poor, and often socially outcast, with little hope in the world.

The missionaries, operating from the Evangelical Gnostic paradigm that separates the spiritual from the physical, have brought a “spiritual” solution, the “narrow Gospel of salvation.” The Christ-motivated development workers, operating from the secular

paradigm of the modern development industry have brought a “physical” solution, technical knowledge and outside financial resources, but little transformation of human life and communities. There can never be a comprehensive solution to a comprehensive problem based on inadequate paradigms and piecemeal methodologies.

If we want to see the lives of impoverished farmers not only improved, but also transformed, then missionaries and development NGO workers must connect their work in agriculture to the perspective and value-system of God’s Kingdom provided in the Bible.

In this paper we will review the reason for this dilemma, build a more biblical understanding of *agriculture*, and challenge Christian agriculturists to be ambassadors for Christ and His Kingdom through connecting the Kingdom to agriculture and connecting agriculture to the Kingdom.

### **The Reason for the Dilemma**

The reason for this dilemma is a faulty worldview<sup>1</sup> among both missionaries and Christian NGO workers. The biblical worldview<sup>2</sup>—the Worldview of the Kingdom of God—was largely abandoned by the church about a hundred years ago. This has left much of the church functioning from a Gnostic<sup>3</sup> paradigm in its religious life and the cultural paradigm (secularism<sup>4</sup> or animism<sup>5</sup>) in the rest of her life.

The worldview of the Bible is the *objective* worldview. The Bible describes reality the way God made it. All other worldviews are *distortions* of reality. Animism is the worldview of many of the impoverished communities around the world. Secularism is the worldview of modern, materialistic societies, and the paradigm of most of the relief and development industry. The Evangelical-Gnostic worldview has been the paradigm of much of the church since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Each mindset answers man’s basic questions differently. How we understand agriculture is dependent on how we answer the following questions: “What is *real*?”

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<sup>1</sup> A worldview is “a set of assumptions, held consciously or unconsciously, about the basic make-up of the world and how it works.” James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> The biblical worldview begins with the Trinitarian God of Scripture. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). Synonyms: Theistic worldview or Theism.

<sup>3</sup> Gnostic worldview refers to the worldview of the ancient Greeks. For them the universe was divided into spiritual and physical realities. The spiritual was high and holy, and the physical was low and profane. This worldview was adopted by large segments of the church at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Synonyms: Evangelical Gnosticism and Dualism.

<sup>4</sup> Secularism begins with nature. The only thing that is real is the physical universe. This is the worldview that Charles Darwin popularized and the worldview of modernism. Synonyms: Materialism, Consumerism, Naturalism, Darwinism, Secular Humanism.

<sup>5</sup> Animism begins with the absolute spiritual. What is real is the spiritual realm. Spirits inhabit nature. I use this phrase to reflect both folk animism as well as Hinduism and Buddhism. This is the worldview of much of the developing world.

What is *man*? What is *nature*?" and "What is man's *relationship* to nature?" Each worldview gives different answers to these fundamental questions. Thus, they each create a different framework for understanding agriculture.

Secularism leads to two distinct views of humanity in relationship to nature. In one view, man is the center of the universe in the sense that he is the highest evolved animal at the top of the food chain. He is, by nature, the highest consumer. Nature exists for man to harvest, exploit, use and consume. This often leads to a mechanistic view of agriculture, to the raping of the land and a lack of care for the soil.

Another view common to secularism is that humanity is merely another part of nature, of no greater or no lesser value than any other part. Everything ultimately is valueless matter. According to this view, man is often seen as a "cancer" in nature. He should live in harmony with nature or disappear. He should take only the food that nature freely gives. Man is to diminish in order to save nature.

In animism, nature is often seen as a god to be worshiped. The ecological system is "alive" with various spirits and deities, and is therefore often seen as more important than man.

In the biblical framework, God exists. He has made "creation" [note I have not said "nature"] good. He has made man in His image. Man is a creature, part of the rest of creation; and therefore he must show respect for creation. But man is also made in the image of God and has been placed on earth to steward creation and develop the earth. Creation belongs to God, not man. His stewardship is to be a reflection of his worship of God.

## THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE AGRICULTURAL MISSION

The apostle Paul challenges us: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). The great need as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century is for the church to have a paradigm shift, to move from the mindset of our age and culture to having what the British apologist Harry Blamires calls a “Christian mind.” We need to return to the worldview provided in the Bible. The biblical paradigm needs to become the integrating factor for our life and Mission<sup>6</sup>. It needs to be the framework for the principles, policies and programs in the sphere of agriculture as well as those working among poor agriculturists in missions and relief and development programs.

What is the framework that establishes the Mission? What is the mindset that will help to transform the lives of agriculturists? What are some of the components of the biblical worldview that can help to lift poor farmers out of poverty?

### **God is the First Farmer** (Genesis 2:8)

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1, the opening line of the biblical narrative reveals that God exists and that He made the universe. This is perhaps the most important sentence ever written. It informs us of the nature of ultimate reality. God existed before creation. He stands outside of creation. He is infinite! The fact that this is even recorded reveals that He communicates. God is *personal!* In addition, we can conclude that reality is both spiritual (God) and physical (the universe).

Genesis goes on to tell us that God planted the first garden. Genesis 2:8 reads, “Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.” This has important significance for farmers.

A number of years ago, I was visiting the Alto Plano, the highlands of Bolivia at an elevation of 14,000 feet. The people living there are subsistence farmers whose staples are potatoes and the meat and milk products from their animals. As in many developing countries, in addition to the grinding poverty, they were the societal outcasts because they worked in the dirt.

I was blessed to be able to bring them a “word of encouragement.” I opened the Bible to Genesis 2:8 and read these words: “Now the Lord God had planted a garden in

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<sup>6</sup> Mission with a capital “M” is distinct from “mission.” By Mission, I am referring to God’s work in history to reconcile all things to Himself, and our part in that work. By “mission” with a lower case “m” I am referring to the narrower field of mission societies and professional missionaries. The Mission provides the context for agriculture as well as mission and R&D programs.

the east of Eden; and there he put the man he had formed." I repeated it with emphasis: "Now *the Lord God* ...planted a garden;" And again: "Now *the Lord God* ...*planted a garden*;" I began to see a puzzling look in their eyes. They seemed to be asking, "Why is the speaker saying this again?" And I said it again: "...*the Lord God* ...*planted a garden!*" There was a dawning coming to their eyes. And a final time: "**GOD ...PLANTED A GARDEN!**" Their eyes were dancing. They understood. GOD WAS A FARMER! He was **THE FIRST FARMER!**

This was a new thought for them. No one—neither the missionaries nor the NGO development workers—had ever told them that. If God were the First Farmer and He put man in the garden, then farming must be a good thing. The dawning of their understanding of their dignity as human beings and the significance of farming was at hand.

Why had the missionaries or NGO development workers neglected such a powerful message? Largely because they did not think from the authoritative framework of the biblical worldview. Missionaries rightly wanted to see people saved for eternity. Development workers wanted to see technical improvements and outside funding brought in to help people develop. Neither understood the power of the biblical paradigm to lift people out of poverty.

### **Man, the *imago Dei*** (Genesis 1:26-27)

The next significant part of the revelation is found in Genesis 1:26-27: 'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' This passage reveals the wonder of what it means to be a human being. We are not merely animals to be fed as the Darwinists argue. We are not merely spirits inhabiting insignificant and burdensome bodies as animism holds.

Instead, the Bible asserts that man is made in God's image. He is the *imago Dei*. When God made the crown jewel of creation, He did not model it after dogs or monkeys; He modeled us after Himself. The poorest farmer is not to be seen as some impoverished wretch, but as nothing less than the *imago Dei*. Man, in fact, stands in the wonderful place of connecting heaven and earth. As one who is created, he is able to identify with the rest of creation. Yet because he alone is made in the image of God, this distinguishes him from creation and unites him with God.

Second, since God is the Creator, to be made in His image is to be creative. Man was made to be an artist and a problem solver.

## The Creation Mandate (Or the “Cultural Mandate”) (Genesis1:26, 28)

Genesis 1:26 and 28 reveal the *purpose* for which man was made, “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ... God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.””

Here God revealed that He has a task for man. Some have called it the Creation Mandate, some the Cultural Mandate, and others the Development Mandate. Call it what you may, it’s clear that man has a responsibility—to create culture and to develop the earth. We see that man is a co-developer with God. While creation is *perfect*, it is not *finished* yet. Just as the seed is perfect in itself, its purpose is not fulfilled until it is planted in the ground. Creation, like the seed, is filled with tremendous potential. It merely needs the touch of God’s image bearer. There is still work to be done. God has made man to be the steward of His creation. God placed man in the garden and gave him the first “job description” as an agricultural worker.

According to the graphic, we see that God is Creator of both man and creation. God owns creation, not man. Man has fellowship upwardly with God. Man relates to creation as its steward. There are two aspects of this stewardship, societal and developmental.



