

FROM VALUES TO PRACTICE: SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND THE RETURN  
OF PLACE IN NORTH AMERICAN RELIGIOUS AGRARIANISM

By

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To my Mother, who passed; my Daughter, who joined; and my Wife, who sustained

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
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By

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This dissertation investigates the emerging phenomenon of North American religious agrarianism. My argument is based upon both literature review and fieldwork that explores the religious, ethical, scientific, environmental, and ideological motivations that two religious communities use to justify their participation in ecological farming practices. The communities are Hazon, a national progressive Jewish food group, and Koinonia Partners, a Protestant lay monastic community founded by Clarence Jordan located in Americus, Georgia.

By combining lived religion and network theory into what I term a “lived network” approach to religion, I analyze how individuals within these respective religious communities put environmental ethics and values based on both contemporary science and traditional religious practices and texts into embodied action, especially as these relate with various agrarian ideals, including the practice of organic/ecological farming. My research methodologies include semi-structured interviews with community members and leaders, participant observation, and archival research.

The argument I offer is that the distinct North American lineage of ecological agrarianism begun by Wendell Berry is merging with a religious environmentalist concern for the health of the planet. This mix is resulting in a religious agrarian worldview where religious identity and values around three interrelated concerns—for locality, health, and justice—are motivating segments of North American religions to practice sustainable agriculture.

This embodied practice signals a growing concern for place in subsets of North American religions, where place is believed to be a Divine creation and its care is seen to be a duty or obligation. Caring for place via sustainable agriculture allows ecological agrarian and religious environmentalist concerns to be adumbrated and put into practice, as seen in the beliefs, values, and actions of members of Hazon and Koinonia, respectively. How the values and practices of both Jewish and Christian North American religious agrarians in regards to the local, health, and justice are similar and different constitute the key thematic chapters of the dissertation.

## CHAPTER 1 SUSTAINABLE RELIGION, SUSTAINABLE ETHICS?

### **Introduction—Taking Stock**

In this dissertation, I investigate an emerging American “religious agrarianism.” It takes as its starting point that religious values are present in the philosophies and practices of agrarian exemplars writing and farming in the United States. In this task, I draw on several fields, including religion and nature theory, environmental ethics, and North American religious history, which together allow me to study, delineate, and understand this growing religious phenomenon.

My dissertation focuses on two religious communities, Koinonia Partners in Americus, Georgia, and Hazon, a national Jewish food group with statewide chapters, including in Atlanta, Georgia and Gainesville, Florida, where I carried out research (see below). These communities embody many agrarian practices and values, including three constellations of such values and practices that I explore in chapters five, six, and seven, respectively. These are fidelity to the local, health, and justice.

My research project investigates if, how, and if so, which agrarian values and practices are being taken up by “mainstream” religions in the U.S. I use a case study approach which allows for comparisons and contrasts to be made between religious practitioners from two faiths, investigating what agrarian values are present in their own lives, how these arose, and how these influence communities of faith and the lifestyle choices of practitioners within the respective communities. A case study approach also allows for a more nuanced understanding to emerge about how these people use their beliefs to support agrarian values and practices, but who do so from an understanding and perspective that is unique to their religious tradition and own life histories. This

intersection of both agrarian and religious belief and teaching, coupled with the interaction of their respective values and practices, is an understudied phenomenon of a rapidly greening American religious landscape. This dissertation thus takes as its starting point this interaction and intersection and proceeds to analyze and investigate specifically how agrarianism is combining with and influencing religious beliefs and practices to create an emergent U.S. religious agrarianism.

### **Religion, the Environment, and the United States**

Global religions, and especially within various subtraditions, are undergoing what many are calling an “Ecological Reformation.” From attending global meetings about climate destabilization to changing to more efficient, eco-friendly light bulbs in places of worship and practice, religion is rapidly getting involved in sustainability initiatives and projects. An increasing number of religionists are claiming that the future landscape of religion will be more decidedly “green,” with this landscape being shaped equally by post-Darwinian insights about evolution and increasing findings from environmental sciences (Taylor 2004).<sup>1</sup> Such activity has prompted one scholar to opine that, “No understanding of the environment is adequate without a grasp of the religious life that constitutes the human societies which saturate the natural environment” (Sullivan 2000: xiii). While in part an essentialist normative claim, this scholar, like many others, recognizes the role “religious life” plays in the natural environment within which humans are embedded.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The philosopher Roger Gottlieb also argues this same conclusion (2006), and he passionately admonishes scholars to recognize an emerging and global “religious environmentalism.” For an astute analysis and criticism of such a religious environmentalist turn, see Tomalin (2002, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> A claim with a long history within anthropology, as seen in the groundbreaking work of both Roy Rappaport (1979) and Victor Turner (1967), to name just two.

I take as another central starting point that humans are indeed embedded biological beings; furthermore, we are embedded beings with both “religion” and with metabolizing bodies that need calories in order to survive.<sup>3</sup> How we grow, harvest, and consume our needed calories thus becomes an activity that can potentially take on religious overtones and even religious attributes of its own. It is also an activity that can be influenced by religious beliefs, customs, and practices. Therefore, the role of farming, and specifically the worldview/s behind agricultural technologies and types of farming methods, becomes a topic about which religious environmentalist values, beliefs, and practices are inherently concerned.

This dissertation accepts the growing consensus that future religions (and in my case, those in the United States) will most likely be “greener,” and couples this acceptance with the recognition that to understand our environments, we must understand our religions. Given that the most recent and emergent U.S. version of agrarianism is in large part about the human relationship and interaction with the environment (see below), then it is important to understand what religious attributes attend to this relationship. It is also important to investigate if and how these religious attributes are “green,” and how these green attributes might be contributing to a larger greening of U.S. religions. Lastly, it is important to analyze if and how religious agrarian beliefs and practices are influencing the beliefs and practices of more mainstream religions in the U.S.

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<sup>3</sup> As the agricultural ethicist Paul Thompson writes, “human life as we know it depends upon production...More particularly, human beings do not exist without the peculiar transformations that produce food and fiber commodities” (1995: 12). This biological materialist claim is echoed by Keith Warner, who writes, “Agriculture serves as the fundamental metabolic relationship binding nature and society” (2007: 1).

I will now briefly touch on why my study examines religions in the U.S. From the standpoint of biological materialism and the quest for sustainability, the United States currently has about five percent of the world's total population of humans, yet as a country consumes twenty-five percent of the planet's total resources.<sup>4</sup> From the perspectives of both environmental justice and the need for humans as biological organisms to live within sustainable limits, this is clearly a problematic figure.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, there is an articulate, sustained, and active environmental history and contemporary environmental movement, or rather movements, within the U.S.<sup>6</sup> The books and articles devoted to this aspect of the American gestalt are legion and growing, as is the consciousness within the American populace of environmental issues ranging from climate destabilization to sustainable agriculture issues (van Wormer, et al 2007). It is foolhardy for scholars of American religion to disregard this history and the growing impact such environmentalist beliefs and values play in American religious production: past, present, and into the foreseeable future.

