

**Sustaining the Planetary Household:  
Methodist Contributions to an Ecological Economy**

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*The human ecosystem has lost its equilibrium and is on the way to the destruction of the earth and hence to its own destruction. The slowly spreading crisis is given the name “environmental pollution,” and people are seeking technological solutions for it. But in my view it is in actual fact a crisis of the whole total project of modern civilization... Unless there is a fresh orientation of this society’s fundamental values, we shall not succeed in finding a new practice in our dealings with nature; unless human beings arrive at a new way of understanding themselves, and at an alternative economic system – then an ecological collapse of the earth can easily be extrapolated from the facts and trends of the present crises.<sup>1</sup>*

The context in which Methodist Christians will give witness in the coming decades to the God of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is one that will be increasingly marked by multiple and overlapping ecological disruptions. Methodist missional engagements with non-Christians worldwide will likely include addressing and responding to such environmentally-related crises as climate refugees, flood, fire, or drought victims, and political-economic instability. As environmentalism grows, both as a distinct movement and as a perspective and set of practices adopted by diverse religious, governmental, and non-governmental individuals and groups, the global Methodist Church will be faced with countless opportunities to engage, partner with, and learn from ecologically-minded non-Christians. In particular, the enormous but essential task of transitioning toward an economic system that sustains rather than degrades biospheric life in its rich and manifold forms raises a key question for we the people called Methodists: what do we have to contribute, in collaboration with others, to this “great work” (T. Berry) of our time? Following a brief review of the primary ecological crises facing humanity today, this paper will

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 133.

set forth a sustaining vision for the global household (*oikos*) that demonstrates a fundamental coherence between the Holiness tradition<sup>2</sup> and an environmental perspective<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Unholy Trinity of Environmental Calamity**

Many in the contemporary environmental movement speak of the “unholy Trinity” of climate change, resource depletion, and ecological degradation.<sup>4</sup> Each of these interrelated crises, taken alone, present a enormous challenge to the modern Industrial economy and the global network of human societies, institutions, and material practices bound up in its functioning. Together, they constitute a potentially ominous future defined by unprecedented social upheaval and human suffering.

#### *Climate Change*

The basic scientific explanation of the processes contributing to global warming or climate change is relatively easy to understand, although the potential effects are still difficult to grasp. With the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas, carbon released from combustion mixes with oxygen to form carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), which ascends into the atmosphere

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<sup>2</sup> Holiness churches are typically identified as those denominations claiming to stand in direct succession to John and Charles Wesley and the early Methodist movement, including, for example, the Free Methodists, the Church of the Nazarene, the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), the Salvation Army, and many of the revivalist groups associated with Charles G. Finney and Phoebe Palmer. My identification of a “Holiness Tradition” includes these specific denominations, while also encompassing a broader inclusion of those ecclesial and theological traditions prior to and after the early Methodist movement that share a basic theological affirmation that God’s love constitutes the essence of God’s being and work, that God calls and empowers us to be holy as God is holy in the whole of life, and that the primary locus and aim of holy living is loving communion with others.

<sup>3</sup> An environmental perspective can be characterized by variety of foundational emphases, including an affirmation of the close bonds between human culture and cultivation of the earth; the uniqueness of farming, gardening, husbandry, forestry, and craftsmanship among human endeavors; the importance of conservation and care of the land through sustainable practices, communities, and economies; the virtues of self-sufficiency, humility, patience, and neighborliness; the integration of all aspects of life, including economic, political, and moral/religious spheres; local economy/community as a balance between the extremes of capitalistic individualism and centralized communism; the importance of living attentively and responsibly within one’s local place/space; and a just distribution of land and its resources within a society.

<sup>4</sup> See for example *Sparking a Worldwide Energy Revolution: Social Struggles in the Transition*, ed. by Kolya Abramsky (Edinburg: AK Press, 2010), 335ff.

with other greenhouse gases like methane and nitrous oxide to create a kind of insulating blanket, trapping heat from the sun radiating off the earth that would have otherwise escaped back into space. Climatologist James Hansen notes that, over the last ten thousand years, the number of parts of carbon dioxide per million (ppm) in the atmosphere has hovered around 275. Two hundred and seventy-five ppm has produced temperatures warm enough to melt the ice sheets from the centers of our continents, allowing us to grow grain, but cold enough for mountain glaciers to provide yearly drinking water. Every aspect of our creaturely life and the human civilizations that have developed over this time have adapted to those climatic conditions. Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, that CO<sub>2</sub> number has risen steadily each year. Hansen has said that 350 is the number we can reach before we do irreparable harm to the biosphere. We are now at 400 ppm and growing. The resultant increase in average global temperatures of a degree and a half Fahrenheit is causing the climatic changes that are becoming everyday news around the world – a spike in the number and severity of hurricanes like Katrina and Sandy, the melting of the ice-caps far quicker than scientists predicted even a decade ago, severe draughts combined with increased lightening strikes causing mega-fires across entire regions, unprecedented torrents of rain and hail, super-blizzards followed by massive spring floods, the acidification of oceans disrupting the marine food chain, and more. According to the scientific community, if individuals, communities, and governments do not act swiftly to reduce carbon emissions, we will likely trigger a series of negative feedback loops (e.g. releasing methane trapped in the frozen tundras) that could raise global temperatures enough by century's end to cause the extinction of most life forms on earth.<sup>5</sup> “Climate is our planet's largest, most important, and most vulnerable interlocking system,” Sally McFague writes. “All of the other issues we care

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<sup>5</sup> See Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making A Life On A Tough New Planet* (NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 2011).

about cannot occur unless our planet is healthy...Climate change, quite simply, is the issue of the twenty-first century.”<sup>6</sup>

### *Resource Depletion*

The modern Industrial economy is utterly dependent upon the concentrated power released through the burning of fossil fuels. Nearly every action of modern, Western life relies upon processes powered by oil, coal, and/or natural gas. Formed over millions of years through the decomposition of dead plants and animals buried, pressurized, and heated deep beneath the earth’s crust, fossil fuels represent a one-time source of compact, transportable, and dense energy. As with any finite, nonrenewable resource, the depletion of fossil fuels is inevitable at some point. Over the last decade, a growing body of literature has begun to examine the implications of “peak oil” – the point at which the rate of global oil production reaches its highest point. No one disputes that the sharp increase in the global rate of oil production, of extraction and refinement, since the start of the Industrial Revolution has powered enormous economic and population growth worldwide. The disagreement among energy experts relates to the exact timing of when aggregate global oil production will reach its apex. The more optimistic projections place the peaking of oil production around midcentury. Data from the International Energy Agency reveals production may have already peaked in 2006. Regardless of the precise timeline, once peak hits, the slope downward is not as gradual as the upward slope, because as the supply of oil reaches its highest point, demand for oil will continue sharply to increase as the non-Western world follows the path of economic growth through industrialization. The peak in oil production does not signify “running out of oil,” therefore, but it does mean the end of cheap oil, as market leverage shifts from consumption/demand to supply.