The *Societal Mandate* is established by the biblical statement, ‘*be fruitful, increase in number, and fill the earth.*’ To develop the earth there must be families, communities and societies. Adam and Eve were to have children and populate the earth. But fill the earth with what? It depends on your worldview. The filling of the earth is not with “consumers” as the materialist would say. Nor is it with “human spirits” that have no interest in the physical world. The mandate is to fill the earth with image bearers of God; it is to fill the earth with agriculturists and horticulturists, artists and painters, composers and poets, architects and craftsman. Fill the earth with families and communities of stewards.

The *Development Mandate* is established by the words *rule* and *subdue*, and later, in Genesis 2:15, with *work* and *care*. These words “rule” and “subdue” reflect that man is to have dominion over creation rather than the other way around as the animists and their New Age counterparts in the ecological movement would argue. The word “work” reflects that man is to *progress*, to expand and advance the garden, not to leave it as he found it. The word “care” reflects that man is to *conserve*—to protect and cherish the garden—to keep it healthy and thriving. This is in contrast with our consumer oriented

materialistic culture that simply wants to harvest, deplete, use, and too often, rape creation.

The development mandate to progress and conserve is beautifully balanced. It stands in stark contrast to secularism's focus on "working but not caring" which can result in the abuse of creation. On the other hand it also contrasts New Age ecology movement which focuses on caring for, but not working the garden. This leads to underdevelopment. The development mandate celebrates *imago Dei*, calling man to expand the garden, create orchards, discover the wonders of creation through science, and to *fill the earth with the knowledge of God!* Worship leads to development.

### **History is Going Somewhere!**

History began in a *garden* and will end in a *city!* The garden is the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-10). The city is the City of God—the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). In Revelation 22:1-4, the New Jerusalem appears as a city in a garden. There is wonderful symmetry in that the tree of life found in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9) and is also found at the end of history in the garden of the City (Revelation 22:2). Agriculturists and horticulturists play a role from the beginning of the biblical narrative to the end.

From the vantage of the biblical worldview, the farmer is a maker of history. The Bible is clear that "history is something you make" (Jeremiah 5:1; Ecclesiastes 9:14-16). As farmers have introduced new crops, new agricultural technologies, and new methodologies, they have increased agricultural potential, feeding countless people. Contrary to this view, the fatalism of animistic cultures holds that "history is something that happens to you." In this mindset nothing ever changes. There is no reason to introduce new crops "because our fathers did not do it that way." In the purposeful view of history, the agriculturist has a significant role to play in the unfolding of the Kingdom.

### **Nature is an Open System**

God has created a universe that is both physical and spiritual. These two realms are distinct, but closely interrelated. There are natural laws that govern nature. But the system is not a "closed system" of cause and effect. There is a spiritual realm. Nature is open to the intervention of God, angels, demons and man. Animists understand the reality of the spirit realm far better than those of us raised in materialistic cultures.

The materialist, by nature, assumes that resources are physical things that "come from the ground." They are finite. Animists on the other hand, see resources as something spring mysteriously from the "outside." According to the biblical worldview, the physical proceeds from the spiritual. Creation proceeds from the mind of God. They also proceed from the mind of the *imago Dei*—they proceed from the

mind of man. Resources are the product of human discovery, creativity and innovation; they are limited only by man's imagination.

An Israeli friend of mine was taking a group of Burundian pastors on a tour of Israel. As they passed by Nazareth, the pastors noticed a forest growing out of "the sand." They were amazed to see such a thing. They told my Israeli friend that in Burundi trees grow in dark soil. How could trees grow in sand? My friend responded, "God has given each people a land. He waits to see what they will do with it. To the Jews He gave a desert, and they transformed the desert into a garden. Today Israeli farmers send fruit, vegetables, flowers and arid land agricultural technology all over the world." Resources are a result of vision and human invention.

### **The Fall** (Genesis 3:1-7)

The biblical narrative reveals that all of God's creation was very good (Genesis 1:31); all was in harmony with God and with itself. In Genesis 3:1-7 we read that sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's rebellion. Moral evil entered the world and so did *natural evil*; there is now pain in childbirth and weeds in the garden. There will be droughts and famines, earthquakes and floods. Man's relationship with God was broken and his role as steward of creation was distorted.

The good news is that hunger and famine are *abnormal*. God did not make this world to be a hungry world. In the "principle of the seed," we see that God intended the world to be bountiful. God's desire is to save man from sin and the ravages of sin, and toward that end, he is unfolding his history-encompassing redemptive plan. Because of this and because hunger and famine are abnormal, man is to fight against the weeds in the garden and the sweat of the brow. He is to use the principles of science to unlock the secret of the seed. He is to use technology, within the moral framework of the biblical worldview, to improve the land, to increase crops and to free man from drudgery and toil.

### **Redemption** (Colossians 1:20)

God is a Missionary God. He has a Mission. The Mission is "to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through **[Christ's] blood, shed on the cross**" (Colossians 1:20). Why did Jesus die on the cross? To reconcile all things to Himself. The cross reaffirms the Cultural Mandate. This is God's BIG AGENDA!

The unfolding of the Mission begins with the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12:1-3. Here God blessed Abraham because His plan was to bless **all nations** through him. We find God's big agenda emphasized again in the Great Commission. Here, the resurrected Christ called His disciples together and announced His reign: "All authority in heaven



and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). He then announced the task He had for the disciples: “Therefore go and make disciples of **all nations**, ... teaching them to obey all I have commanded” (Matthew 28:19-20). The Great Commission is nothing less than the **discipling of nations**.

Romans 8:18-23 reflects, again, the scope of God’s big agenda. The **whole creation** is awaiting redemption. It is not merely the soul of man that is waiting for redemption. It is all of man and all of his relationships. But it is not just man that is broken. All of creation is groaning, awaiting redemption.

At the consummation of history, Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5). He will come to marry His bride (Revelation 19: 6-8). One of the most glorious pictures at the completion of the Mission is provided in Revelation 21:23-26 where the kings of the earth bring the **glory of their nations** into the garden-city—the New Jerusalem. Then the Cultural Mandate will be completed.

God is unfolding this magnificent story. It is the Transforming Story. It has the ability not only to save individual souls, but to transform lives, lift communities out of poverty and build nations that are free, just and compassionate. The story creates the framework for the Mission. God calls the agriculturist into the story. This story can lift the poor farmer out of poverty. The task of the missionary, the development worker and the agriculturist is to tell the whole story.

## UNDERSTANDING AGRICULTURE

### The Cultural Mandate

The Creation Mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15,19 is also known as the Cultural Mandate. This mandate has special significance for those working in agriculture, as we will see. But first, let’s examine the word culture. What is culture? There is actually a family of words: *cult*, *culture*, and the agricultural term *cultivate*. The latter words are derived from the former word, *cult*.

The word “cult” means worship or reverential homage rendered to a divine being.<sup>7</sup> “Culture” refers to the training, development, refinement of mind tastes and manners; the condition of being thus trained and refined; the intellectual side of civilization.<sup>8</sup> The word culture is derived from the word “cultivate.” “Cultivation” is used to speak of tilling or preparing for crops; to manure, plow, dress, sow and reap; to study; to labor to

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<sup>7</sup> The Compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 1246.

<sup>8</sup> OED, p. 1248.

improve or advance; to cultivate the mind.<sup>9</sup> These words have two senses: preparing the physical earth for planting and preparing the mind of the individual and society for growth and maturity.

The root of culture is worship. Culture is a reflection of the god that is worshipped. D. B. Hegman, writing in *Plowing in Hope* states, "The term [culture] could also be used in a religious context to mean *worship*. The idea here seems to be that in the same way the farmer actively fusses over his crops, so the worshiper gives rapt attention to the deity he serves. Thus the term is closely related to the Latin *cultus* meaning *adoration* or *veneration*. The English language retains this connection with such terms as *cult*, *cultic*, *occult*, etc."<sup>10</sup>

Theologian Henry Van Til stated: "culture is religion externalized."<sup>11</sup> In short, a people's culture is a reflection of the nation's deity. A culture is a manifestation of a people's cult.

In reviewing the Cultural Mandate, we see the twin aspects given to man, the *Culture Maker*. First, there is the *cultivation* of the *soil*, using his **hands** to work and care for the garden (Genesis 2:15). Second, is *cultivating* the *soul*, using the **mind** and **heart** in the naming of the animals (Genesis 2:19). Here man engages the mind in observation, reason, and categorization, and then inflames the heart in creativity and passion.

Indian scholar and development worker, Vishal Mangalwadi, summarized this when he said: "God speaks and creates the universe. Man speaks and creates culture that shapes the universe."<sup>12</sup> Words are indeed powerful; the visible world comes from the invisible God through His spoken word. As God created by speaking, He then defined creation by using words as well: "God called the light day and the darkness He called night.... God called the expanse sky.... God called the dry ground land" (Genesis 1:5, 8, 10).