As I write this in December of 2009, the international community is meeting at Copenhagen, Denmark to update the Kyoto treaty and generate a new international agreement about climate change. Citizens and the media of the U.S., on both left and right, are weighing in on the pros and cons of committing to such an agreement.

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<sup>4</sup> Based on various measurements and studies, the Vitousek, et al estimate that on a species level, *Homo sapiens* globally consume 40% of the total net primary productivity of the planet (1986).

<sup>5</sup> Regarding living within biological limits, see Hardin (1993) and Ehrlich (2008). For literature criticizing the U.S. (and the Global North in general), and Washington, D.C. consensus neo-liberal economics in particular, see, Mander and Goldsmith (1996) and Conca and Dabelko (1998). For a rebuttal of some of these arguments, see the work of the economist Jagdish Bhagwati (2004).

<sup>6</sup> For an accessible introduction to this environmental history, see Merchant (2007). See also Roderick Nash's classic *Wilderness and the American Mind* (2001), and Kirkpatrick Sale's work on the foment that helped lead to today's American environmentalisms (1993).

Religious leaders in the U.S. are actively adding their voice and perspective to this debate. One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that environmental issues, both local and global, are actively entering into the concerns and teachings of various national and regional religious bodies. As religions are reified social constructs that have fluid, changing, and contested concepts of what qualifies as sacred, holy, and legally obligatory relationships and duties, then it becomes the job of religion scholars to study how and why these concepts and categories are changing, including those religious concepts and categories that relate to nature and environmental issues.<sup>7</sup> One area of human/nature relations is the human (and thus religious) relationship to food and how food is produced and consumed. Given the material environmental dimension of food production; the value-laden social, political, and ecological goals and normative claims of agrarianism; and how these relate to sustainable food issues (which are part of a larger sustainability milieu) that some religions/religious bodies are becoming cognizant of, then the study of this emerging environmental dimension of U.S. religions becomes an area of concern and study that religion scholars are beholden to engage.

A further reason to study religions in the U.S. is because of the lengthy historical role U.S. religions have played in U.S. politics. Citizens from within U.S. religions have actively lobbied their fellow believers, their neighbors, those from other religious bodies, and the government--from local to federal levels--on everything from abolition of slavery to temperance to engaging with Native Americans to abortion and to same sex marriages. What does this history contribute, if anything, to the emerging religious

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<sup>7</sup> Regarding the social construction of religion, see both McCutcheon (1997) and Burton Mack, who writes, "Social theory...regards religion as a human creation on a par with the other systems of signs and patterns of practices that humans have invented to structure their societies" (2001: 83). Regarding changing concepts and the power-laden social construction of what counts as sacred, see Chidester and Linenthal (1995), and Anttonen (2000).

agrarian concern of sustainable (culturally and environmentally) food production? More specifically, what advocacy networks, if any, do my case studies belong to that help shape and influence their religious agrarianism? Given the active role religion in the U.S. has played in some of the nation's most pressing issues, it should come as no surprise that religions and religious networks are beginning to actively comment upon and lobby about environmental issues, including those related to sustainable agriculture. My research in part explores this legacy of U.S. religious history.

Lastly, compared to other Western nations, religious identity and beliefs still constitute a large part of the identity of the vast majority of the American public. Various polls report that nine out of ten Americans believe in God or a higher power while others suggest that over 70% of Americans identify with some variety of Christianity. Coupled with the aforementioned polls about environmental values and concerns within the American public, it behooves scholars to investigate the interaction of religious belief and environmental behavior in the U.S. This does not necessarily mean there is a causation between religious belief and environmental practice, but rather such study should be undertaken to help the community of scholars understand if such links exist, and if so, how pervasive and effective they actually are.

For example, religion and nature scholar Anna Peterson comments that, "changes in values lead[ing] to changes in behavior [is] an assumption supported by little if any empirical and historical evidence. The paradox of modern environmentalism is that while pro-environmental values have become mainstream in the U.S. and many other parts of the world, anti-environmental practices continue to escalate" (2006: 376). Despite this gap in knowledge, she nonetheless continues, claiming that, "Religion is

indeed the way many people think about important moral and intellectual issues, and an expansion of environmental ethics to address religious traditions and ideologies is an important and necessary step” (2006: 378)—if true, then this is a step to which religious scholars must pay attention. Of course, such debates about religious belief and action towards the natural environment date back to Lynn White Jr.’s epochal article that blamed western Christian beliefs, and thus actions based on those beliefs, for the world’s environmental problems (1967). My dissertation contributes to this growing body of knowledge about religious belief and practice regarding environmentally centered behaviors.

### **Religious Agrarian Communities**

Within this context of United States agrarianism (outlined below), and especially North American and U.S. religious history, I have chosen two religious communities for my case studies. Chapters three and four, respectively, give greater detail about these communities. Here I will give a brief introduction to each. One is a Protestant lay-monastic community called Koinonia Partners. Koinonia is a 501c3 profit sharing intentional community that is located on an approximately 600-acre campus. The community consists of about twenty full time members, as well as others who live on-site as interns or as guests-in-residence to see if they would like to become members. Clarence Jordan (1912-1969) founded Koinonia outside of Americus, Georgia in 1942 when Jim Crow racism was still rampant throughout the region. Dallas Lee, biographer of Koinonia, writes that Jordan “was a dirt-farming aristocrat, a good ‘ole Georgia country boy with a doctor’s degree, a teacher with manure on his boots, a scholar with working clothes on his mind” (1971: 1). Jordan began Koinonia as an experiment in interracial living, inspired in large part by his doctorate in Greek New Testament from

the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also had received a degree at the Georgia State College of Agriculture at the University of Georgia, Athens. Jordan's vision was to unite the races in a voluntary life of simplicity; in effect, a religious experiment (drawing especially on Acts<sup>8</sup>) based on shared farming responsibilities and voluntary simplicity. Jordan, along with his wife, named the community Koinonia, with the Greek term *koinonia* being translated into "fellowship" and "communion." In the summer of 2009 I spent two weeks living in residence at Koinonia, conducting interviews and participating in farm duties with the members and interns of the community. Along with repeated follow up phone and e-mail interviews and return trips, this experience provides the basis for my analysis of Koinonia's approach to what I argue is in part a continued experiment in intentional Christian agrarian living.

The other religious community I study is Congregation Shearith Israel, an egalitarian Conservative Jewish synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia. Shearith Israel is partnered with Hazon, a recently formed North American progressive Jewish food group with offices in New York City and San Francisco. Hazon works with various Jewish temples and synagogues around the country and helps them find local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms that synagogue members then join (see below and also chapter two for more information on CSAs). My research for this case study consists of repeated visits to the Congregation, visits to Riverview Farms (the CSA that the Congregation partners with), interviews with the Rabbi and various members of the

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<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:44, 45; Acts 4:32, 33: "And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need... Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all..." (quoted in Lee 1971: 25).

synagogue and those responsible for organizing the CSA-Congregation partnership, and a visit to Hazon's annual food conference which took place in December, 2009 in Monterey, California. I have also interviewed members of B'nai Israel, a synagogue in Gainesville, Florida that began a partnership with Hazon in late 2009. Taken together, this fieldwork allows me to speak about Hazon broadly, and the two Jewish communities in particular.