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<sup>6</sup> Sally McFague, *A New Climate For Theology: God, The World, And Global Warming* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 14-15.

It also signals a transition from the extraction of readily accessible oil to expensive, hard to reach oil, like the oil drilled a mile beneath the surface of the Gulf Coast waters or the dirty oil extracted from the tar sands in Canada. Whether peak oil has occurred or remains years off, the fact remains that “the era of abundant, inexpensive oil is closing, and all the systems for modern life designed around that earlier reality are bound to be affected.”<sup>7</sup>

### *Ecological Degradation*

The destructive effects of modern production and consumption patterns upon the health of the earth and its manifold creatures and interlocking bio-systems are innumerable. Whether one points to the pollution of air and water, deforestation, species extinction, the loss of arable farmland, or the disruption of ecosystems, it is clear that the heavily-consumptive lifestyles promoted and required by a global economy dependent upon endless growth are calamitous to the whole and constitutive parts of the biosphere. The ongoing loss of the planet’s biodiversity is emblematic. In an essay titled “Peak Nature?” Stephanie Mills writes that “it is estimated that between fifty million and one hundred million different kinds of microbes, fungi, plants, and animals make up” our planetary home, each inhabiting a unique place within various eco-system households.<sup>8</sup> Without biodiversity, human life could not exist. To give just one example, Mills says that “about 70 percent of Earth’s flowering plants depend on insect pollination,” including “most of the crop species that provide about a third of the goods and beverages we consume.”<sup>9</sup> At present, many of the world’s pollinators are threatened, including the all-important honeybee, due to modern Industrial farming methods. A syndrome called colony collapse disorder began

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Heinberg, “A Deeper Look At The Energy Picture,” in *The Energy Reader: Overdevelopment And The Delusion Of Endless Growth*, ed. by Tom Butler, Daniel Lerch, and George Wuerthner (Watershed Media, 2012), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Stephanie Mills, “Peak Nature?” in *The Post Carbon Reader: Managing The 21<sup>st</sup> Century’s Sustainability Crises* (Watershed Media, 2010), 97.

<sup>9</sup> *Ib.*, 99.

threatening beehives around the world in 2006, and the problem continues to worsen. The honeybee is one species. Mills quotes the United Nations' Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which states that "the structure and function of the world's ecosystems changed more rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century than at any time in human history," resulting in a "substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth."<sup>10</sup>

Many in the scientific community, including key figures in the global environmental movement, agree that the interconnected dynamics of climate change, resource depletion, and ecological degradation, along with the resultant negative effects on the global economic systems we rely upon for practically every aspect of life, constitute the defining macro issues of our time. The warning issued over 20 years ago by the Union of Concerned Scientists sounds with even greater urgency today:

We the undersigned, senior members of the world's leading scientific community, hereby warn all humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required is vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated.<sup>11</sup>

### **Home Economics for the Planetary Household**

Precisely because the environmental crises of our time stem from the logic and material processes of the modern global economy, the chief human task of advancing "a great change in our stewardship of the earth" requires a profound change in the nature and structure of our global economic life together. As environmental ethicist Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda says, the world's peoples are impelled today "to reconfigure the economic dimension of life, to reorient it toward building ecologically sustainable and socially just ways of living on planet Earth." For people of faith, in particular, she suggests that "the role of religion in the twenty-first century includes

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<sup>10</sup> *Ib.*, 106.

<sup>11</sup> 1992 World Scientists' Warning to Humanity, *Union of Concerned Scientists website*, <http://www.ucsusa.org/about/1992-world-scientists.html> (accessed on October 1, 2012).

offering the gifts of religious traditions to this pan-human and interfaith task.”<sup>12</sup> Before offering what I believe to be important Holiness/Methodist contributions to this great work, contributions compatible with key perspectives and practices of the modern environmental movement, it will be helpful briefly to identify my primary assumptions about the meaning and purpose of economic life.

### *Oikonomia*

The English word “economy” comes from two Greek words: *oikos* + *nomos*. *Oikos* means a household or home. *Nomos* means laws or rules. In its most basic sense, then, economy simply means the household rules, the management of the household. *Oikos* is also the root word for “ecology” (*oikos* + *logos*), or the study of our planetary household, and “ecumenical” (*oikos* + *menikos*), or the inhabited/shared worldwide household. How we address the interconnected issues raised by these 3 *oikic* words – economy and ecology in the global household (*oikoumene*) – will determine the kind of future we can expect for human beings and myriad other life forms.

*Oikonomia*, or the management of the household, is the most ancient meaning of “economy.” Aristotle, for example, distinguished *oikonomia* from *chrematistics*. The one, *oikonomia*, he described as the management of the material resources of the household for the benefit of all its members over the long run. For Aristotle, this is the true form of economy. The other, *chrematistics*, he said, relates to the manipulation of property and wealth so as to maximize short-term monetary gain for the individual owner. Aristotle viewed such activities with disdain.<sup>13</sup> The modern meaning of economics follows this second path. Modern economics, which is just over 200 years old, is focused on the rules, or the managerial techniques

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<sup>12</sup> Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), xix.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, *Book I*.

needed to maximize monetary wealth for the individual actor as quickly as possible. Modern economics is the art of individual money-making. Those committed to the upbuilding of an ecological economics for the flourishing of all God's creation would do well to look to the older meaning of *oikonomia*. Here, the most basic question of economy is not "how can I, a self-interested individual, make as much money as possible?" but rather "how shall we order the household for the benefit of all?" or "how shall we make a home?"