In Genesis 2:19 God established man's dominion over nature by making man a *word maker*, giving man the responsibility of naming the animals. As man mimics God by using language, he is separated from the rest of creation as the maker of culture. Thus in the Garden of Eden, the First Farmer created the first couple. In response to worship (cult), Adam and Eve are to create culture, by cultivating both soil and soul. The importance of man as culture maker is found in the language that we employ: *agriculture* – cultivate the field, *horticulture* – cultivate the garden, and *aquaculture* – cultivate the water. Theologian Herman Bavinck wrote: "Culture in the broadest sense is

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<sup>9</sup> American Dictionary of the English Language (1828), by Noah Webster; Published by The Foundation for American Christian Education.

<sup>10</sup> David Bruce Hegman, *Plowing In Hope* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), pp. 13-14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Excerpted from a lecture at Mercy Ship's Foundation in Community Development School in Tyler, Texas, May 1995.

the purpose for which God created man after His image...[which] includes not only the most ancient callings of ... hunting and fishing, agriculture and stock raising, but also trade and commerce and science and art.”<sup>13</sup>

Farmers are cultivators, not only of the soil, but also of culture. They have their role in the building of nations. As the societal mandate sends image bearers to the corners of the continents, the agriculturists precede them, finding innovative ways to nurture the “fruits of creation.”

George Washington Carver conveyed the excitement of this: “When one fully realizes that every farm, garden and orchard product will yield new, strange and useful things to the thoroughly developed creative mind, an inexhaustible [sic] field of possibilities dawns upon us; a field in which all can work without clashing, indeed the greater number of workers, the more interesting their work becomes, and the more closely they are drawn together, as here we really walk and talk with the Great Creator; it is here that He shows His glory, majesty and power in such an understanding and unmistakable way.”<sup>14</sup>

### **God has Created an Agricultural System (Genesis 1:29)**

God created with a purpose; therefore there is a design. The design reflects the *beauty* and *order* of the mind of the Creator. In fact, in creation, science and art meet. We marvel as we see the beauty and science of a grand sunset or of a simple daisy.

The First Farmer not only planted a garden, but He designed the system—one simple yet profound, beautiful yet rational. And this system is not a mere *mechanical* scheme, but a *lively* work of art, a *divine order*.

At the heart of the divine order is the simple *seed*. Genesis 1:11- 12 records that on the third day of creation, ‘God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: *seed-bearing plants and trees* on the land that bear fruit with *seed* in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.’ Seeds that reproduce life, a common miracle!

We find this divine order also reflected in Genesis 1:29-2:1.

Then God said, “I give you every *seed-bearing plant* on the face of the whole earth and every *tree that has fruit with seed* in it. They will be yours for food. And to all

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<sup>13</sup> Herman Bavinck, quoted by Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey in *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999), p. 293.

<sup>14</sup> George Washington Carver, quoted by John S. Ferrell in *Fruits of Creation* (Shakopee, MN: Macalester Park Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 72, 73.

the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give *every green plant for food*.” And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was *very good*. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.” Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their *vast array*. [Italics mine.]

Note the beauty of the passage and the power of the words. From the vast array of the heavens to the miracle of the seed, God created with patterns and textures. Order and beauty were spoken into this lively work of art. Plants and trees are seed bearing. They reproduce life after their design.

There is no place where we see this more profoundly expressed than in the *seed*. Seeds allow for reproduction, for the expansion of life, for the growing of the garden, for the sending out of culture makers to all the corners of the earth. Imagine if the system of the seed called for only a one for one exchange, one seed would reproduce just one seed. Death would have been built into the system. But the miracle of the seed produces a bountiful garden. From one seed comes a plant that produces many fruit, and within each fruit are many seeds. The agriculturist and horticulturist have the honor of participating in this miracle.

There is a wonderful Kenyan proverb that describes the glory of the seed: “You can count the number of seeds in a mango, but you cannot count the number of mangos in a seed.” From one seed can come a virtually unlimited harvest. Is this not a *common miracle*? Or think of the DNA of a dog. The genetic code of one dog has the potential to produce all the wonderful varieties of dogs that we see in the world today—from one seed.

A Kenyan pastor named Joseph captured the wonder of the seed in this rather intriguing question: “What is more powerful, a seed or a bullet?” The profound answer: “A seed!” Why you ask? “Because, a bullet can kill *one* person. A single seed can produce food for a *million* people.” Pastor Joseph concluded, “Man created the bullet. Who created the seed? God!”<sup>15</sup> Ah! The wisdom of Africa!

T. D. Jakes, writing in his foreword to Dr. Mark Hanby’s book *You Have Not Many Fathers*, describes the wonder of the divine order:

Our God is methodical. He is not chaotic. If we want to be prosperous both spiritually and naturally, then we must endeavor to know and function within His divine order. I am reminded of that truth whenever I read about the creation of our world as recorded in the Book of Genesis. It is there that God, through His eternal wisdom, whispers in the ear of His servant the unveiled blueprint of

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<sup>15</sup> Shared at a Samaritan Strategy Vision Conference in Nairobi, Kenya (at NIST), August 2001.

the creation of the universe.... It is here that God begins the order from which His methodical structure for all truth emanates and flourishes. For instance, He calls from the muddy montage of an uninhabited planet the herb, plants, and greenery. He brings forth these plants whose seed will reproduce and grow in the calm summer breezes of thousands of years.

He will create only once the blade of grass which He expects to garnish His fields. His plan is so futuristic that it puts within each plant a seed of potential. The seed holds the key to reproduction and thereby eliminates the possibility of extinction. Each blade had a destiny created in its origin. Its future is perpetuated in the integrity of its seed. As long as there is a seed to germinate, the blade, through its progeny, will be represented. Its purpose cannot be aborted. It is this principle that governs all of God's creation.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Jaques Monod, a Nobel Laureate in biology, has also articulated this principle. In his book *Chance and Necessity*, Monod writes: "...one of the fundamental characteristics common to all living beings without exception [is] that of being *objects endowed with a purpose or project*, which at the same time they exhibit in their structure and carry out through their performances..."<sup>17</sup>

While Monod is an atheist and materialist, as a scientist he was forced to acknowledge the design he observed while examining nature. All living things are endowed with a purpose. That purpose is expressed in both their design and function. For an atheist, this is a surprise. For someone operating from the biblical worldview, this is expected. There is a Designer. He has created with purpose. And man, in addition to appreciating beauty and design, can discover the purpose of the seed.

### **The Farmer Can Understand the Design (Genesis 2:19)**

In Genesis 2:19, we find the most startling revelation: "Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name." God made the animals, but he left it to Adam, the farmer, horticulturist, and animal husbandry expert to name them. This reveals something very important about both man and creation. Creation reveals the divine order. Creation is not "disordered" or capricious, as animists believe. Man, being made in the image of God, is a reasonable, rational creature. As husbandman, Adam had the ability to observe the order that God had created and to use language to categorize creation. Not only does man have this ability, but also whatever Adam named the animals, "*that was its name!*" Let me say that a little differently. Whatever name Adam gave the animals, that was the name *that God would call them by!* The poorest farmer is

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<sup>16</sup> Dr. Mark Hanby, *You Have Not Many Fathers* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2000), pp. ix-x.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971), p. 9.

not poor in endowment. The poorest farmer has the ability *to think about farming!* Speaking from their Central American experience, Flores and Sanchez state, “If the mind of a campesino (peasant) is a desert, his farm will look like a desert.”<sup>18</sup> Conversely, if the mind of the farmer is bountiful, his farm will produce bounty. Part of our task is to help the farmer to know the First Farmer, so that he may come to think about farming the right way.

What is the nature of God’s revelation? God has revealed Himself in two major ways. In *General Revelation*, He has revealed Himself to all mankind, through “the book” of His *world!* In *Special Revelation*, He has revealed Himself to those who would be saved through the book of His *Word!*

Through General Revelation, God has revealed Himself to every human being in every generation, through the things He has made. Paul makes this point in Romans 1:19-20 (ASV): “because that which is known of God is manifest *in them* [italics mine]; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived *through the things that are made* [italics mine], even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse:” Paul argues here that God has revealed Himself in two ways in His creation. First, He has revealed Himself “in them” —man the image of God. Second, He has revealed Himself “through the things that are made.” This is why, even an atheistic scientist like Jacques Monod argues that all living things bear the imprint of design. The logical conclusion is that there must be a Designer.

Likewise, through Special Revelation, God has revealed Himself and His plan of salvation through His Word. First, He has revealed Himself in the *Living Word*, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-2, 14). Second, He has revealed Himself through His *Written Word*, the Bible (Hebrews 4:12). God’s General Revelation gives each man enough to know *that* God exists. In Special Revelation He discloses the plan of salvation and tells us how we might *know* God.

While we have discussed God’s revelation in a “theological” framework, it is important to hear the wonder in our theology. The great American agriculturist and educator, Dr. George Washington Carver, understood the wonder of God’s revelation. He called his research lab “God’s Little Workshop.”<sup>19</sup> Carver was a Christian. As such, he understood that God spoke through both His creation and through His Word. He understood that each revelation shed light on the other.