I chose Jewish and Christian communities because these are the two predominant religious groups in the U.S. This especially holds in terms of membership for Christianity, but also in terms of the social and financial networking both religions contain. Followers of certain branches in both religions are also extremely active in lobbying the U.S. government and this political capital is a potential resource for religiously motivated political concerns pertaining to U.S. agrarianism. This religion-government interaction is built upon a unique U.S. history where both Judaism and Christianity (and especially appeals to both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament made by citizens within these faiths) have contributed more than any other religions found in the U.S. in advocating for progressive social change. As my project investigates, parts of this legacy are now advocating for progressive agrarian and environmental change via modern religiously based agrarian and religious environmentalist values. However, this agrarianism is both similar across Jewish and Christian religious identities, yet at the same time distinct for members of both traditions. I maintain that understanding such similarities and differences will help scholars understand emerging concerns and motivations that attend to American religions and how these religions interact with and are shaped by environmental issues. My case study approach also allows for a regional

perspective on religious agrarianism and provides an entryway into issues of politics, environmental justice, and religious production with regards to agrarian environmental issues in the South.

### **Whither Agrarianism?**

I will fully explore agrarianism in chapter two so will only briefly introduce some key concepts in this introduction. Agrarianism is a response to industrial agriculture and governmental policies that support this type of farming. Given this, contemporary agrarianism in the United States privileges sustainable farming as a hallmark of a responsible culture. The values that imbue contemporary agrarianism include fidelity to farming lifeways, thrift, ecological literacy, concern for local economies, and the belief that sound, sustainable farming is an art form. These hallmarks of agrarianism highlight the need for scholars of religion to connect the values expressed in agrarianism and those expressed in religiously based agricultural communities and/or religious communities that support agrarian values, as these synergies often overlap and can be mutually reinforcing.

For example, the Christian theologian Norman Wirzba writes that:

Agrarianism...is...a deliberate and intentional way of living and thinking that takes seriously the failures and successes of the past as they have been realized in our engagement with the earth and with each other. Authentic agrarianism, which should not be confused with farming per se...represents the sustained attempt to live faithfully and responsibly in a world of limits and possibilities. As such it takes seriously what we know (and still need to learn) about the earth—the scientific ecological principles that govern all life forms—and what we know about each other—the social scientific and humanistic disciplines that enrich human self-understanding (2003: 4).

For members of the religious communities I study, these concepts of limits and responsibilities, coupled with deliberate and intentional living centered around their faith and the teachings of their faith, help to form a guiding vision and ideal that dictates their

lived behavior. This behavior is reflected in and practiced by the members as they attempt to embody agrarian ideals of food sustainability by supporting local food production and engaging in eco-friendly and environmentally responsible farming methods. Such behavior, enforced, inspired, and reaffirmed as it is by religious teachings and beliefs, is a phenomenon worthy of study.

In my research I categorize three phenomena (of many) that are compatible with and that fit within a larger agrarian ideal: organic agriculture, farmer's markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). In the United States, organic farming has grown exponentially over the past ten years. This growth is both financial, with sales of organic produce numbering in the billions of dollars, and applied, with the number of farmers seeking organic certification numbering in the thousands and the amount of acreage certified organic by the U.S. Government numbering in the millions.<sup>9</sup> Various studies show that this increase in consumer demand for organic products is a result of health, labor, epicurean, and environmental reasons (Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, and Martin 2005). In response to this growing consumer market, some farmers have shifted to organic agriculture for economic and soil health reasons; some, however, choose to farm organically because of ethical and spiritual reasons (Ableman 2005; Bolduc 2008). Besides this increase in organic food sales, there has also been an exponential increase in regional farmer's markets, where fresh, local, and artisan food, animal, and craft products are sold. These products need not be organic, but most markets do have

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<sup>9</sup> On sales, see the Organic Trade Association's website: [http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2006/05/organic\\_sales\\_continue\\_to\\_grow.html](http://www.organicnewsroom.com/2006/05/organic_sales_continue_to_grow.html) On certified acreage, see the US Department of Agriculture: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/organic/>

organic products present.<sup>10</sup> The third recent phenomenon within a larger agrarian rubric is the burgeoning CSA movement.

CSA farms are those that offer “shares” to customers, where the customer enters into an advance contract with a farmer, paying up front for a share of the produce the farm will produce over the coming growing season. Such arrangements help farmers secure capital overhead at the beginning of the season when they most need it, and customers are willing to take risks with what the farmer is able to grow in exchange for receiving local produce on a weekly basis once the produce is ready for harvest. CSAs can be organic or non-organic; can include animal products; shares can be picked up on site or can be delivered (for example, some CSAs in New York state deliver to customers in New York City); and some have contracts where members must put in a certain amount of labor on-site throughout the growing season. CSAs and farmer’s markets represent one of the major goals and ideals of agrarianism: developing and supporting local food systems that recognize and operate within the limits of local “foodsheds.” A further ideal and goal is to develop local food systems that are sustainable and which contribute to ecosystem health; this is where organic/sustainable agriculture methods of farming explicitly enter into the agrarian worldview.

As noted earlier, during this same period of time, U.S. religious communities, organizations, and institutions have demonstrated an increased environmental concern (Oelschlaeger 1994; Tucker 2003). This increase in environmental concern among some U.S. religious bodies does not necessarily correlate with the growth of organics as an industry and as farming practice, or with the growth of CSAs and farmer’s markets

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<sup>10</sup> A 2002 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) survey of 210 farmer’s markets found that one-third of all vendors offer certified organic produce (Fromartz 2006).

that support sustainable farming practices. However, some religious communities in the U.S. have chosen to express their burgeoning environmental concern by participating in or supporting organic and/or local farming practices. Given this developing phenomenon, my research project seeks to explain why U.S. religious communities from diverse subtraditions are involved in organic farming and the consumption of organic produce, and how such involvement both contributes to and exemplifies a maturing U.S. religious agrarianism.

The scholarly literature on the interaction between religious belief and agrarianism, especially sustainable agriculture, is sparse. One reason behind this dearth of literature is because social scientists tend either to study why individuals chose to farm organically, or they analyze the growth of organics as a whole industry. Furthermore, studies about the motivations of organic farmers usually emphasize market forces and/or environmental concerns held by either farmers or consumers (Willer, Youssefi-Menzler, and Sorensen 2008) rather than religious, ethical, and value-based motivations.