Agrarian author, farmer, and environmental activist Wendell Berry has long called for the reconstitution of economic life based in an affirmation of the immediate and symbolic importance of home-making. In his recent Jefferson Lecture in Humanities given after receiving the highest honor given by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Berry said this:

I am [therefore] nominating economy for an equal standing among the arts and humanities...I mean, not economics, but economy, the making of the human household upon the earth: the arts of adapting kindly the many human households to the earth's many ecosystems and human neighborhoods. This is the economy that the most public and influential economists never talk about, the economy that is the primary vocation and responsibility of every one of us.<sup>14</sup>

### *Setting the Table*

At the center of nearly every household is the table. The table or the meal gathering is the center, both material and symbolic, around which most other household activities are organized – and this is true of a family meal, a seminar table in a university, a corporate board room, or almost any of the world's religious traditions. It is around a table that our most basic patterns of household life together are determined. Here, at table, I would argue, we encounter the most basic questions of economy:

1. Who gets to sit at the table?
2. What bonds are formed around the table?

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<sup>14</sup> Wendell Berry, quoted in "We are all implicated," by Scott Carlson, *The Chronicle of Higher Education website*, <http://chronicle.com/article/In-Jefferson-Lecture-Wendell/131648/>, April 23, 2012 (accessed on Oct. 1, 2012).



3. Do the elements served nourish the body?
4. How are the seats arranged?
5. In whose name is the meal blessed?

These are all questions of economy, and the way in which we answer them determines how our households are ordered, whether at the personal, congregational, institutional, national, or even global levels. So what are we to contribute as Methodist Christians? If we are to participate in shaping the economy to come – locally, nationally, globally – what might we contribute from the perspective of our unique history, faith, and experience? What do we believe to be right and good and even joyful about how households are to be managed, about how life together around the table is to be shared?

The scriptures are clear that the God of Israel, of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is deeply invested in the question of how households are managed, about the question of home-making, about table practices. From the house of Pharaoh to the manna economy to the Torah instructions concerning the poor (e.g. gleanings, usury prohibition, justice for the alien, widow, and orphan, Jubilee) to the prophetic criticisms of the monarchs to Jesus' announcement of the inauguration of the divine economy (Luke 4:18-19), God is revealed as the Economist working to create the conditions of home for the whole of creation.<sup>15</sup> As we Methodist Christians participate with non-Christians in the emergence of an ecological economy for wellbeing of all, it is important that we contribute this scriptural witness through the particular lens of our understanding of the holistic nature of God's salvific love. By doing so, it is possible to identify areas of convergence between the Holiness-Wesleyan tradition and the perspectives and practices of the modern environmental movement. With that aim in mind, I propose that, in the

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<sup>15</sup> See M. Douglas Meeks, *God The Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989). I am indebted to Meeks' influence in this particular section and, as should be evident to anyone familiar with his work, throughout the paper as a whole.

household of God that Jesus proclaims and incarnates, centered in particular around a peculiar set of table practices, the five basic questions of economy are answered in this way:

### **God's Economy for the Whole Creation**

#### *1. Who gets to sit at the table?*

The God of Jesus Christ invites everyone. All are welcome, especially the poor, the vulnerable, and the excluded. There is more than enough for all. We see this in the feeding of the multitude stories, where Jesus hosts a meal, much like the manna meal, in which “all ate and were filled” (Matthew 14:20). Theologically, the claim is that in Jesus Christ, the divine holiness is revealed as *gracious love* for all. As the fourteenth-century mystic, John Ruusbroec,<sup>16</sup> affirmed, “Christ went out to all in common in his love, his teaching, and his admonitions; in the way he tenderly consoled and generously gave...He gave himself completely to all in common, does so still, and will do so for all eternity, [for] he was sent to earth for the common benefit of all.”<sup>17</sup> Faithfully responding to the divine summons to “be holy as I am holy,” then, means following after Jesus in the way of gracious love for all. The table commandment issued in one of the banquet parables is simply this: “Go therefore, and invite everyone you find” (Matthew 22:9).

To be faithful to this command – to follow Jesus today – entails criticizing any arrangement of the household, locally or globally, that excludes people from access to the basic means of life. Proponents of modern capitalism portray our present global economy as if it were an inclusive web of partnerships open to anyone seeking access to the abundant life. Through the seemingly peaceable coordination of society's individual members, the free market is

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<sup>16</sup> Ruusbroec's writings and model of communal life were the primary source of inspiration to Geert Grote, the founder of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life (*Devotio Moderna*). One of the earliest members of the *Devotio Moderna*, as well as the chief biographer of Grote, was Thomas à Kempis, whose understanding of holy living was a significant influence on John Wesley.

<sup>17</sup> John Ruusbroec, *The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works* (New Jersey, Paulist Press, 1985), 106-7.

supposed to produce prosperity for all who join in the cohesive bonds of self-interested gain. The reality, however, is that, as more and more of the world's people are brought into the global web of market exchange, countless individuals are simultaneously excluded from direct access to the basic means of livelihood and daily sustenance, while fewer and fewer enjoy the fruits of economic growth.

Many in the environmental movement point to the enclosure of lands as emblematic. For Indian activist Vandana Shiva, the beginnings of modern capitalism can be traced to the enclosure of lands which, starting in sixteenth-century England, began the uniquely modern process of severing the majority of humans from direct access to the means of their daily sustenance.<sup>18</sup> In almost all pre-capitalist societies, she argues, the multitude of people subsisted through an immediate relationship to the earth and the fruits of the earth. The enclosing of the commons and dispossession of the multitudes inevitably creates “surplus” or “disposable” people. In early modern England, for example, the enclosure of lands led to the formation of a class of “vagabonds,” “beggars,” and “masterless men” who aimlessly roamed the countryside seeking alternative sources of livelihood or new common lands on which to live. Ultimately, the only remaining option for the landless and dispossessed was to migrate to the urban centers – London, in particular – where their singular means to gain livelihood was by selling their labor to those who owned the means of production and work within the exploitative factories of industrial production. This same pattern has followed the spread of free-market capitalism around the world.

The industrial system has...in virtually every area of the globe, ‘enclosed’ farmland, forcing subsistence peasants off the land, so that it can be used for growing high-priced export crops rather than diverse crops for local populations...Removed from their land and means of survival, the new

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<sup>18</sup> See Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 19-27.

