

Injustices and Ecological Deficiencies of Industrial Agriculture

God's Green (and Brown) Revolution

by Jenny Holmes

“The soil is the great connector of our lives, the source and destination of all.” —Wendell Berry

Then 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. NIV.

“As part of the natural functions and ecosystem services provide by soils, a healthy soil stores more carbon than that stored in the atmosphere and vegetation.” —
Recarbonization of Global Soils – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



As the timeline to prevent the worst impacts of climate change shortens, many questionable “solutions” are being offered that potentially deepen social inequities and erode cultures and biodiversity. How can God’s *shalom* be embodied in the solutions for climate change? Or is the situation so dire that should we just be concerned with cutting carbon as fast as possible no matter how we get there? What questions should Christians seeking to be faithful to God’s *shalom* be asking about proposed solutions?

Billionaire “philanthrocapitalist” Bill Gates, who recently released “How to Avoid a Climate Disaster,” is one of the most visible promoters of technological solutions to climate mitigation and adaptation, such as carbon capture and storage, and a more climate resilient agriculture. To the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), climate resilient agriculture may be more efficient but depends heavily on fossil-fuel-based fertilizer and genetic engineering. Gates’s technological and capitalistic mindset clearly dominate the Foundation’s approach to climate change. This is not to say that technology and capitalism cannot be useful in finding and implementing climate solutions. Obviously, they must be engaged. However, their dominance blinds us to the opportunity to enhance the flourishing of humans and nature through climate solutions that are more inclusive and equitable.

Not everyone is buying into Gates programs and are proposing other ways forward. The interfaith [Southern Africa Faith Communities’ Environment Institute](#) said to the Gates Foundation in a recent letter:

"We urge the Gates Foundation to stop pushing a green 'revolution' that imposes technologies and seeds that are controlled by companies with vested interests. Rather, it should be looking at and learning from small-scale farmers from around the world who are working to build alternative food systems that are socially just and ecologically sustainable."

Widespread hunger has laid bare the failure of the profit-driven food and agriculture system during the COVID-19 crisis inspired the group’s response.

Here in the US the COVID-19 crisis has also laid bare the injustices and the ecological deficiencies of industrial agriculture. Front-line agricultural workers were among the first and the worst hit by the pandemic. There is growing awareness of the role that soil plays in the climate crisis, and the value of regenerative agriculture that maximizes the soil even by agriculture giants like General Mills. With industrial food supply chains affected and concerns for food safety, the interest in local sources of food, such as community supported agriculture, skyrocketed at the beginning to the pandemic. Whether this trend continues remains to be seen.

In the Punjab area of India, where the Green Revolution took root in the 1950s, growing inequities faced by small farmers have brought them to protest in the street. Aniket Aga said in Scientific America “Farmer protests in India are writing the Green Revolution’s obituary... It is evident that the new problems of industrial agriculture have added to the old problems of hunger and malnutrition.”

Soil is where we come from according to scripture and science, and where we return. Soil health is basic to the health of all life, specially in a warming world. Land degradation greatly reduces the ability of soils to maintain and capture carbon. We have much to learn about the complex living soil. Humility and humus are required to flourish as humans as a partner in nourishing God’s shalom in climate solutions. God is calling us to a revolution in our relationship with each other and earth that is both green and brown.

Jenny Holmes lives in Portland, Oregon is a former Moderator for Presbyterians for Earth Care. She serves as the Washington Oregon Field Organizer for Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance organizing people to protect 8.4 million acres of wilderness in Utah that will help the US meet 1.5 percent of its goal to protect 30 percent of lands and water by 2030 for the climate and biodiversity. She has done faith-based environmental organizing for over 30 years and serves on the Earth Care Team of First Presbyterian Church. Gardening and local food nourish her, body, mind and soul.

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January 24, 2021, Aniket Aga.