Within the field of religious studies, the few completed studies on sustainable agriculture have focused on individuals or monastic communities (Gould 2005; McFarland Taylor 2007), but not a comparison of two or more religious communities. There are theological treatises about organic farming (Fick 2008) but these are written from a position of faith by members of a faith tradition and are not objective, comparative scholarly studies. Equally, a few scholars in the fields of both religious studies and sociology are beginning to theorize about the influence contemporary environmental science has exerted on religious beliefs and practices (Taylor 2002: 49;

Proctor and Berry 2005); in general, however, this is still an underdeveloped field, and as a whole, the discipline of religious studies has tended to marginalize religion and agriculture issues.<sup>11</sup> My research thus serves to help fill this lacuna in scholarship and analysis of religious agrarianism and religion-agrarian interactions within the U.S.

Overall, this dissertation helps fill this above gap in current understanding by providing knowledge about why some people of faith are motivated to practice and support the agrarian practice of organic farming, especially in a U.S. context. It also briefly analyzes the tension that can exist in communities of faith among secular environmental science, environmental ethics, and religious faith and how this tension impacts the practices and beliefs of religious practitioners (Harrison 2006). Lastly, it looks at the inverse of this, analyzing the reinforcing synergies between secular environmental science, environmental ethics [and especially emerging food issues, seen for example in Pollan (2006, 2008) and Salatin (2007)], and religious faith and how their interaction influences the practices and beliefs of religious practitioners (Chapman 2000).

### **Chapter Outline**

This work is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter two explores agrarianism and lays the groundwork for what I am calling religious agrarianism. This chapter looks at the goals, motivations, practices, and ideologies of United States agrarianism as it has developed over the last century. The

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<sup>11</sup> Norman Wirzba and Ellen Davis are active in agrarian scholarship but their work is largely written from a theological perspective and uses as an exemplar Wendell Berry and his Christian (Protestant)-based agrarianism. Scholars focusing on Global South agrarianism deal with religion (Parajuli 2001), but they do not focus on Global North agrarianism and/or religion. Lastly, rural studies undertaken in departments of geography (mainly in Europe and Canada) tend to elide religion from their research programs (see Cloke and Little [1997] and Haartssen, et al [2000]).

groundwork for understanding agrarianism as a movement with implicit and explicit religious attributes will also be laid out for the reader. By drawing on theoretical perspectives from religion and nature, lived religion, connections and concerns with American religions in general, and my case studies in particular, an argument about religious agrarianism and its synergies with greening mainstream religions will begin to take shape.

Chapter three builds upon this argument and offers an in depth analysis of Koinonia: its history, current structure, and contemporary environmental vision and agrarian practices. Key quotes taken from interviews with community members and community literature will be used to argue that Koinonia is indicative of both a larger trend within Christianity in the U.S. to become more green, and also that Koinonia itself is an exemplar of a burgeoning U.S. religious agrarianism. A brief history of farming--and especially sustainable farming--and Christianity is provided in this chapter to help give added context.

Chapter four in turn offers an in depth analysis of Congregation Shearith Israel and Hazon. I analyze the history of both the Congregation and Hazon, describing their relationship with one another, where and how Hazon fits within a larger Jewish tradition of advocating justice issues, and how both the Congregation and Hazon taken together evidence an emerging re-articulation and re-formulation of what it means to be Jewish given today's environmental and political realities. This chapter also provides a brief overview of the history of Jewish, and especially sustainable, farming.

Chapter five is the first of three chapters that compares and contrasts various themes that arose from my research. This chapter explores the theme of the local: of

locality and place and the environment and what these mean and how they contribute to a religious agrarian worldview. I then explore what “locality” means to my research subjects at Koinonia and Shearith Israel/Hazon. This chapter weaves in environmental philosophy, outlines how a religious agrarian turn towards the local is indicative of a lived religious environmentalism, and looks at how values and practices relating to environmentalist ideals are both formed and performed.

Chapter six analyzes the theme of the health of land, community, and the body. I compare and contrast the role religious beliefs and practices play in both the idealized construct of health (of the land and the body) and the embodied practices my research subjects put in place to create this perceived understanding of health of the body and land.

Chapter seven investigates the understanding and goal of justice (social and environmental) and how religious beliefs shape this idea and motivate my subjects to work towards creating and achieving this ideal.

Chapter eight offers a conclusion to my research, a summary and recapitulation of my arguments, and outlines the significance of an emerging religious agrarianism on the U.S. religious landscape. It also comments on potential avenues for future research so the field of religion and nature can continue to investigate how various U.S. religions are “going green” and the values and practices upon which they act in order to do so.

## CHAPTER 2 PREPARING THE BED

### **The Big Picture**

This chapter covers a variety of interrelated topics, all of which are central to the argument that I am making throughout this dissertation. Briefly, in this chapter I

- Argue that bringing food as both trope and actual unit of analysis into a study of religion in North America is important
- explain why farming is a valuable focus for exploring food issues
- discuss ways how the study of values surrounding food, farming, and the environment can influence our understanding of religion in North America
- outline my theoretical framework, including exploring methods and theories germane to both lived religion and network theory
- give a short history of agrarianism as it has developed in the United States
- and lastly explore what I mean by the phrase “religious agrarianism” and how this concept is central to my argument.

With these central concepts in place, I move to an introduction of my two case studies in chapters three and four.

### **Why Food?**

Mammalian bodies need calories in order to survive. As mammals, humans consume and imbibe liquid and food items, which are then metabolized so that our cells, muscles, tissues, organs, and blood all receive nourishment in order that we can move, work, play, pray, reproduce, think, and contribute to society. Given that eating food is a central act in which all humans everywhere participate, coupled with another panhuman universal, religion (Atran 2002; Boyer 2001; King 2007; Counihan and Van Esterik 2008), then current trends suggest that the interplay between the two is growing.

Food is indeed a “hot topic” in American culture at large, such that a leading website for the fast food industry published a guest editorial about “The Case for Humane” that began by saying, “Food production and agricultural sustainability seem to be on everyone’s mind these days. In fact, a report released in May [2011] by the International Food Information Council found that nearly 60 percent of Americans are now familiar with food sustainability issues. From best-selling books like Michael Pollan’s *In Defense of Food* [sic] and Mark Bittman’s *Food Matters* [sic] to widely read articles and editorials in the *New York Times*, *TIME* magazine, and *USA Today* [sic], signs point to a dietary revolution that transcends concerns over health.”<sup>1</sup> This revolution is an amalgamation of environmental concern, a concern for animal and farm worker welfare, artisan sensibility, and, lastly, religious sensibilities.

In regards to American religion--and in particular its historical relation with food--Daniel Sack writes, “Food carries a moral value in America. In this culture, a particular foodstuff is not only good or bad for your body but also can be good or bad for your soul. Whether based on popular culture or on scientific studies, personal food choice becomes an ethical calculation” (2000: 185). As I show throughout this dissertation, food indeed carries a moral value for my research subjects; it also carries an explicit religious value and reflects ethical deliberations that are environmental in calculation.