'landless' then flock to the newly industrialized cities where they quickly become a class of urban poor competing for low-paying jobs and doomed to long-term hunger or starvation.<sup>19</sup>

In God's economy, all are given access to the necessary means for life. We who claim to follow Jesus' radically inclusive love are called to work for a public household in which the efficiencies of the private marketplace do not overtake the common goods of an inclusive society that works for all and is accessible to all. One of the ways individuals and communities can participate in Jesus' holy way of gracious love is by engaging in efforts to bring about policy and legal changes at the national and international levels to ensure that all people have immediate access to the productive potentialities of the earth. One of the founding fathers of the modern environmental movement in North America, Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858-1954), recognized the fundamental linkages between a genuinely democratic society, proper care for the land, and the universal access of all citizens to what he called the "holy earth." Precisely because the earth, as Bailey saw it, is a "gift" from God and "is not selfish" but "is open and free to all" and "invites everywhere," we should "begin to understand the awful sin of partitioning the earth by force."<sup>20</sup> Bailey's vision for the United States was that "every person should have the right and the privilege to a personal use of some part of the earth."<sup>21</sup>

While advocating for larger structural land reforms, Christians are simultaneously called to support initiatives in their local communities to increase what Nobel Prize economist Elinor Ostrom calls the "commons" or "common-pool resources," through efforts like community gardens or lands trusts that preserve woodlands or native prairies for public use and enjoyment. As agro-economist Jack Kloppenburg recognizes, "to begin the global task to which we are

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Kimbrell, "Introduction," *The Fatal Harvest Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture*, Andrew Kimbrell ed. (Washington: Island Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Holy Earth: Toward A New Environmental Ethic* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2009), 31, 34.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 35.

called, we need some particular place to begin, some particular place to stand, some particular place in which to initiate the small, reformist changes that we can only hope may some day become radically transformative.”<sup>22</sup> In so doing, by participating in the gracious nature of God’s love manifest in Jesus Christ for the wellbeing of all in a particular place – via church lands, parking lots, and other properties owned by denominations, congregations, or individual members – Christians thereby prepare the ground for the possibilities of broader economic reforms to come.

## 2. *What bonds are formed around the table?*

The Holy Spirit joins everyone together in bonds of fellowship. The relationships that are formed around the table are deep and sustaining. For the Spirit binds diverse others together in bonds of genuine communion. From a Holiness-Wesleyan perspective, the theological affirmation is that the divine holiness is present with us in the Holy Spirit as *convivial love*. Faithfully responding to God’s invitation to participate in the divine holiness, then, means abiding in the spiritual bonds of love with, for, and among others. We become holy as God is holy by “sharing in the Spirit” (Phil. 2:1), who is present as the source of harmonious life together. For this reason, love for God and love of others are ultimately inseparable, for when we love one another we are sharing in the love of God, which is ever present to us in the Holy Spirit. The call to holiness, moreover, is not restricted to certain spheres or relationships, for the will of God is for our *entire* sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23). This is a “going on to perfection,” as John Wesley described it – an ever-deepening alignment with the love of God in the Holy Spirit infusing all the relationships of life. “By perfection,” he writes, “I mean the humble, gentle,

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<sup>22</sup> Jack Kloppenburg, “Coming into the Foodshed,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 13:3 (Summer): 41.

patient love of God and our neighbor, ruling *all* our tempers, words, and actions.”<sup>23</sup> The table command here, as Paul says, is “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do...let *all* that you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 10:31, 16:14).

To be faithful to what the Spirit is doing in the world today – to abide in the Holy Spirit – therefore means first of all criticizing economic structures that are based in the fragmentation of longstanding relationships and communities. Proponents of modern capitalism often portray the modern market economy as if it were a near-perfect mechanism for weaving the world’s people, geographies, and natural resources into a web of harmonious partnership. Through the non-coercive coordination of society’s self-interested actors, the free market is purported to be able to bring about general equilibrium for society and individual well-being for its participating members.<sup>25</sup> The reality, however, is that, while the exchange of commodities in and across markets worldwide is binding more and more people, places, and materials together, longstanding social and ecological bonds are simultaneously being torn asunder.

In recent years, the environmental movement has focused particular attention, for example, upon the destructive effects of modern industrial agriculture on native ecosystems. From an ecological perspective, a healthy ecosystem is a natural area (i.e. a pond, a forest, grassland) within which a dynamic complex of plant, animal, and micro-organism communities interact in such a way as to sustain the diversity of life forms in an integrated whole.<sup>26</sup> One of

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<sup>23</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Epworth Press, 1952), 112.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Charles E. Lindblom writes: “The market system is the world’s broadest and most detailed organizer of social cooperation...No other method of social cooperation matches the market system in scope and detail.” *The Market System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 41.

<sup>26</sup> Speaking of natural ecosystems, Sir Albert Howard wrote: “Her sowings and harvestings are intermingled to the last degree, not only spatially, but in succession of time, each plant seizing its indicated opportunity to catch at the nutrient elements in air, earth, or water, and then giving place to another, while some phases of all these growing things and of the animals, birds, and parasites which feed on them are going on together all the time. Thus the prairie, the forest, the moor, the marsh, the river, the lake, the ocean include in their several ways an interweaving of existences which is a dramatic lesson; in

the chief strategies of industrial agriculture, of course, has been to separate, isolate, and then manipulate certain plant varieties or animal species/traits in order to amplify food production. Driven by the logic of efficiency, economy of scale, and the profit-motive, modern agro-economic policies have replaced small, highly diversified farms, which typically incorporate a variety of plants, animals, woodsheds, waterways, and wildlife, with massive, monocrop or livestock operations that focus on a singular part of the food economy. Modern industrial agriculture's primary strategy of increasing global food production through the use of technologies such as large-scale machinery, synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides contributes directly to many of today's ecological crises. Although they initially produced increased crop production, these "savior" technologies have also been responsible for such ecologically ruinous consequences as a 30 percent loss in the world's farmable land over the past 40 years<sup>27</sup> and the present release of over 25 percent of the world's CO2 emissions, 60 percent of all methane gas emissions, and 80 percent of nitrous oxide emissions, all major contributors to global warming.<sup>28</sup>

In God's economy, all the members of the body are woven together in true harmony. To abide in the Spirit today must therefore include participating in modes of production and consumption in which the many elements and participants are interwoven in ways that nourish social and environmental health. Within the sustainable agriculture movement in particular, one of the ways an increasing number of farmers are participating more fully in the healthful energies of conviviality is by incorporating synergistic agricultural methods into their food production systems. Instead of relying as heavily on external commodity inputs, monocrop planting

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their lives, as in their decay and death, beasts and plants are absolutely interlocked." *The Soil and Health: A Study of Organic Agriculture* (The University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 62-63.