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<sup>18</sup> Flores, M. and E. Sanchez. 1992. *The Human Farm: People-based Approach to Food Production and Conservation*. pp 74-81. In K. Smith and T. Yamamori (eds.) *Growing our Future: Food Security and the Environment*. Kumarian Press. West Hartford, Connecticut.

<sup>19</sup> John S. Ferrell, *Fruits of Creation* (Shakopee, MN: Macalester Park Publishing Company, 1995), p. 61.

Nature is a book to be read. It reveals the Designer and the design. As we study the form and structure of a thing, we can discover its purpose; we can “think God’s thoughts after Him.” The Scripture, on the other hand, helps us to interpret what we are seeing. It establishes principles and a framework for, in our case, agriculture. God’s Word interprets and gives meaning to God’s world. God’s world reveals both the existence of God and something of His purpose.



George Washington Carver understood the wonder of God’s revelation. When God’s Word said in Genesis 1:29, “Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food ....” (KJV), Carver, in childlike wonder, commented, “Behold” means to ‘look,’ ‘search,’ ‘find out’ ... That to me is the most wonderful thing in life.”<sup>20</sup> Carver took the Bible seriously. He understood that it informs us about our life and work.

Carver also understood that he was to “read” the book of God’s world: “To me Nature in its varied forms is the little windows through which God permits me to commune with Him, and to see much of His glory, by simply lifting the curtain and looking in. I love to think of Nature as wireless telegraph stations through which God speaks to us every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives.”<sup>21</sup>

Carver came to creation to discover the purpose of a thing and then to put it to use to benefit man. When asked by agricultural journalist what prompted him to study the simple peanut, Carver responded:

Why, I just took a handful of peanuts and looked at them. “Great Creator,” I said, “*why* did you make the peanut? Why?”

With such knowledge as I had of chemistry and physics I set to work to take the peanut apart. I separated the water, the fats, the oils, the gums, the resins, sugars, starches pectoses, pentoses, pentosans, legume, lysine, and the amino and amedo acids. There! I had the parts of the peanut all spread out before me. Then I merely went on to try different combinations of those parts, under different conditions of temperature, pressure, and so forth.

The result was what you see—these 202 different products, all made from peanuts!<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> George Washington Carver, quoted by John S. Ferrell in *Fruits of Creation* (Shakopee, MN: Macalester Park Publishing Company, 1995), p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

George Washington Carver was born “the poorest of the poor.” Both his parents were slaves in the state of Missouri during the Civil War. Carver was orphaned and thus never knew his parents. Yet he became one of America’s greatest “farmers.” He learned how to *think* about farming. God used this man of humble roots to impact a nation.

There is an old Chinese proverb that has helped to guide the development movement. It says: “Give a man a fish and he has food for a day. Teach a man to fish and he has food for a lifetime.” “Giving a man a fish” is an act of charity during an emergency. This is called *relief*, and it can keep a man alive during a time of disaster. To “teach a man to fish” introduces the “how” skills and technology knowledge. This is called *development*, and it can help a man provide for his family in situations of chronic poverty and hunger. While these are good as far as they go, they leave the community in a static situation. The community is limited by the resources and knowledge that are “brought in” from the outside. Today, development is often thought of as outside help, outside money, and outside resources being brought to bear on a poor community. In cultures where fatalism shapes the mind, well meaning outside resources tend to reinforce the lie: “We are poor and there is nothing we can do about it!”

The proverb needs to be extended if people are going to be set free to dream and to reach their God-given potential. The proverb could read:

Give a man a fish, he has food for a day! – *Relief*  
Teach a man to fish, he has food for a lifetime! – *Development*  
Teach a man to *think* about fishing and his life is changed forever! –  
*Transformation*

In our context, the task of the Christian agriculturist, missionary, development worker or pastor is to teach farmers to “think about farming,” to understand their life and work within the framework of the biblical worldview. It is to call poor farmers to live in the context of God’s two forms of revelation. Through general revelation, the design reveals the glory of the First Farmer and the structure and functions of, among other things, the seed system. Special revelation allows us to have a relationship with the First Farmer, to understand biblical principles of agriculture and to have a dynamic framework for connecting agriculture to the Kingdom of God. It allows us to cultivate a Christian mind as it relates to agriculture.

We have seen this Christian mind in George Washington Carver. God’s general revelation through creation and special revelation of the Bible were “the books” that he read to have his mind framed as an agriculturist and an educator. Another man who understood these things was “the father of modern missions,” William Carey. In a profound little book, *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for the Transformation of a Culture*, Ruth and Vishal Mangalwadi explore, not Carey’s life, but his mindset. Carey



was not only the father of modern missions; he was the pioneer of transformational (biblical) development. Carey was not a missionary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century sense of a “professional, cross-cultural religious worker.” Bringing a Christian mind to the task of evangelism, church planting, cultural transformation and national development, Carey was, among other things, a botanist, agriculturist, and conservationist. Carey connected the Kingdom of God to these endeavors to see India transformed. Read, with delight, these brief sketches from the Mangalwadi’s book. To the question, “Who was William Carey?” we see three of the answers:

*Botanist:* “William Carey was a Christian missionary,” answers a science student. “And he was also the botanist after whom *Careya herbacea* is named. It is one of the three varieties of eucalyptus found only in India.

“Carey brought the English daisy to India and introduced the Linnaean system to gardening. He also published the first books on science and natural history in India, such as Willaim Roxburgh’s *Flora Indica*, because he believed the biblical view that, ‘All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord.’ Carey believed that nature is declared ‘good’ by its Creator; it is not *maya* (illusion), to be shunned, but a subject worthy of human study. He frequently lectured on science and tried to show that even lowly insects are not souls in bondage, but creatures worthy of our attention.”<sup>23</sup>

*Agriculturalist:* “William Carey founded India’s Agri-Horticultural Society in the 1820s, thirty years before the Royal Agricultural Society was established in England,” says a post-graduate student of agriculture. “Carey did a systematic survey of agriculture in India, campaigned for agriculture reform in the journal, *Asiatic Researches*, and exposed the evils of the indigo cultivation system two generations before it collapsed.

“Carey did all this,” adds the agriculturist, “not because he was hired to do it, but because he was horrified to see that three-fifths of one of the finest countries in the world, full of industrious inhabitants, had been allowed to become an uncultivated jungle abandoned to wild beasts and serpents.”<sup>24</sup>

*Conservationist:* “William Carey was an evangelist,” begins a student from the Indian Forest Institute. “He thought that, ‘If the Gospel flourishes in India, the wilderness will, in every respect, become a fruitful field.’ He became the first person in India to write essays on forestry, almost fifty years before the government made its very first attempt at forest conservation, in Malabar. Carey both practiced and vigorously advocated the cultivation of timber, giving practical advice on how to plant trees for environmental, agricultural and

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<sup>23</sup> Vishal & Ruth Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 20.

commercial purposes. His motivation came from his belief that God has made man responsible for the earth. It was in response to Carey's journal, *Friend of India*, that the government first appointed Dr. Brandis of Bonn to care for the forests of Burma, and arranged for the supervision of the forests of South India by Dr. Clegham."<sup>25</sup>

Like Carver, William Carey was a remarkably gifted man. Both were born in poverty. Unlike Carver, who had a formal education past the doctoral level, Carey did not finish secondary school. Both men cultivated, not only the soil, but also a Christian mind.

### **Beyond Dualism**

William Carey and George Washington Carver were men from a different era, a time when Christians functioned from the biblical worldview. Christ is the Lord of all of life, not just the spiritual part of life. In the biblical worldview, there is no sacred-secular dichotomy; there is no priest-laity hierarchy; there is no concept that doing religious or spiritual work is "full-time Christian service" and all non-spiritual vocations are somehow second-class. According to the biblical worldview, we live in *one* world, God's world. God is the Lord of the entire world, and as Christians, we are to live *coram Deo*—before the face of God. But today, many Christians live in two worlds—a spiritual world and a secular world. The spiritual world is the realm of church, Bible study and prayer meetings. The secular world is everything else, including, for many Christian agronomists, their work in agriculture.

The farmer and agriculturist have a different call than do the pastor or theologian. They have different skills and a different calling than the evangelist or church planter. The gifts and call are different, but one is not superior to the other. The issue is one of consecration, not one of higher and lower calling. A farmer may be leading a consecrated life and a pastor may not. In this case, the farmer is "more spiritual" than the pastor.

In an earlier generation, when the norm for Christians was to live *coram Deo*, a woman had a plaque made for her kitchen. It read, "Worship services held here three times a day!" What did she understand? She knew that she was a Christian, not only when she was in the church building, but also when she was in her kitchen. She understood that she was a Christian 24/7, not just on Sunday. She understood that the "horizontal" activity of preparing a meal for her family and friends was an act of worship. When her husband went out to his field to farm, he stood in the middle of the field and cried to the Lord, "Lord, this is your farm! I am your steward. How may I labor today so as to glorify you in my field?"