This religious-ethical turn means that how we get our calories becomes an exercise in value reasoning and deliberation, with our menus and plates becoming loci of meaning making. As Jeremy Benstein, founder of the Heschel Center for Environmental Learning, states, “few acts are as imbued with as much religious

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<sup>1</sup> Guest Author, June 2011, “The Case for Humane.” [www.qrsmagazine.com/outside-insights/case-humane?utm\\_campaign=20110606&utm\\_source=jolt&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.qrsmagazine.com/outside-insights/case-humane?utm_campaign=20110606&utm_source=jolt&utm_medium=email) Accessed June 6th, 2011.

symbolism and stricture as eating” (2006: 150). The meaning making of food choices has led one advocate of sustainable farming to claim that, “Food may be the primary arena where we humans sort out our values” (Holthaus 2009: 258).

For example, the fascinating article “The History of a Cup of Coffee” (Ayers and Durning 1994) expertly highlights the value-laden ethical complexities that accrue to one of the most common consumer products that is sold from every gas station to every restaurant.<sup>2</sup> Such complexity is one reason some criticize grounding contemporary environmental ethics within religious frameworks: the legal and textual traditions (at least for Abrahamic religions) which have determined orthodox practices in regards to ethics were developed in pre-modern times well before the Industrial Revolution and current post-Bretton Woods, neoliberal, Washington Consensus policies. Those who hold this view argue we need totally new ethical frameworks using current political parlance and legal mechanisms (Nash 1989).

However, others cogently argue the opposite and advocate for explicitly grounding environmental ethics within religious cosmologies (Gustafson 1996). The atheist and famous Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson comes down on the side of religious environmentalism, in that he accepts more people are religious than are atheist/agnostic, and he recognizes that religious beliefs motivate ethics. Therefore, Wilson hopes to build bridges between secular scientists and religious environmentalists, including especially environmentally concerned evangelicals (2006).

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<sup>2</sup> For an articulate exploration of ethical conundrums that highlight the need for equity in food politics and economies of scale—and the political structures set up that compound rather than facilitate just purchasing decisions—see eds. Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans (2003).

Given the above debate about religious environmentalism, the starting point of my dissertation rests in this realm of the meaning-making, value-laden power of food choices, and the role religion plays in these choices. I argue that religious-based values and ethics do indeed motivate people to put into practice sustainable, environmentally friendly behaviors (itself a problematic concept, especially given that entropy exists). For religious agrarianism, food is an important marker of value, identity, and custom, as it has been in almost all human cultures, past and present. Furthermore, food is a point of contention in our current American consumer culture as well as in our socially constructed religious systems. Although food can be fiber that is sweet, bitter, salty, and sour, it can also be a polysemous material item that becomes a site of contested religious meaning making (McDannell 1995; Chidester and Linenthal 1995; Tweed 1997). Lastly, via food aid and governmental subsidies, food is a contested political object, and via genetic engineering, it is a contested scientific object (Kent 2005; Bello 2009; Nützenadel and Trentmann 2008). Given the production of religious, ethnic, political, and material meanings that entail to food, and given our physical need to consume it, it makes sense to use food as a lens with which to analyze issues related to both religion and nature and American religion.

While studies such as Sack's look at the role of food in American religious history, or those like Shortridge (1998) look at food in a religious context and how it acts as a boundary and/or marker of ethnicity, my study looks at food in an American context of heightening environmental awareness. In this context, food is not only an environmental issue, but also a religious environmental concern. Given the ecological footprint of food items, and the growing concern about environmental issues in both

“foodie” and religious subcultures, it makes sense to develop a sustained analysis of food. It also makes sense to develop an analysis of agrarian and environmental ethics, and of the emergent religion-food-environment phenomenon now occurring on the American religious landscape.

### **Why Farming?**

The evidence for this turn towards food as a social and environmental issue in contemporary American religions becomes clearer once we look at the material actions, implications, and goals of both conventional (i.e. industrial) and sustainable farming. To help articulate these goals, I give a brief history of what the term industrial agriculture/farming means, and then contrast this with sustainable agriculture/farming. This history helps highlight how the farming and growing of food becomes a central ingredient in understanding religion and food issues in modern America.

### **Industrial Agriculture/Farming**

Over history humans have adopted various approaches to procuring food calories, ranging from foraging, gathering and hunting, nomadicism, fishing, pastoralism, swidden agriculture, and settled industrial agriculture. Most humans today in the United States obtain their food from the modern industrial farm the agrarian Eric Freyfogle descriptively visualizes in the following passage:

Imagine a typical high-tech farm field, American style. Massive graders have flattened the field, making it accessible by the biggest industrial machines. Fencerows are long gone. So are the old farm creeks and ponds. The land manager begins the new year by killing every living thing on the land except microscopic organisms. A single species of life is then introduced, perhaps a bioengineered wonder quite different from any wild plant. The species probably cannot survive without constant human attention. It might be sterile. The plant's seed or fruit has been engineered for appearance, 'shipability,' and ease of harvesting. There is little concern about nutrition or ecological effects. Chemicals are deployed to keep other life forms at bay. 'Farmers' interact with this land only from cocoons atop

noisy machines. Key decisions are made in offices far away. If a human hand touches the resulting produce, it is likely that of a low-paid worker on an assembly line that washes, sorts, and packs. Her building may have no windows. She has probably never seen the field that produces the crop. The people who buy the produce will know nothing more.

We can think of this farm scene as a contemporary counterpoint to a medieval cathedral. More than a place and human construct, the field is a cultural emblem of who we are and of how we understand our place. It is as value laden as any stone edifice. That the values embedded in the field now enjoy influence we must readily admit (2007: 8).

The purchase and consumption of the vast majority of farmed (and processed) industrial food items grown by the methods described by Freyfogle takes place in supermarkets that dot the American landscape. Furthermore, almost one quarter of all Americans daily consume at least one meal from a fast food restaurant; such consumption makes these restaurants some of the largest purchasers of industrially farmed food. It is also important to note that the food items purchased in these restaurants and supermarkets are grown both domestically and internationally, as the modern agricultural system is now global in its reach and impact. For example, some studies suggest that the average food item on an American plate has traveled approximately 1,500 miles, with an average of ten calories of energy going into the production, distribution, and purchase of what becomes just one calorie of energy in our bodies.

In large part the ability to purchase and consume the wide variety of food items available on supermarket shelves and on restaurant menus is the result of cheap, abundant oil and fossil fuel energy; refrigeration and shipping technologies; the invention of new, larger, and more powerful tractors and combines; a centralized government and energy grid; fossil-fuel based weapons developed during WW II which then became the basis of modern synthetic agricultural chemicals; the development of the land grant University system; international trade and shipping; and both corporate

and University-sponsored research into improving and creating new hybrid strains of seeds, including especially the work of Norman Borlaug (Kunstler 2005; Pollan 2006; Conkin 2008; LeVasseur 2010a). The development of hybrid seeds, coupled with developments in new technologies for irrigation, refrigeration, and distribution of the products grown by these seeds (and policies and subsidies that favored the adoption and use of these technologies), is commonly referred to as the Green Revolution. Over the past seventy years, this Revolution has allowed *Homo sapiens* to bring the most land in the history of agriculture into cultivation; has created an abundance and surplus of calories never before seen; and has helped contribute to the exponential growth of human numbers.