<sup>27</sup> Fatal Harvest Facts, [www.fatalharvest.org/factsheet.pdf](http://www.fatalharvest.org/factsheet.pdf) (May, 2002), (accessed on October 18, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> *Earth Democracy*, 103-104.

techniques, and the sequestering of plant and animal units, synergistic farming introduces a multitude of species into an environment in ways that allow all of the diverse components to influence and enhance each other through numerous complex interactions.

Permaculture is another way of producing food in close alignment with the Spirit's healing energies of charitable interconnectivity. In the process of designing any particular location for human settlement, such as a rural homestead, a city block, or a watershed, the permaculture designer begins by identifying all of the living and non-living components that are or will be present – i.e., plant, animal, and human inhabitants; buildings, roads, and paths; land and water features; soil types and conditions; climatic aspects of sun, wind, and rainfall. Next, the designer compiles a comprehensive list of the products and activities, intrinsic qualities, and needs of the most significant and representative elements. Having done so, she then creates and progressively implements a site design in which the needs of the various elements are provided by the yields of other elements through the intentional arrangement of each in relative location to all the others. The result is a dense web of mutually beneficial interconnections that mimics a natural ecosystem.<sup>29</sup> By shifting emphasis away from increasing the yields of a singular crop for commodity exchange and toward a broader focus on nurturing convivial relationships among a complex diversity of natural and agricultural participants, the permaculturalist shares in the healing energies of God's convivial love present with us in the Holy Spirit. By joining together in sustainable models of economic life together like biodynamic farming and permaculture, Christians faithfully participate in the divine holiness working to join all members of the social and ecological body together in the bonds of harmonious love.

### *3. Do the elements served nourish the body?*

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Toby Hemenway, *Gaia's Garden: A Guide to Home-Scale Permaculture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2009).



God the Father/Mother nourishes our bodies with the bread of life and the cup of salvation. God's intention is for the earthly flourishing of the whole of creation. In the last supper he shares with his disciples, Jesus says, "This is my body, this is my blood" (Matthew 26:26, 28). God is given to us in the form of life-giving bread that sustains our bodies to do the work of God. "My food," Jesus says, "is to do the will of the one who sent me and to perfect his work" (John 4:34). The theological claim here is that the divine holiness from the Father/Mother is offered to us as *enfleshed love*, which nourishes our earthly life. The Father/Mother offers Her love to us in bodily form, so that we who are Her creatures can receive and be sustained by it. As Radical Pietist Johann Christoph Blumhardt<sup>30</sup> writes, the work of God is not, as most think, oriented toward heaven. "It is the heavenly coming to reality upon earth...It is earthly because it is a concern that the situation on earth become good and righteous, and that God's name be hallowed on earth, that his kingdom come on earth and his will be done right here on earth. The earth is to manifest eternal life."<sup>31</sup> Faithfully responding to God's invitation to participate in divine holiness, then, means worshipping the Father/Mother by nurturing the bodily well-being of created existence. The movement of the Father/Mother's love is from the Creator toward the earthly creation, which means we properly "worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24) by tending to the flourishing of the earth and all God's creatures. The table commandment here is to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1).

To be faithful to the God who nourishes our bodies with life-giving food means criticizing economic structures, which prioritize the generation of abstract, financial wealth over

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<sup>30</sup> For an excellent introduction to the place of the Blumhardts in the Holiness/Pietist tradition, see Frank D. Macchia's text, *Spirituality and Social Liberation: The Message of the Blumhardts in the Light of Wurttemberg Pietism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Johann Christoph Blumhardt, in *Thy Kingdom Come: A Blumhardt Reader*, ed. Vernard Eller (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 3.

the real wealth of healthy human bodies and vibrant ecosystems. Those who champion modern global capitalism point out that the economic coordination of individual interest through free markets is the single most powerful generator of wealth in human history.<sup>32</sup> Over the last several hundred years, the standard of living has indeed risen sharply wherever the profit-motive of individual actors has powered the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services within a given society. At the same time, however, the perpetual growth of financial wealth in the modern global economy is based in the ongoing destruction of the real wealth of biospheric well-being.

One of the core fallacies of modern economic logic, according to many environmental critics, is the denial of the primacy of land/nature in capitalistic production. Rather than viewing the soil, air, water, and the whole of living nature as fundamentally different than a manufactured product to be bought and sold through the marketplace, the presuppositions of capitalism treat the processes and elements of nature as, at best, one potential commodity among others. The problem is that the natural world is not simply one among a list of possible goods but rather the foundational precondition of all human activity. “Nature is the world’s dominant producer,” as Vandana Shiva writes. “The production of humus by forests, the regeneration of water resources, the natural evolution of genetic products, the creation of fertile soil from eroding rock...Human production shrinks to insignificance in comparison with nature.”<sup>33</sup> One of the principal ways that the quite tangible human and ecological costs of the global economy are hidden is through the “externalization of costs,” or what Wendell Berry calls the “false accounting” of a money-oriented economy. While owners of production extract innumerable

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<sup>32</sup> As Charles Schultze, a former chair of the president’s Council of Economic Advisers, has said, “harnessing the ‘base’ motive of material self-interest to promote the common good is perhaps the most important social invention mankind has achieved.” Quoted in Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2007), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Shiva, *Earth Democracy*, 16.

goods from the commons and privatize them through various forms of enclosure, they simultaneously are allowed to unload the massive human and ecological costs of production onto the public. The *true* costs of production include all such “externalities,” but because producers are not always required to include them in their bottom lines, many of the worst social and ecological effects of the global economy remain hidden from the final market price.

A related fallacy is the idealistic belief in limitless economic growth. Proponents of unfettered capitalism continue to argue that there is no limit to the global economy’s capacity to expand, both by extending the number of those “enjoying” first-world consumptive lifestyles and by continually “improving” standards of living with newer and “better” commodity goods. But “it does not require more than a simple act of insight,” as E.F. Schumacher asserts, “to realize that infinite growth of material consumption in a finite world is an impossibility.”<sup>34</sup> The absolute dependence of modern, industrial societies on nonrenewable resources – coal, oil, and natural gas in particular – represents, perhaps, the most obvious limit to economic growth.