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

There is a great division among Christian ministries today because of the sacred-secular dichotomy. The “professional missionary,” functioning as a dualist, wants to see souls saved for heaven and churches planted. When this occurs, the missionary’s job is done. Some with a dualistic mind may use agriculture “to get a foot in the door” to do the “real work,” of evangelism and church planting.

Conversely, Christian relief and development workers often see the needs of the poor, and are moved by God’s mandate to help the poor, yet they often respond with materialistic patterns of solving the problems of poverty. Like their secular counterparts, they enter a country in response to a major disaster and set up a relief office, hire staff, buy vehicles and move commodities. As the crises subsides, they begin to receive training resources and funding from USAID or UN sponsored agricultural agencies which in many cases flow from a materialistic paradigm. They then proceed to implement essentially materialistic programs in the name of Christ. To make these programs “holistic” they may seek to add a “spiritual” component to their materialistic development efforts, like pastors’ conferences or showing the Jesus Film.

Today, both Christian missionaries and relief and development workers tend to operate from a dualistic “two worlds” paradigm. What is necessary today for both is that they return to a biblical worldview driven perspective of their ministry. They need to answer the questions, What is the Mission? What is the role of the church in society? What does it mean to be a Christian? What is the responsibility of the church to the impoverished, from perspective of the biblical worldview?

Christians should not seek to start “Christian relief and development organizations,” but relief and development organizations that are functioning from a biblical paradigm. To be motivated by Christ to do secular development is not enough. The motive, mindset and methodology should all reflect the biblical worldview. Missionary organizations need to learn from William Carey, and base their policies and programs on the biblical worldview as well.

My good friend and co-worker, Arturo Cuba, has a remarkable story that he tells from his experience in Guatemala. It illustrates a truly holistic approach to development, in contrast to the dichotomized ministries of missionaries and relief and development staff working among impoverished farmers in the mountains of Guatemala.

The Pokomchi Indians are among the poorest people in the poorest state of Guatemala. A generation ago, missionaries evangelized them and planted churches. Many Pokomchi accepted Christ, but their communities remained desperately poor. The young Christian converts gained hope for the future, but no hope for today. In fact, they were literally waiting to die, so they could leave their miserable existence on earth and go to be with Jesus in heaven. After awhile, several private voluntary organizations came to work with the

Pokomchi, interested in helping them overcome their physical poverty. They brought in large amounts of outside money and completed many projects, labeling them successful. Now, there were pit latrines, but they were largely unused. There were school buildings, but very few children attended or graduated. Many of the projects that were carried out to improve the physical condition of the Pokomchi were completed, but there was no transformation in the lives and communities of the Pokomchi. The people remained desperately poor.

This began to change when Arturo, a young Peruvian pastor, began to work among the Pokomchi in the early 1990s. Unlike earlier missionaries and relief and development workers, Arturo understood the importance of the biblical worldview for individual and community transformation. Likewise, he understood that authentic Christian ministry is to be wholistic—reaching out to every area of brokenness in the community. He began to work with illiterate Pokomchi pastors. He prayerfully took them through a comprehensive study of the Bible, in hopes of challenging their mindsets. Arturo understood that true repentance involves more than spiritual belief. It also requires a completely transformed frame of mind.

As Arturo taught them from the Bible, he used everyday illustrations to teach key biblical principles, such as God's intention that mankind exercise stewardship over creation. A common problem among the Pokomchi was the lack of proper storage facilities for harvested crops. Often, peasant farmers harvested a good crop, only to have rats eat it before their children could be fed. Arturo asked the farmers, "Who is smarter, you or the rats?" The farmers would laugh and say, "The rats." Arturo asked, "Do you have dominion over the rats, or do the rats have dominion over your lives?" The farmers reluctantly acknowledged that, in a real sense, the rats had dominion over them and their families. Then, Arturo introduced the farmers to the key biblical principle that men and women are uniquely created in God's image, and are given the mandate by God to exercise stewardship and dominion over the rest of His creation (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:15; 9:1-2; Psalm 8:3-9.) He pointed out that God had blessed them with creativity because they were made in His image. With their God-given creativity and a proper understanding of their role to subdue and care for creation, they could overcome this problem. The farmers later developed a plan for grain storage that involved the construction of simple, elevated corncribs. The food supply began to increase, as did the overall health of the children in the community.

Arturo continued to teach other biblical principles and their practical, everyday application, and gradually, the mindsets of these Pokomchi pastors

were transformed. As their mindsets were transformed, the church was impacted. Through the church, the community began to be transformed.

Arturo taught the biblical principle that all human life is created by God, in His image (Genesis 1:26-27) and is therefore of incredible value. Community members came to realize that their children were a gift of the Lord (Psalm 127:3) and blessing of the Lord to the community. As a result, community members began to encourage their children to attend school. Children started to go to school because the people valued education, particularly education in God's Word.

Arturo taught the biblical principle that both men and women are of equal value and worth in God's eyes, and that husbands are to love their wives and treat them with respect and dignity (Ephesians 5:25-28; 1 Peter 3:7). As a result, husbands began to encourage their wives to learn to read because they came to realize that God cares equally for men and women.

In the Pokomchi community, it is traditional for wives to stay at home with the children during the day. These homes are typically small mud-brick huts, where the women prepare meals over open fires on the floors of the huts. A critical problem in the community was that the smoke from these fires caused health problems for wives and children living inside the huts, and often children would stumble into the open fires and be severely burned. The husbands, as they came to realize their biblical responsibility to love and care for their wives and children, began to apply these principles by building small mud stoves in their homes. The stoves were designed to channel the smoke outside, and to protect their children from getting burned. As a result, the health of both wives and children in the community improved.

A seminary professor from the United States visited Arturo recently. He witnessed how the lives of the Pokomchi had been transformed through wholistic ministry, based on the power of biblical truth applied to all areas of life. Tears welled up in his eyes and he said, "This is the coming of the Kingdom of God to the Pokomchi!"

## **AN AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM**

Most Christians separate agriculture from the Kingdom of God. Relief and development organizations traditionally connect agriculture to the materialistic paradigm. Many missions organizations, operating from a Gnostic paradigm, use agriculture (a "secular" activity) to create a platform for doing the higher activities of evangelism and church planting. We need to begin to repudiate these distorted models

and replace them with a holistic model. We need to reconnect and integrate agriculture and the Kingdom of God.

Above all else, an agriculturalist or farmer is an ambassador of the Kingdom of God. We must encourage the continuation of the “great cloud” of pastoral and agricultural witnesses: Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, Amos, Peter, Carey and Carver to name a few.

Dr. Ted Yamamori, President Emeritus of Food for the Hungry International, has dedicated his life to calling the church to biblical holistic ministry. He talks frequently of the couplets “redemption that leads to development” and “development that leads to redemption.”

In holism, cycles of interaction and understanding are created. In our context, redemption that leads to development may be identified as “connecting agriculture to the Kingdom,” while development that leads to redemption may be identified as “connecting the Kingdom of God to agriculture.” These are two sides of the same coin. In both expressions, the agriculturalist who wants to function from the framework of the biblical worldview is the integration point of this holism. Let’s look at these in turn.

### **Connecting Agriculture to the Kingdom**

Responding to the Gospel proclamation should lead to Kingdom principled agricultural development. When a farmer becomes a Christian, his life is to be lived within the context of the Kingdom of God; his mind is to be transformed so that he begins to see agriculture within the framework of a biblical worldview. His purpose now is to be a steward of the land that God has given him.

How does one begin to think and function as a Christian in the domain of agriculture? First, Christians who are farmers can begin to develop a *Biblical Theology of Agriculture*. The Bible is God’s “farmers’ almanac,” the owner’s manual for agriculture. While it does not contain all there is to know about agriculture, it creates a framework for understanding agriculture and presents principles that relate to agriculture. The Bible is not only to be studied as a devotional book, but it is to inform the vocational life of the agriculturalist.

When the Scriptures inform a person’s understanding of his vocation, it may be said that he is developing a biblical theology for vocation. This monograph can be used as a framework for that study. An agriculturalist can keep a journal, and over a few years or the course of a lifetime, read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation to see what it reveals

about agriculture. Other methods of study, such as “Scripture Search”<sup>26</sup> and “word studies”<sup>27</sup> may be used profitably to help develop a biblical theology of agriculture.

Second, as a farmer comes to Christ, he is to live *coram Deo*—“before the face of God.” He is a Christian 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He is not merely a Christian when he is doing “spiritual things.” His vocation is transformed and is to bring glory to God and hope to a broken world.