This revolution has not been without sustained, articulate, and impassioned criticisms. For example, Rachel Carson (1962), Vandana Shiva (2000), Raj Patel (2007), Andrew Kimbrell (2002), and Wendell Berry (1977) have all made strong criticisms of the industrial agricultural system that emerged out of the Green Revolution. They, along with others (Jansen and Vellema 2004; Clapp and Fuchs 2009), lambast the centralized control of such farming; claim there are deleterious environmental impacts that the rampant use of agro-chemicals has on birds and other flora and fauna of the American landscape; and argue that transnational agribusiness corporations undertake biopiracy and colonization of food items, seeds, and agricultural lands. The gestalt of emerging critiques against industrial farming includes arguments against food aid policies, global trade agreements (targeting especially the World Trade Organization [WTO]), criticisms of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and criticisms of the modern supermarket system that has developed around selling cheap food (in both

terms of cost and nutrition) in carefully controlled retail environments. These and other scholars further argue that industrial farming uses toxic chemicals that poison our bodies and landscapes and lead to the salinization of soil; rapidly draws down aquifers; and contributes to climate destabilization. A shared concern is held about the impacts that mechanized, corporate controlled farming in the United States has had on rural America, so that today less than two percent of all Americans are involved in farming. Taken together, these various criticisms of industrial farming have entered into domestic and global environmental discourses and are a motivating factor behind what I am calling religious agrarianism. I will expound upon these critiques during this dissertation, and they will be further encountered in the narratives of my research subjects.

### **Sustainable Agriculture/Farming**

Critiques of industrial agriculture presume that there is an alternative that is less destructive, a “sound” or sustainable agriculture. For a growing number of Americans, this perceived better alternative is to be found in “sustainable” agriculture. Sustainable Agriculture is more *popularly* known as organic agriculture, while some supporters use the term eco-agriculture, or even the phrase “beyond organic.”<sup>3</sup> Practitioners and supporters of such agriculture express a wide range of worldviews and engage in a diverse set of practices which are united by a belief that industrial agriculture is destructive socially and ecologically. They also share the belief that there is a better

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<sup>3</sup> This reflects not only the role of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in codifying national organic standards, but also to the polysemous and contested nature of terms and tropes such as “organic” and “sustainable.” For example, Wes Jackson argues that organic agriculture is a subset of sustainable agriculture, where the latter also includes natural systems agriculture, perennial polyculture, permaculture, biodynamics, and other sustainable farming systems.

way to feed people and to treat nature, and many believe that regional communities and economies are both strengthened by supporting local, sustainable agriculture.

To begin, the goals of sustainable agriculture are to feed humans by adopting farming practices that are healthy for the soil, the crops and animals being grown, the larger environment in which these flora and fauna reside, and for human bodies and human societies. Some of these farming practices include building soil nutrients and humus by making and applying compost; using GMO-free seeds and, when possible, heirloom and organic seeds; the disavowed use of almost all petroleum-based and synthetic chemicals that are seen as being toxic and polluting to soil microbes and human bodies; the humane treatment of animals grown for human consumption; the humane treatment of farm workers; and the development and maintenance of on-farm biodiversity, through both planting polycultures and creating on-site habitat for life forms that are not directly part of the farm economy but nonetheless are seen as beneficial.<sup>4</sup> It is also acknowledged that some supporters and practitioners of sustainable agriculture are involved solely for economic reasons, while others are motivated in part by economic concerns but also subscribe to the worldview that is commonly associated with sustainable agriculture.

### **Sustainable Agriculture: Land Health**

One aspect of this worldview is offered by the environmental philosopher Paul Thompson, whose 1995 book *The Spirit of the Soil: Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* is one of the earliest sustained analyses of the ethics of sustainable agriculture.

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<sup>4</sup> For more in depth analysis and introduction to these concepts and practices, see LeVasseur, 2010b, c, and d. It must be noted that some chemicals (pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides) are legally permitted and actively used by sustainable/organic farmers and this is another point of contention within organic subcultures. Another point of contention is the creation of organic monocrops that are planted for increased yields in order to both meet and shape market demands.

Thompson begins by noting, “Field crops and animal grazing—the key production activities of agriculture—are easily the most spatially extensive human activities having impact upon land masses” (1995: 1). He also claims that, “farmers do care about the land, but this does not mean that they can be trusted to safeguard environmental quality” (1995: 14), so that “Agriculture cannot continue indefinitely without an environmental ethic, or at least it cannot continue happily” (1995: 15). He outlines the history of industrial agriculture, which he describes as holding to a “productionist” philosophical paradigm of sustained and increased yields and argues that this is the “sole norm for ethically evaluating agriculture” (1995: 47). For Thompson, this normative productionist ethic and paradigm contrasts with that of agricultural and agrarian stewardship, which is “both an ecological and a self-interested notion” (1995: 75-6).

Of direct import to my dissertation is his point that

Agriculture described in Judeo-Christian [sic] religious teachings is not typical of farming during the post-feudal era of concern here. Nineteenth-century farmers could not have learned much about farming from the Bible. What is more probable is that folklore has provided the substance of agrarian stewardship values, and that religion has been selectively applied to sanction common wisdom. Religious teachings supporting stewardship allowed rural people a warrant for accepting common wisdom in the form of a moral and religious obligation. The religious sanction for stewardship was undoubtedly important for rural people who based their value systems on faith, but the folkloric roots of agrarian stewardship reveal a philosophical dimension that might be missed in a purely theological interpretation. As stewards of their land, farmers were thought to be acting in their own interest. Stewardship is not something that farmers undertake altruistically, nor is it a religious duty that farmers perform at the expense of their personal, earthly betterment...Stewardship is an integral component of agricultural land use. Stewardship duties do not oppose use, but are components of wise use. Stewardship does not arise as a constraint on the farmer's ownership and dominion over the land, but as a character trait, a virtue, that all farmers would hope to realize in service to the self-interests

created by ownership of the land. So agricultural stewardship is entirely compatible with self-interested, anthropocentric use of nature (1995: 74).

Here he eschews the romantic view of holism and “hands-off” environmentalism that has tended to dominate the majority of United States environmental thinking over the past century, including in religious environmentalist discourses about “stewardship.” He is arguing, rather, that farmers directly engage with and utilize farming landscapes for self-interested reasons that can nonetheless also be environmentally sustainable, and that this practical tradition of stewardship has folkloric, ethical, and religious dimensions.