In God’s economy, we “taste and see” that Lord and all his earthly creation are good. Worshipping the Father/Mother in economic life – and thus participating more fully in the divine holiness – means finding ways of integrating all of our economic activities into the limits and needs of our creaturely life together on earth. Those who begin with the recognition that our human economy exists within the bio-physical framework of a finite ecosystem will therefore strive toward what Herman Daley calls a “steady-state” economy. In such an economy, the total input of material resources and energy into an economy and the total output of waste materials and heat do not exceed the regenerative and absorptive capacities of the biosphere. A truly sustainable economy, as Daley says, requires mechanisms that internalize rather than externalize

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<sup>34</sup> E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful* (NY: Harper and Row, 1973), 114.

the full costs of production, distribution, and consumptive use to ensure we do not extract more from the earth's "natural capital" – the primary source of all wealth – than we put back.<sup>35</sup>

In an integrated economy centered on the sustainable production and consumption of goods for the sake of creaturely well-being, qualitative value is as important an indicator of economic health as quantitative value. In an economy oriented toward the sustenance of the earth and all its creatures, the key question is not simply "how can we produce, market, and sell the greatest number of commodities for the highest possible financial return?" Instead, questions related to the qualitative properties of products and the manner in which they were produced become equally significant. Is this product healthy for human bodies? Can this product be produced and distributed in harmony with nature? Is this product well made, such that it will not be hastily thrown away before necessary? What are the impacts of certain goods or services upon the local communities and bioregions in which they are produced and sold?<sup>36</sup> The driving aim of economic life thus shifts from an exclusive focus upon increasing short-term, abstract financial value to a more holistic promotion of such qualitative goods as the humane treatment of other creatures, clean water, well-crafted, beautiful products, and healthy children. In this way, by engaging in the production, distribution, and consumption of real goods and services that foster the flourishing of the whole of creation, Christians offer their lives in spiritual worship as a

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<sup>35</sup> See Herman Daley, "Economics in a Full World," *Scientific American*, Sept. 2005, Vol. 293, Issue 3.

<sup>36</sup> Such questions are fundamentally congruent with Wesley's economic logic in his sermon '*The Use of Money*' I.1-8, *Works* II. Wesley's first instruction to "earn all you can" is qualified by the provision that "we ought not to gain money at the expense of life," which he specifies as any work which is harmful to one's body or mind (e.g. working around arsenic, engaging in 'sinful trade') or is hurtful to another (e.g. land enclosures, usury, the production of unhealthy goods). The second instruction, to "save all you can," includes wasting no part of one's resources "in curiously adorning your houses in superfluous or expensive furniture; in costly pictures, painting, gilding, books; in elegant (rather than useful) gardens," because all wealth beyond what is necessary for sustaining one's life and the life of one's family belongs to the poor. Finally, after earning and saving all you can, the Methodist ought to "give all you can" for the good of those who suffer in need.

living sacrifice to the Father/Mother, who offers His love to us in bodily form for the sustainment of our earthly lives.

#### 4. *How are the seats arranged?*

The God who is triune arranges dinner guests as co-equal companions. Those who participate in this meal are mutual servants of one another. Here, we recall Jesus' response to his disciples who are arguing over who will sit next to him at the messianic banquet. "The Kings of the Gentiles lord it over them...but not so with you, rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves" (Luke 22:25-26). From a Holiness-Wesleyan perspective, the claim is that in the Holy Trinity, the divine holiness is shared as *mutual love*, which flows out to the creation that we might love our neighbors as ourselves for the sake of the common good. Faithfully responding to God's invitation to "be holy as I am holy," therefore, means conforming to the triune God by joining with and being for our neighbors in the upbuilding of concrete communities of mutual service. "Life in God means gathering," as Eberhard Arnold affirms. The will of God is that we be knit together in an "organic unity composed of many members who are committed to one another and support one another."<sup>37</sup> The table commandment is this: "Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor" (Rom. 15:2).

To be faithful to the God who is triune means criticizing any arrangement of the household in which power and wealth are consolidated in the hands of an elite few. One of the recurring claims made by proponents of modern capitalism is that the global market economy operates with no central direction or organization. The modern market system, they argue, "is a method of social coordination by *mutual* adjustment among participants rather than by a central

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<sup>37</sup> Eberhard Arnold, John Howard Yoder, ed., *God's Revolution: The Witness of Eberhard Arnold* (Paulist Press, 1984), 111, 113.

coordinator.”<sup>38</sup> While it is certainly true that the global economy is constituted by a worldwide network of partnerships, it is also the case that the ongoing consolidation of corporate and state power is centralizing economic and political control among fewer and fewer actors. What Naomi Klein means by “corporatism,”<sup>39</sup> Michael Nollert by the “emergence of transnational economic elites,”<sup>40</sup> and Hardt-Negri by “empire” or “biopower,”<sup>41</sup> Wendell Berry describes as “the centralization of our economy” and “the gathering of the productive property and power into fewer and fewer hands.” The result of such an unjust hoarding of resources, Berry says, is the “consequent destruction, everywhere, of the local economies of household, neighborhood, and community.”<sup>42</sup>

At the heart of concerns about “centralized power” is a denunciation of the modern corporation. Environmental economist, David C. Korten argues that modern corporations have become “*the* dominant governance institutions on the planet.”<sup>43</sup> Korten traces the rise corporate power to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England and Holland, where large landowners who had amassed considerable agricultural wealth from the enclosure of common lands were looking to invest their capital in new ventures for profit. Unlike the business form of partnerships they replaced, in which small groups of people who knew each other ran businesses they co-owned, the new corporate form of the joint stock company allowed for the sale of stock to strangers by corporate managers.<sup>44</sup> This new form, Korten writes, combined two ideas:

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<sup>38</sup> Lindblom, *The Market System*, 23. See also Thomas Sowell, *Basic Economics* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), especially chapter 4.

<sup>39</sup> See Klein, *No Logo* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> See Nollert, “*Transnational Corporate Ties: A Synopsis Of Theories And Empirical Findings*,” in *Journal of World-Systems Research*, Volume XI, No. 2 (December 2005).

<sup>41</sup> See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* (NY: North Point Press, 1990), 128.