The Christian apologist and cultural critic Os Guinness shares a marvelous story from his own family in his book *The Call*. It is the story about the life of his great-great grandmother, Jane Lucretia D’Esterre. As an impoverished 18 year-old Irish orphan and widow with two children, D’Esterre sat on a riverbank in deep despair, contemplating suicide. While gazing “into the dark depths of the river...she looked up and saw a young plowman setting to work in a field on the other bank of the river. He was about her age but quite oblivious to her and to anything but his work. Meticulous, absorbed, skilled, he displayed such a pride in his work that the newly turned furrows looked as finely executed as the paint strokes on an artist’s canvas.”<sup>28</sup>

Guinness continues that D’Esterre was “saved from suicide and reinvigorated for life by the sight of *work well done*.” [italics mine] She returned to care for her children, came to faith in Christ and married Captain John Grattan Guinness, Os’ great-great-grandfather. “Nothing is known of the Scottish farmer’s son except what was seen in his plowing and could be guessed from his whistling hymns as he worked. But knowing the common motivation of that most Christian of centuries in Scotland, it is not too much to say that the incident underscores how *calling transforms life so that even the commonplace and menial are invested with the splendor of the ordinary*.”<sup>29</sup> [italics mine]

A life lived *coram Deo* is a life that brings the simple things into the realm of worship. Dignity is given to the menial, the splendor of the ordinary is revealed to a watching world. Agriculture is transformed within the framework of stewardship, and God uses the simple and beautiful artistry of the farmer to speak life to the watching world. Farming is to be done to the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom. As the Christian agriculturist enters his field, he recognizes that “this land belongs to God;” the farmer in his field is a steward and has come to worship. The prayer he utters is, “Lord, how can I honor you today in this land? How can I make this land more bountiful? How can I enrich the land for a legacy for the next generation?” We saw this earlier illustrated in “Arturo’s Story.”

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<sup>26</sup> See Thomas H. McAlpine’s book *By Word, Work, and Wonder* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, a division of World Vision International, 1995), Chapter 5.

<sup>27</sup> This is a method of using the *Noah Webster 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*. For more information, contact: Foundation for American Christian Education, P.O. Box 9588, Chesapeake, VA 23321-9588.

<sup>28</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 195.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Third, the farmer, seeking to function from a biblical mind as it relates to agriculture is to apply biblical principles in his practice. In Genesis 1:26-28 and 2: 15 we read that the farmer is to be a steward of the land. Instead of destroying the soil, he should work the farm in a way that leaves it more fertile for succeeding generations. This would speak against the slash and burn agriculture found in many developing nations and erosion of agricultural land found in others.

This is illustrated in George Washington Carver's call for the farmer to be "kind to the soil." He writes, "The farmer whose soil produces less every year, is unkind to it in some way; that is, he is not doing by it what he should; he is robbing it of some substance it must have, and he becomes, therefore, a soil robber rather than a progressive farmer."<sup>30</sup> Carver continues, "We must enrich our soil every year instead of merely depleting it. It is fundamental that nature will drive away those who sin against it."<sup>31</sup>

From Exodus 23:10-13 there is to be a Sabbath rest every seven years for the land. This was given to "rest the soil" and to remind the farmer that his dependence was on the Lord, not on his own initiative for prosperity. Carver comments on this and similar passages, "We take this very Book, here — go way back here, almost to the beginning of time and we find, way back in the time of the Pharaohs, the farmers were obliged to rest their lands and every fifty years was a jubilee year. This was picnic time for the soil."<sup>32</sup>

From Deuteronomy 24:19-22 and Ruth 2:17 we read that the land is intended by the Land Owner for social good. The steward is to leave  *gleanings*  to meet the needs of the widow, stranger and foreigner. This is a reminder to the farmer that God cares for the poor and thus the Christian who is a farmer has a social responsibility to use a portion of his crop to meet the needs of the poor.

We know from Scripture, that we live in a moral universe and therefore farmers have a moral obligation to the community. Crops should be grown that edify and not destroy human potential. Two Christians working as agriculturists in the Mission in northern Thailand were confronted with a dilemma. The farmers they were working with were growing opium poppies for the drug trade. As farmers in these communities came to Christ, fruit orchards and vegetable gardens replaced poppy fields.

These are just a few examples of how the Bible establishes principles for agriculture.

Fourth, the church is the body of Christ and is to be an incarnational community. Those gifted with equipping gifts, pastors, and teachers are to equip the saints for the

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<sup>30</sup> John S. Ferrell, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30.



work of service (Ephesians 4:11-12). Too often today, because God's people function from a Gnostic paradigm, we think that Christians are to be employed in "church jobs" like ushering, running programs, or being the church treasurer. While these may or may not be necessary, what is clear from the biblical paradigm is that the church is to be an incarnational community and her people are to be equipped when gathered on Sunday to be servant-leaders in the community when they are scattered the other six days a week. The church in agricultural communities is to equip the farmers to not only be servants to the community, but to be leaders in the agricultural sector. God's intention is that *nations* (not merely individuals) are to be disciplined (Matthew 28:18-20). For this to occur all sectors of society need to be disciplined – bringing a biblical worldview and biblical principles to that sector. Natural evil (weeds in the garden, drought, famine) is to be pushed back, farmers are to be equipped to provide leadership in their sphere of society to fight the ravages of the Fall and to make the land as bountiful as God intends.

We have seen how Carey and Carver exemplified this leadership. Now let's look at Cyrus McCormick. In the draft script of their television series, "The Book of the Millennium," Ruth and Vishal Mangalwadi describe the impact of the Bible on economics by developing a case study from the life of McCormick and his labor-saving invention of the reaper. This extraordinary tool developed by a farm boy proved to be an invention that changed the world.

The McCormick reaper "tells the story of the Bible's impact on the economic transformation during the second millennium. For the reaper was not invented at an Engineering College, nor at an Agricultural University.... Instead, the reaper – its invention and marketing – was the initiative of an ordinary country boy – Cyrus Hall McCormick (1809-1884)."<sup>33</sup>

"Cyrus had little formal schooling. At the age of 15 he began to build upon his father's many failed attempts at constructing a reaper. He succeeded at the age of 22, and went on to become a *nation builder* [italics mine] – industrialist, businessman, publisher, politician, philanthropist, and a promoter of biblical education."<sup>34</sup>

The Mangalwadis point out that Patrick Bell in Scotland and Obed Hussey in the USA were working on the concept of the reaper at the same time. They raise the profound question, why did "ancient civilizations that built the great Pyramids and monuments (such as the Taj Mahal in India) not invent a simple machine like a reaper? The answer is that these inventors were a product of a peculiar culture and mindset, which had been forged by the Bible. It was more natural for them to think of building labor saving machines useful for others than mausoleums for their graves."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Vishal & Ruth Mangalwadi, *The Book of the Millennium*, draft script, pp. 3-4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

It was a superior theology that drove McCormick and others to pursue developing the reaper. It was a theology that respected human dignity in contrast to the cheapness of human life found in many developing countries. It was a mindset that man is to have dominion over nature rather than vice versa.

The Mangalwadis summarize, "... all agricultural societies have needed to harvest grain. They have met this need simply by hiring laborers, buying slaves, or forcing women and children who are too weak to say 'no.'"<sup>36</sup> "McCormick's cultural and personal beliefs made him conscious of the need of a non-human harvester.... Societies that lack this respect for weak and vulnerable human beings don't even bother to provide laborers with wheelbarrows so easily available today."<sup>37</sup> "Indeed Cyrus McCormick empowered the farmers to turn America into the breadbasket of the world. Not by exploiting others, but by liberating slaves and laborers by substituting machinery for human labor."<sup>38</sup>

This reveals the importance of developing servant leaders in the agricultural sector. The wealth of a nation is her people, being freed by the principles flowing from the biblical worldview to be all that God intends for them to be. It is the role of the church to create the conscience of the nation, to equip believers to be nation builders, including preparing simple farmers to become shapers of the agricultural sector.

Building on this, the fifth thing is to let Christians in the agricultural sector create or infiltrate existing institutions that train future farmers. Let them bring with them the biblical mind to shape those institutions. Let these institutions be places where the best research (reading the book of the world) is integrated with the reading of the book of the Word of God. Let them be places where the simple farmer is called into the Kingdom of God—where he is taught, not only the technical side of agricultural, but to also *think* about farming.

George Washington Carver articulated this spirit when he wrote, "Let farmers' institutes be organized, and all the methods of nature's study be brought down to the everyday life and language of the masses. Let us become familiar with the commonest things about us, of which two-thirds of the people are surprisingly ignorant... If every farmer could recognize that his plants were real, living things, and that sunshine, air, food, and drink were just as necessary for their lives as for that of the animal, the problem would become at once intellectual, enjoyable and practical."<sup>39</sup>

Now let's look at the other side of the issue, connecting the Kingdom to agriculture.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 6,7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> John S. Ferrell, p. 36.

## Connecting the Kingdom to Agriculture

Agricultural development within the mental context of the Kingdom of God should lead to Gospel proclamation. As a natural part of the Christian farmer's life there is an opportunity to reveal the Kingdom of God in the agricultural sector. This is not to be a separation between the technical and the message. In some secular-founded Christian relief and development programs, the Christian technical people do the technical work and bring in the "spiritual people" to do the spiritual work (i.e., showing the Jesus Film, leading Bible studies, or holding pastors' conferences). Conversely, missionary organizations often leverage agriculture as a means to a "higher" objective—evangelism.