Thompson continues by categorizing agrarian stewardship as being “an ecologically based duty that is entirely consistent with the farmer’s interest in producing food and fiber commodities...agricultural stewardship is built on implicit or indigenous knowledge of ecology relating soil, water, plant, and animal life. These relations are understood as at least partially regenerative, and the good steward develops a working knowledge of how to enhance, rather than degrade, the regenerative capacity of soils and other farm ecosystems” (1995: 77). Thompson sites Wendell Berry as being an exemplar of agrarian stewardship, thus providing one of the key figures who provides a link between environmental and religious agrarianism that I will explore later in this chapter. Also notice Thompson’s discussion of regenerative relations that are a hallmark of sustainable systems—sustainable agriculture attempts to regenerate and build the fecundity and health of agricultural soils and farm systems, holding that this leads to healthier, more nutritious foods, human bodies, and ecosystems (compared to productionist, industrial agriculture which is seen as being degenerative).

Thompson does recognize that society and farmlands are better served by a holistic approach to agriculture. Such a holistic approach sees agriculture as a self-

contained ecosystem, as well as being part of “the larger human biotic community” (1995: 119). Rather than privileging holism, however, he instead argues for a systems theory approach to sustainable agriculture (1995: 136). He argues that by adopting the latter approach we are better equipped to talk about sustainable systems, and can thus attempt to model and create sustainable farm systems that have minimal internal threats to their stability. Thompson thus takes a fairly anthropocentric, human-use approach to creating resilient sustainable farm systems, but one that advocates wise stewardship and concern for human and non-human ecosystems (as compared to his characterization of linear, input and energy intensive industrial farming that has as its sole goal increased yields in order to capture market shares).

### **Sustainable Worldview: Community Health and the Local**

Thompson includes in his argument about stewardship a concern for the health of local landscapes, bodies, and communities. Another leading advocate of sustainable agriculture is Wes Jackson, founder and director of the Land Institute in Salinas, Kansas, where he and his staff have developed what Jackson calls “Natural Systems Agriculture.”<sup>5</sup> Jackson is a trained botanist and plant geneticist whose 1985 book *New Roots for Agriculture* is an early and emblematic call for sustainable agriculture that more fully expresses a concern about local health.

As with Thompson, Jackson begins with a critique of industrial farming, writing that “So destructive has the agricultural revolution been that, geologically speaking, it surely stands as the most significant and explosive event to appear on the face of the

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<sup>5</sup> Jackson founded the institute in order to realize his stated goal: “I think agriculture needs a technical fix—a bio-technical fix...This bio-technical fix would be based on mixed perennial seed-producing plants” (1985: 3). See [www.landinstitute.org](http://www.landinstitute.org)

earth, changing the earth even faster than did the origin of life...In this sense, then, till agriculture is a global disease, which in a few places has been well-managed, but overall has steadily eroded the land” (1985: 2).<sup>6</sup> He also lambasts the productionist farming of the industrial paradigm, writing that, “Unfortunately, our successes [in increased yield on less land] are measured on discount economics” (1985: 16) so that our current American Farm Policy is to “Simply Discount the Future” (1985: 21). Jackson does present a nuanced expose of what he calls “chemotherapy on the land” (1985: 23), sharing that “Humans are sloppy creatures, but they seldom err on purpose...we must recognize that most of the total load of poisons in the environment will be there due to error and not intent” (1985: 28).

Jackson offers a vision of sustainable farming practices and ethics in contradistinction to this error-filled chemotherapy of modern industrial farming. To begin, he writes that, “If we make this agriculture less human-dependent and more self-renewing, then the new agriculture, based more on the principles of nature, can afford us a greater opportunity to take without thought for the morrow and still be sustained. As we look to a new agriculture, we cannot nor should we separate our agriculture from our religion or from our ethics...as we move toward a sustainable agriculture, we will necessarily develop an ethic with sustainability at its core” (1985: 64). Two points stand

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<sup>6</sup> He also writes, “Soil is a placenta or matrix, a living organism which is larger than the life it supports, a tough elastic membrane which has given rise to many life forms...before their decline and demise. But it is itself now dying. It is a death that is utterly senseless, and portends our own. In nature the wounded placenta heals through plant succession; enterprising species cover wounds quickly. The human agricultural enterprise and all of civilization has depended upon fighting that succession” (1985: 10). These sentiments about the soil being alive, of it being its own matrix imbued with life force, is a central tenet of sustainable agriculture and of contemporary agrarian philosophies. This premise (the soil is alive and its health equals the health of human bodies and societies) thus motivates farm practices (such as applying compost or planting green manure, or applying only chemicals that are seen as being non-toxic to soil microbes and organisms) that attempt to sustain and build the fertility and life of the soil.

out here. The first is that Jackson is arguing what Thompson argued ten years later—that our agriculture should be based on understandings of sustainable systems, including their abilities to be resilient and to regenerate; and that our modern industrial agriculture is perceived to be antithetical to these abilities. The other is that Jackson is arguing that sustainable agriculture requires a religious ethics of sustainability.<sup>7</sup>

Jackson's vision of sustainable agriculture is based on solar energy and privileges perennial fruits and seeds. Jackson claims that the benefits of an agriculture based on herbaceous perennial seed-production are that it reduces soil loss; reduces energy consumption; reduces pesticide dependency; builds healthier soil and food; reduces dependency on commercial fertilizers; and halts the decline of domestic genetic germplasm. Lastly, this system of agriculture is decentralized, mirroring the decentralization of photosynthetic plants that capture solar energy (1985: 111).<sup>8</sup> For Jackson, such a sustainable system of low-input perennial fruits and seeds will be part of a system of farming which telltales an "Age of the Recognition of Limits" (1985: 122) and which will entail a shift in ethics and values towards our farms and systems of farming.

This shift will tender a recognition that locality is important. It is important for land stewardship, a localized land ethic (the implications of which are investigated in Jackson's own book *Becoming Native to this Place* [1996]), and for concepts of robust health. This health will include a focus on local economies, farmland, farm culture,

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<sup>7</sup> Jackson also tellingly writes that, "Anything as important as an ethic cannot be written but must evolve in the mind of a thinking community" (1985: 73). This too points to the findings of my research and my own argument: communities of practice enable sustainable agricultural values to be embodied and put into place. Religious communities are on the vanguard of such embodiment, as I explore throughout this dissertation.

<sup>8</sup> On biomimicry, see Benyus (2002).

human bodies, and the bodies of plants and animals. Similar concerns permeate the writings of other advocates for sustainable farming, from Wendell Berry to Michael Pollan, and are found in literature on bioregionalism, which will be further explored in chapter five.

### **Sustainable Worldview: Spiritual Health**

Although presented as separate sub-headings, it is important to note that in the sustainable worldview, concerns about stewardship, the local, ecology, and individual health are all interrelated. To explore the concern about individual spiritual health (which includes the health of those in religious communities), I provide a vision of sustainable agriculture seen in the work of the Protestant agronomist Gary Fick. His 2008 book *Food, Farming, and Faith* is a layperson's exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, where an appeal to scripture is used to evidence the need for contemporary sustainable agricultural practices.