<sup>43</sup> Korten, *The Post-Corporate World: Life After Capitalism* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1988), 60.

the sale of shares in public markets and the protection of owners from personal liability for the corporation's obligations. These two features made it possible to amass virtually unlimited financial capital within a single firm, assured the continuity of the firm beyond the death of its founders, and absolved owners of personal liability for the firm's losses or misdeeds.<sup>45</sup>

In the United States, the extension of constitutional rights for individual persons to private corporations has allowed corporations to enjoy the full rights of citizenship while being exempted from many liabilities and responsibilities. As a legal "person," the modern limited liability, joint stock corporation in America has gained tremendous power to shape contemporary social and political life, at the same time that restrictions against the gross abuse of such power have been minimized. Through the spread of corporate power worldwide through colonialism, developmentalist policies, structural adjustment loans, and now free-trade agreements, and by way of ongoing mergers and acquisitions, corporations have gained tremendous power over the structures of the global political economy, resulting in the amassment of the world's financial resources and political power by fewer and fewer actors.

In God's economy, power is shared equally. All share and enjoy the goods of creation through cooperative relationships. Those seeking to gather in conformity to the mutual, co-equal fellowship of the triune God are thus being called today to participate in cooperative modes of economic life together. One way Christians might share with others in forms of economic life that more closely resemble the mutual love of God is by upbuilding what Korten calls "local-living economies." In a local-living economy, economic activity is focused primarily upon the locally-sufficient production of goods and services for bioregional consumption, with only the surplus being used for external trade. Whatever cannot be produced locally is sourced from community-oriented companies and small farms located in other economic bioregions. By

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<sup>45</sup> David Korten, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 131.

keeping wealth circulating within a local region, political and economic power is thus allowed to concentrate in democratically-governed townships, neighborhoods, or any variety of small collectivist organizations.

A local-living economy resembling the divine fellowship of co-equal persons is constituted by a diverse collective of small, local companies committed to a set of cooperative, egalitarian business practices. One of the key foundations of such companies is the sharing of ownership and workplace governance among employees. In a cooperative employee ownership structure, those who create the products and subsequent wealth of a business enjoy an equal share of the generated wealth, thereby preventing an unequal balance of power and wealth between ownership and labor, managers and staff. Employees also participate democratically in the many decisions of the workplace, so that even though there are a variety of different roles and tasks to accomplish, each of the members is able to affect both the daily operations and overall direction of the workplace. Companies that are committed not only to financial profit but also community development and ecological sustainability also seek out opportunities to contribute to the people, institutions, and landscapes of which they are a part. In the present context of the unjust and undemocratic control of corporations over more and more aspects of our daily lives, Christians seeking to participate in the mutual love of the triune God by serving their neighbors within their economic lives are being called to upbuild and maintain local companies committed to egalitarian and community-oriented business practices.

5. *In whose name is the meal blessed?*

The Lord God grants permission for the feast of life to begin. As the divine King of heaven and earth, the God of glory has blessed the commencement of the royal banquet. Already in this present age, the reign of God's eternal holiness breaks forth as *creative love*, which frees



us to partake in fruitful ventures of a new life together. Here, we remember that the primary image of the coming kingdom of God in the scriptures is that of a messianic feast, and that in Jesus' own ministry, it was his festive and disruptive table practices that enfolded his proclamation that "the Kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). A world that would otherwise be bound to an eternal perpetuation of that which has always been is continuously opened up by the creativity of God's sovereign love. "A new reality appears, a reality that is opposed to the world's history," as Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt affirms. "God's kingdom is the revelation of the divine life here on earth, the birth of new hearts, new minds, new feelings, new possibilities."<sup>46</sup> Faithfully responding to God's invitation to participate in the divine holiness, then, means obeying the Lord God in accepting the liberty we are given to "obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29). For we know that "our citizenship is in heaven," (Phil. 3:21) and that the inbreaking of God's sovereign love into this world authorizes us to "stand firm" and "not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). Christian freedom is thus "the creative passion for the possible," as Jürgen Moltmann says, manifest in the implementation of "new, unguessed-at possibilities" in the world.<sup>47</sup> The table commandment is this: "New wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (Luke 5:38).

To begin now the banquet feast of God's kingdom, in which creative love reigns, means first of all criticizing forms of household arrangements marked by imperial colonization. Proponents of the global spread of modern capitalism argue that free markets, based on open competition and driven by the unfettered self-interest of both producers and consumers, are the

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<sup>46</sup> Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt, *Action in Waiting* (Plough Publishing House, 1998), 18-20.

<sup>47</sup> Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 119. As early as 1975, Moltmann was directly turning to "experiences of the ancient congregational churches," such as "the Waldensian congregations, the Mennonites and the Moravian Brethren." *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), xiv. In his more recent work in pneumatology, Moltmann draws heavily on German Pietism, early Methodism, and Medieval mysticism.

most effective and democratic way of organizing the distribution of goods and services throughout a society. Whereas governments are overburdened by bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption, and whereas centralized control stifles individual freedom, open markets, they claim, provide the conditions in which the innovation and creativity of free individuals automatically generates economic growth, growth that ultimately benefits the whole of society through the “invisible hand of the market.” The reality is that the worldwide opening of more and more realms of existence to the logic of free markets has simultaneously allowed for the ongoing expansion of corporate dominionship over more and more aspects of social and ecological life on earth.

According to Vandana Shiva, the progressive invasion of the profit motive into ever-new spheres has taken place in three major waves. The first wave, she argues, happened during the five hundred years of European colonization of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia. The second, postcolonial wave has occurred over the past five decades amidst the Western imposition of “developmentalism” on so-called “undeveloped” nations. The third wave of colonization, she asserts, is taking place today through patents, genetic engineering, and intellectual property rights (IPRs). “The land, the forests, the rivers, the oceans, and the atmosphere have all been colonized, eroded, and polluted.” In pursuit of new spaces to invade, enclose, and exploit for financial profit, she says, “the colonies have now been extended to the interior spaces, the ‘genetic codes’ of life-forms from microbes and plants to animals, including humans.”<sup>48</sup>

Over the last three decades, the corporate drive to possess exclusive ownership over every aspect of the economy has penetrated to the “inner space” of living organisms. With scientific “advances” in the capacity to understand and manipulate life at the genetic level, the

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<sup>48</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1997), 4-5.

commercialization of biotechnical research, and the extension of property rights to genetically modified life-forms, corporate interests have been able to commoditize the material elements of life itself. Corporate ownership of living organisms at the molecular and genetic levels has been made possible by a series of legal decisions allowing the patenting of “novel” life-forms. As a result, “virtually all living organisms in the United States, including human genetic material, became patentable subject matter, just like any other industrial invention.”<sup>49</sup>