In the biblical paradigm of the Kingdom of God there is an integration of all of life. The Christian technical worker *is a Christian!* The world in which he works is God's world. Dr. Carver expressed this quite simply, "I know that my Redeemer liveth. I know the source from whence my help comes. Inspiration ... means simply *God speaking to man through the things He has created* [italics mine]; permitting him to interpret correctly the purposes the Creator had in permitting them to come into existence. I am not interested in any science that leaves God out; in fact, I am not interested in anything that leaves out God."<sup>40</sup>

The Good News of the Kingdom is both demonstrated and proclaimed in each sphere of society. The sphere of agriculture is a place *through which* "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The farm of the Christian agriculturist is the place where Christ wants to make Himself known. Within the normal everyday activities of farm life, the farmer will find opportunities for pre-evangelism or evangelism. He can utilize these opportunities in a number of ways.

First, the "Book of the World" can be used to reveal the Creator. These opportunities are called truth encounters. Christianity is objectively true because God exists and reality conforms to His existence. The book of the world is part of God's self-disclosure. Truth encounters reveal The First Farmer in everyday farm life. A report from a 1915 Farmers' Conference in Georgia reveals Dr. Carver's practice of truth encounters. "Prof. Carver is a genius. He not only knows his subjects but puts them in such simple form that a child can grasp them. His knowledge of the soil and plant life is simply wonderful. No one can spend any time with Prof. Carver in a grove or woods without getting some conception of nature and nature's God. He sees the good and beautiful in everything that God has made."<sup>41</sup>

Truth encounters simply reveal the "fingerprints of God" all over creation. From His immensity seen in the vastness of the universe to His power seen in the pounding surf, to His artistry seen in the sunset, to His nurturing seen in the mother's breast, or to His

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

marvelous engineering seen in the miracle of the seed, God reveals Himself through the things He has made. It is the Christian agriculturist's grand journey to point to the First Farmer through the daily miracles on the farm or at the research institute. It was said of Dr. Carver's three-hour lecture to a group of orphan boys in 1939 in Michigan, "What began as a lecture on botany soon developed into a soul-stirring recital of how intimately all of the plants are related to one another, of how the plants and the animals—mankind included—are inextricably interdependent, and of how the whole of creation is related to its Creator."<sup>42</sup>

Second, the Book of the Word can be used to establish practical principles of agricultural life. Bible studies can be developed from the farmer's journal used for tracing a biblical theology of agriculture. Studies on stewardship, the fallowing of the land, and gleaning for the poor can give guidance in improving the viability of the farm. Such studies can also show the veracity of God's word for other areas of life as well. These studies can be done informally, one on one, with individual farmers or can be part of the curriculum of the farmer's institute. When taught by the agricultural researcher or soil scientist, the seamless whole of God's creation is authoritatively revealed.

Third, the Book of the Word, can be used to teach timeless spiritual truths. The Old and New Testaments are filled with proverbs, sayings and stories from agrarian life in a poor Middle-Eastern setting. Jesus, Himself, was a master storyteller. In 30 places, He took common events from city and agrarian life to teach eternal principles. His simple agricultural parables acted as spiritual time bombs in the lives of those who heard them. Let's look at some examples. In Matthew 13: 1-23, Jesus used the parable of the seed to illustrate that not all who hear the Gospel will respond in faith. In John, He used an illustration of the vine and the branches to reflect the need of the believer in Christ to abide in Christ. It also teaches the agricultural and spiritual principle of pruning. In Galatians 6:7-10, the Apostle Paul affirmed the principle that you reap what you sow! If you sow evil, you will reap destruction. If you sow charity, you will reap life.

Fourth, as mentioned in the previous section (Connecting Agriculture to the Kingdom), we can establish research and training institutes where the revelation of God's world and Word are integrated on the programmatic level.

Fifth, the local church can demonstrate the love of God through the use of "Seed Projects," simple projects using local resources to minister holistically to non-Christians in the community. This type of ministry has been articulated by the Harvest Foundation in their Leadership Development Training Program for pastors and church leaders. A story told by a Baptist pastor from Burma will help to illustrate how a group of Christian farmers in this predominately Buddhist country reached out to demonstrate God's love to an antagonistic Buddhist neighbor.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

"Following the conference I was visiting one of our churches in lower Burma. I taught them the lesson on Seed Projects. (This lesson emphasizes using local resources to demonstrate God's love.) While I was in the community I learned of a non-Christian man with five children that couldn't prepare his rice paddies in time for the rainy season planting because he only had one ox. I shared this situation with our church members who are from a different ethnic group than this man. Historically there has been fighting between the tribe to which the church members belong and the ethnic group to which this man belongs. In spite of the traditional inter-ethnic animosity, the church members responded and took six of their oxen to this man's rice paddies and helped him prepare his fields for planting. This action of kindness—especially across ethnic lines—had a great impact on the man and his family. I just returned from another visit on January 22nd and learned that the man's oldest daughter has become a believer and been baptized. The rest of the family is coming to church and learning about the Christian faith. However, the church speaks a different language than this man's family and he wants to learn about Christian faith in his own tongue. So he and some members from the church are building another building where they can hold services in this man's mother tongue. Another result of this demonstration of God's love by the Christians is a growing unity between the two ethnic groups in the village."

Sixth, larger scale (larger than seed projects) agricultural projects can be initiated by Christian farmers to demonstrate God's love to the poor by providing work, increasing vitality of the soil and improving the economic strength of an area. The following is the story of a pastor from the city of Nairobi, Kenya. After attending a conference in which he heard about the need for the church to minister holistically to the poor, Pastor Joe "Cotton" moved to rural Kenya, to mobilize the church and community to increase food security in the area by planting cotton.

I attended a Vision Conference in 1999, not sure what it was all about, but determined to honor the invitation of a friend from NIST [Nairobi International School of Theology].

The teaching process was revolutionary. I had never heard the Bible presented in such powerful words and illustrations, making it relevant to me and my community today.

Most astounding was the assertion that the church and its pastor are Heaven's Embassy to demonstrate God's intentions today and throughout history.

The brokenness of man in every area of his relationships explained the inequality and injustices evident around me. Seed projects [a lesson teaching

Christians to use local resources to do small projects to demonstrate God's love to the non-believers in their own community] had me completely entranced. I pledged to be an agent for the message and concept. I felt the Lord Jesus Christ plant something deep within me—affecting me and the choices I make and growing from me to affect my whole society. Being a pastor, I realized I am God's point of excellence and reference in all issues facing my community.

Cotton can be grown in 75% of Kenya. First grown in Kibos (Kisumu) in 1905, by the 1960's and 70's most families in Kenya had benefited from cotton growing... 140,000 bales. This has whittled down today to below 20,000 bales so that children of the 1980's and 90's don't know what cotton looks like. Cotton growing can ensure food security as it is easily intercropped with any food crops and does not compete with finances or moisture but is nitrogen fixing, adding value to whatever is already in the field.

In December 1999 I set out to find seed to prepare for next planting season of March 2000. By February and March I had not found any. In April I got in touch with KARI Fibre Research Station Kibos who gave me many ideas on how to get seed and revive cotton growing. I was then living in Nairobi working as a church administrator of Nairobi Gospel Centre. Through prayer, I was led to relocate to a rural cotton growing area and a rural church, Voice of Salvation International, with 90 churches along the Lake Victoria region. My wife, Ruth, miraculously got admitted for a 3-year course at Maseno University. So in September 2000 my family relocated to Kisumu (Ruth, Josephine, Kepha, and myself). From September to December I embarked on mobilization of church and community members to grow cotton in the 2001 season. Eighty-seven widows and fifty church members joined our project which we named CREAM—Cotton Rehabilitation and Management. The local steering committee was put into place with me as project officer.

In October 2000 the Government of Kenya (GOK) promised free cotton seed to all who would plant cotton in the 2001 season. With 133 members, CREAM was given 500 kg of seed free of charge. KARI Kibos donated 100 kg foundation seed for bulking by CREAM to ensure future supply of quality seed in subsequent years.

A local Ahero contractor leased two tractors for early land preparation by CREAM, to be paid by installments.

In March 2001 GOK donated 48 MT seed of food crops to Ahero/Nyando District. Rains fell on time in April and May and ten acres "nucleus area" and 50 acres "outquarter" was planted among the B3 CREAM members. Weeding,

spraying, and husbandry were supervised by GOK extension officers and CREAM training.

The cotton crop is currently at different stages of being picked. Many in the community are already asking to participate in 2002 season. Local ginneries are willing to "buy our whole crop."

We have had opportunity to demonstrate the CREAM concept of poverty eradication and community empowerment through growing cotton at Kisumu Agricultural Show (August 2001) and Nairobi International Show (1-6 October 2001). The response and request for collaborations and information is overwhelming. We recorded 250 responses in Kisumu and we are yet to record the requests in Nairobi.

This is only year one; we must go on to mobilize and prepare for year two. There is great potential to be explored further, with up to 5,000 potential cotton growers within and around the churches.