In what is frequently likened to a nineteenth-century style ‘land grab,’ vast tracts of the genescape and its products – DNA sequences, exons, introns, individual mutations, expressed sequence tags, single nucleotide polymorphisms, proteins, protein folds, parts of plants, whole organisms, whole classes of organism – are being appropriated via patents.<sup>50</sup>

The patenting of genetically-modified seeds, in particular, has allowed corporations like Monsanto or Dow to prohibit farmers from saving and reusing their seeds. As Shiva writes, “it is not just the implanted gene, or one generation of animals, that is being claimed as intellectual property, but the reproduction of the entire organism, including future generations covered by the life of the patent.”<sup>51</sup>

In the economy of God, we are liberated from the “principalities and powers” of this age to serve God at home, work, in the public square and marketplace. Those striving to obey the Lord God Almighty are being called today to withdraw their cooperation with economic systems of colonial domination while participating in creative modes of life together that support the growth of a new economic order. At the very beginnings of our modern political economy – nearly five hundred years before transnational corporate entities would claim exclusive ownership over plant and animal genes – Thomas Müntzer openly declared that the source of “all

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<sup>49</sup> *Fatal Harvest*, 243.

<sup>50</sup> Kloppenburg, Jr., Jack Ralph, *First The Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 324.

<sup>51</sup> *Biopiracy*, 96.

usury, theft, and robbery” in society are the self-interested lords and princes “who take all creatures for their private property.” For “the fish in the water, the birds in the air, the animals of the earth,” he warned, “must all be their property (Is. 5:8).”<sup>52</sup> Although the modern age has seen Christian movements claim emancipation from various forms of repressive control, there have been few who have successfully declared freedom from the economic forces overruling nearly every aspect of contemporary life. In working toward a new economic order, in which the love of God guides our economic practices and decisions, Christians affirm their allegiance to the God whose transcendent freedom from the world is manifest in the power to bring about a new reality in and for the world.

There is perhaps no better starting point for those seeking to support the emergence of a new economic reality in our time than with the food economy. For the inbreaking of God’s kingdom into this present age forces a decision about who or what truly governs our daily lives. That decision is clearly concentrated in two very different meal gatherings: the agri-business meal produced from the imperial conquests of self-love and the joyous banquet feast born of God’s perfect love. The reality is that a few private corporations possess ubiquitous command over nearly every aspect of the production and distribution of most foods that we eat. As a result, unless we are willing to seek out and support the few alternative food sources that presently exist, as Marion Nestle says, “we support the current food system every time we eat a meal.”<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, having been liberated to begin the kingdom feast already here and now, Christians are free to support existing food alternatives, however small and imperfect, while helping to create models and systems that are even more closely aligned with the nature of divine

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Müntzer, “A Highly Provoked Defense,” in *The Radical Reformation*, Michael Baylor, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 81.

<sup>53</sup> Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How The Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 374.

love. Because the food economy is so foundational to any economic system, the eruption of new, more charitable and sustainable ways of producing and distributing food has the potential to redirect the entire global economic order. According to Shiva, small-scale, direct responses are “necessary in periods of dictatorship and totalitarian rule because large-scale structures and processes are controlled by the dominant power.” In particular, everyday essentials such as “our seeds, our rivers, our daily food are sites for reclaiming economic, political, and cultural freedoms because these are the very sites of the expanding corporate empire over life.”<sup>54</sup>

The ultimate aim of Christians involved in the creation of alternative economic models is not simply to fashion an economic sphere set-apart from the rest of the world but to challenge and transform the entire network of political and institutional structures that constitute the global economy. In the context of American history, the agrarian revolt of the prairie populists, which led to many of the legislative reforms of the “Progressive Era,” is an instructive model. What began as a series of disconnected local struggles in the mid to late 1800’s among small landowners and landless workers against monopolistic control of the land by financial elites led to a highly organized alliance that produced a national political platform that addressed, among other things, the corporate ownership of the media and transportation, the need for currency reforms, banking monopolies, humane work laws, and common access for all to the nation’s fertile lands.<sup>55</sup> As Dave Henson, director of the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, writes, many of the same struggles that the prairie populists engaged in against the corporate control of agriculture need to be fought again today.

The fight against corporate chemical-industrial agriculture, against corporate control of the global food system, against corporate ownership of life, and against corporate control of economic decision making is the fight

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<sup>54</sup> Shiva, *Earth Democracy*, 183.

<sup>55</sup> See Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

on this planet... In the 1870s to 1890s, American farmers built an anti-corporate movement that was clear about what it wanted. The Populists, Knights of Labor, Greenbacks, Alliance, and even the Grange worked to oppose the monopolizing consolidation of the banks and railroads...Times have certainly changed, but the fundamental struggle against rule by large corporations is much the same.<sup>56</sup>

Henson promotes a series of strategies to be implemented at the state and local level, including amending state constitutions to declare that corporations do not have the constitutional rights of an individual person, banning the corporate ownership of farmland, and restricting the financial influence of corporations on the political decision-making process.<sup>57</sup> In the midst of a global economy ruled by corporate domination, those seeking to obey the Lord God are called today to participate in the divine work of liberation by engaging in creative actions that contribute to the formation of a new economic reality. By participating directly in grassroots movements for justice and in struggles to transform our global economy, including the ways we gather up and share the fruits of the earth in table fellowship, Christians participate faithfully in the divine holiness that is redeeming all things through creative love.

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In an age of climate change, resource depletion, and ecological degradation, Methodist Christians worldwide are joined with the peoples of the earth in a common task to envision and work toward new models of economic life together that nurture rather than harm our planetary home. As I have attempted to demonstrate, Holiness-Wesleyan understandings of the holistic love of God – marked by gracious inclusion, convivial harmony, enfleshed integration, mutual cooperation, and creative freedom – are congruent with key affirmations and practices found in the modern environmental movement. In giving witness to God’s economy through missional

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<sup>56</sup> Dave Henson, “The End of Agribusiness,” in *Fatal Harvest*, 233, 237.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-239.

engagement for the sake of the world God so loves, including especially with ecologically-minded non-Christians, I believe the people called Methodists will find grateful and interested partners ready to receive and share with us in the great work of our time.