The pastor will be the centerpiece of further mobilization and training as benefits of cotton growing penetrate every community living on 'black cotton soil.'

There is a remarkable example of how a community of Christians has practiced an integration of agriculture and the Kingdom. They are the Mennonite communities of the Chaco in Paraguay. Their remarkable story is told summarized here.

Here is another story about how the Mennonites transformed the desolate Paraguayan Chaco into an inhabitable, productive land.

The remarkable book *Garden in the Wilderness* by Edgar Stoesz and Muriel T. Stackley (Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 1999) provides a case study of redemption that leads to development and development that leads to redemption. It is the story of the coming of the Mennonite communities to the Chaco of Paraguay. It is the story of the transformation of a desolation into a garden, of bringing, in a substantial way, the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the impoverished and famine-stricken indigenous peoples of the Chaco.

### **Background**

From 1927 to 1947, three waves of Mennonite immigrants made their way from Russia to the Chaco in Paraguay. The three groups began their journey in Holland. They moved to Poland-Prussia and Southern Russia in search of land to farm. After a sojourn in Canada, the first wave arrived in the Chaco in 1927,

establishing Menno Colony. The second wave arrived in 1930, fleeing the Stalinist oppression, to establish the Fernheim colony. The third wave, made homeless by WW II, arrived in 1947, establishing the Neuland Colony. [p. 2]

### **The land**

The land of the Chaco was a bitter land. Literally the grass was bitter and the water was salty [25]. It was a hot, scrubby wasteland [7], infested with insects [44]. "The land was so hard that it was workable for only five or six days following a rain" [90]. There were no roads, electricity or communications systems [90]. The Chaco, a forbidding land [1] was called the "Green Hell" [22]. The common wisdom was that "white men did not return alive" [1]. "The story goes that the animals complained to God that every place they went, people would follow, forcing them to leave. God said to the animals, 'I have one place where no human being will survive, so go there and you will live in peace.' And that was the Chaco. Then came the Mennonites" [22]. It was estimated that at the time of the arrival of the Mennonites, a remnant of 500 destitute and starving Lengua and Nivaclé Indians, called the vast wasteland their home [pg. ix].

### **The people**

After long journeys of months and sometimes years, the Mennonites arrived destitute [ix]. They walked or journeyed by ox cart into the wasteland. "The children are sick." "We have had to dig too many graves." "Lines to the makeshift toilets are intolerable." "The sand flies are unbearable." "The mosquitoes are relentless" [23]. Coming from Russia, they had no experience with the tropics [90]. The German Proverb "Tod, Not und Brot" summarized the experience of these people. The first generation was marked by such destitution that "Tod" – "death," defined existence. "Not" – "need" and "bare necessities," marked the next period. "Brot" – "bread" and "plenty," marks the current generation [89].

### **Their beliefs and values**

The Mennonites were, above all, a people of faith [1,23,27,49,189]. They understood that God was the first farmer and that they were made to be farmers. "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden ... and there he put the man whom he had formed." (Genesis 2:8) "They came to understand that God intended their suffering—and everything it took to make a wilderness into a garden—for good (Genesis 50:20)" [1].

The Paraguayan land baron, José Casados, who arranged for the Mennonites to purchase the land for their colonies, challenged the settlers: "It is in your hands to change these lands through your agricultural methods into a garden, a dedication to the founder of your faith, so that you and your descendants can be blessed and can live in peace and good fortune" [1]. The Mennonites saw in this



their destiny. They were, like the Israelites, being taken by God into the promised land [pg 55].

They took Scripture seriously [16, 23]. They were prayerful, determined, pragmatic [ix], resourceful [1], and hard working [22], and saw time as valuable [122]. They had a strong sense of family [17] and community, looking out for one-another's needs, creating strong social institutions, churches and economic cooperatives [17, 45, 61, 92-93, 188]. A strong, relevant, even dynamic church had been an indispensable part of the experience. First, the church reinforced the ethic of mutual aid and community. The strong were expected to help the weak. The motto, prominently displayed in the hall where early colony meetings took place, was "Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz" (the common good over personal gain). The colonists were poor, but they helped each other. In bad times mutual aid made the difference" [188].

There was no government or services in the Chaco. They took responsibility for their own lives, creating their own schools [125-132], health care system [133-140], infrastructure (water, roads, sanitation, communication) [141-150], and government [171-180].

In addition to this, they reached out holistically to their neighbors. They proclaimed the Gospel and demonstrated the Gospel with literacy classes, health care, schools, technical training, jobs and economic capital, and shelter for the homeless, and planted churches [161-170].

At the time of the Mennonites' arrival in the Chaco, the indigenous people "were in danger of extinction due to intertribal war, disease and their practice of population control" [123]. They were largely impoverished by their belief system. Being animists, they believed there were spirits in the plants and animals; thus the Indians sought to live in harmony with nature (an "egalitarian relationship" with plants and animals [80]. Nature had dominion over man in their worldview. "It was unthinkable to dominate climatical adversities" [80]. In order to control their population they practiced infanticide [122]. Wealth was not created; in fact, some of the older people thought it "is something given, something sudden" [80]. There are finite resources and no sense of private property. Therefore there is no saving or accumulation of wealth. You must give surplus away so that no one has anymore than his neighbor [114].

There were two different peoples living in the same land, the Mennonites and the Indians. What was the difference? It was their vision for the land. The animistic worldview saw nature as having dominion over man. This worldview brought the indigenous peoples poverty and near extinction. The Mennonites worshiped the living God. They had a different worldview and system of

values; they had a different vision of the land. That vision allowed the wilderness to be transformed into a garden.

### **The transformation**

Because of the Mennonite farmers, the wasteland was transformed into a garden. Today the “Chaco is fit for human habitation” [192]. The three colonies are “mostly located in the state of Boqueron, the largest state geographically, but with only 33,000 people – most of them Mennonite or Indian” [197]. A land that could not sustain 500 indigenous people in poverty now provides a bounty for more than 10,000 Indians [ix] and 23,000 Mennonites. “By the 1990s the colonists had fenced 600,000 acres. Cattle in the Chaco increased in 40 years from 17,000 to 326,000 head. Milk for market, nonexistent in 1950, is now 60 million liters per year. By 1997 almost 50 percent of all milk production of Paraguay is from the Chaco” [97]. In addition to milk, cotton and peanuts are cash crops. Meat production is on the rise and exports to Europe are on the horizon.

When asked the secret of their success in the Chaco, the Mennonites answer: “Glauben” (faith), “Arbeiten” (work), and “Einigkeit” (unity) [207].

“The land of last resort became the land of choice. With hard work and “manna” the wilderness became a garden. God meant it for good” [208].

This illustration reveals the power of ideas. The animistic worldview of the indigenous peoples left them in destitution and near extinction. The Mennonites worship the living God. He has good intentions for the land and its inhabitants. His laws and ordinances create a framework for life that, in turn, produces the virtues of faith, work and unity. As these virtues were practiced, the land was transformed from the “Green Hell” to the Green Garden. May God be glorified and the Mennonites of the Chaco be thanked for the outworking of their worship.

Edgar Stoesz wrote the following poem expressing the Lord’s journey for the Mennonites who settled in the Chaco. [208]

### *God meant it for good*

*When their villages in Russia were plundered,  
and they were beaten to their knees,  
When the Paraguayan “green hell” was one of the few places willing to receive  
them,  
When they discovered that the grass they counted on to nourish their herds was  
bitter,*

*When the well water was found to be salty,  
When their crops were devoured by  
grasshoppers, When plagues left  
orphans, widows, and widowers,  
When the land they had bought was claimed also by Indians,  
When a border dispute made the Chaco an international battlefield,  
When political passions erupted in their midst,  
When thousands emigrated back to Canada, or left for Germany and  
East  
Paraguay,  
When discouragement descended,  
When life became so unbearable that they questioned  
their coming, When they asked, "Is this God's will or a  
tragic mistake?"...  
In the stillness of the Chaco night,  
    before the nightingale  
        began to trill,  
    before the buds appeared on the bottle tree,  
    amid cries of anguish, doubt, and fear  
    came a voice: I, your God, meant it for  
    good." (Genesis 50:20)*

As I conclude this paper, I am reminded again, that the problems of hunger and poverty do not exist because of a shortage of resources. God has made a bountiful world. We have the technology to solve the problems of hunger and poverty. The root of the problem is faulty *thinking* about agriculture – the lack of the biblical worldview being applied in agriculture. We need to call farmers to have “bountiful minds” so their farms can begin to produce bounty. It is the task of God’s people to bring the worldview of the Kingdom of God to those entrapped in poverty in agricultural communities around the world. May we call Christians working in agriculture to be ambassadors of the Kingdom on their farms and in their communities.

*This paper was originally published in Biblical Holism and Agriculture: Cultivating Our Roots, edited by David J. Evans, Ronald J. Vos and Keith P. Wright (Published in 2003 by William Carey Library*

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