Fick begins by noting that, "Sustainability requires change, and for people to change to more sustainable patterns of living, they must be knowledgeable and motivated. Faith or worldview is a great motivational force" (2008: xvi). See here the privileging of faith and religion, or ideas and worldview, in the need to move towards sustainability (a move in the lineage of Lynn White, Jr.), as well as the author's concern with sustainability in general.<sup>9</sup> Fick then positions agriculture as a human activity that is culture bound and also bound by nature and nature's limits.<sup>10</sup> This echoes Jackson and

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<sup>9</sup> He also notes that, "our motivations are linked to ethical and religious worldviews" (2008: 2).

<sup>10</sup> In his words: "I have first placed agricultural sustainability in the dual context of the natural environment and human culture, both of which determine and direct the processes of agriculture...the way we eat and the way we think about eating is a cultural phenomenon. It is a part of the culture of agri-culture. At the same time, biological and physical conditions limit what is possible for agriculture to produce. We need to

Wendell Berry, who challenge farmers to place their work within the context of localized limits. Therefore, Fick appeals to holism and underlines the crucial place of ethics and religion in analyses of food and agricultural issues.

Fick's reading of scripture leads him to claim that stewardship is the foundation of the biblical view of agriculture (2008: 17). Part of stewardship is local knowledge (2008: 54) and reverence for God's creation (2008: 55). Fick concludes in a vein that is similar to both Jackson and Thompson: that systems thinking should inform our agricultural decisions and practices. Furthermore, religious and ethical beliefs, as well as farm labor issues and farm economics, are part of systems--and thus of a farm system--as much as tillage machinery and crop and animal breeds (2008: 127). Fick concludes his call for religiously informed sustainable agriculture with a list of what he calls "The Essentials of Agriculture" (2008: 179-80). These tenets of sustainable agriculture include: "soil must be respected and protected;" "Adequate natural resources must be managed in locally appropriate ways;" the humane treatment of animals and the use of animals for traction power; "Agriculture must be viewed and managed in a holistic manner;" and recognizing that, "Farming must offer an attractive lifestyle and a means of learning how to farm so that future generations will become farmers" (2008: 179-80).

Ellen Davis's *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture* (2009) is another recent publication that approaches agrarianism from a religious (in her case, theological) perspective. Davis claims that, "In contrast to ourselves, [the ancient Israelites] belonged to a culture that recognized land care as the life-and-death matter it

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be aware of both culture and nature if we are to understand the basic parts of our food systems" (2008: 5).

unquestionably is. Thus, they can provide a vantage point from which to view and develop a nuanced critique of our current cultural practices regarding land use and food production” (2009: 2). She also maintains that the Bible has a theological land ethic (2009: 25-6) and this is especially found in Deuteronomy (2009: 27). Just as Emma Tomalin writes that a religious environmentalist view brings with it a reinterpretation of tradition, rather than a traditional interpretation, I argue that both Fick and Davis take an environmental agrarian view towards Scripture. Therefore, they both offer a reinterpretation of tradition, in large part because environmental agrarian discourses and critiques of industrial agriculture are by definition only possible in a post-Green Revolution world.<sup>11</sup>

We see that influential advocates of sustainable agriculture, including Thompson, Jackson, and Fick, underline the moral and religious dimensions of alternatives to industrial agriculture. My dissertation further explores this dimension by explicitly focusing on the religious dimension of religious agrarianism. As we will see, this aspect of the sustainable worldview is gaining adherents throughout North American religions, with Koinonia and Hazon providing vanguard examples of how religious ethics influence sustainable farming practices.

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<sup>11</sup> In regards to “mining” the Hebrew Bible for passages and messages that speak to or evidence environmental concerns, Biblical scholar Norm Habel writes, “After exploring ecology and the Bible for more than twenty years, I have come to the conclusion that...[t]he Bible, as a major force in the Western Christian tradition, is not obviously green and has certainly not been read by Christians—whether scholars or laity—as a work that immediately connects us personally with nature. In the past, the Bible has generally not made Christians green in their attitude to creation—just the opposite!” (2009: xvi). So although Davis’s reading of scripture from an agrarian lens holds some validity, as the authors of scripture were not the “Western Christians” of whom Habel writes, it is still a problematic leap à la Tomalin to maintain they had environmental agrarian concerns. In regards to Tomalin’s and Fick’s appeal to scripture to find evidence of how Biblical peoples dealt with the challenges of agriculture, it must be pointed out that if these challenges (pests, drought, blights, and others) were present back then, then as Jackson writes there might be an inherent problem with till agriculture itself. A critique of the general historical enterprise of agriculture is addressed later in this chapter.

## **Sustainable Worldview: Ecology/Natural Systems**

Besides the focus on ethics and religion by the above sustainable farming advocates, all equally point to the need to understand how *ecosystems* work; point out that farms are *managed* ecosystems; and two explicitly point toward the need for a holistic worldview within which sustainable farming is but one component. As with any activity that is managed and is part of a system, the values and ethics system managers bring into their decision-making will affect the management and structure of the system. Thus, values and ethics shape systems, and thus impact, create, and shape the even larger systems (environmental, social, religious, political, economic, and others) within which these are embedded. Almost every critic of industrial farming, and thus almost every proponent of sustainable farming, claims that the former is anthropocentric, mechanistic, reductionist, productionist, linear, polluting, and unsustainable. In contrast, they claim that sustainable farming is cyclical, regenerative, holistic, organic (in worldview), adaptive, and harmonious.<sup>12</sup> Thus the ethics and values of both systems are constantly seen to be at odds with one another, and critics of the first inform their criticisms by the holistic values and ethics they hold. Their worldview, and thus their idealized version of a sustainable planet, is directly threatened by the actions and values of the industrial system and worldview. Furthermore, for religious agrarians a theistic understanding of Creation provides motivation both to criticize industrial agriculture, and to support the goals and ethics of sustainable agriculture.

This cleavage of worldviews, ethics, and values, and thus the practices they lead to, can be grouped into two sets of competing views and ideals about agriculture (Beus

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<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth look at holism, organicism, and the rise of a Western ecological worldview (and how this impacts the current understanding and quest for sustainability), see Worster (1996).

and Dunlap 1990). They explain that the worldview of conventional agriculture is based upon seeing humans as being independent from nature so that we are able to dominate it; advocates for centralization in farming politics and markets; believes in exploitation of farm lands, seeds, and now even the genome; and is premised upon competition, both in markets and with anything in agricultural fields that gets in the way of production. In comparison, they explain that the worldview of alternative agriculture is based upon seeing humans as being dependent on nature so that the goal becomes living in harmony with nature; advocates for decentralization in farming politics and markets; believes in showing restraint when working with farm lands, seeds, and the genome; and is premised upon community, both in the market and in fields.

Many, if not all, of these attributes of alternative agriculture represent key goals and ideals of broader environmental philosophies and movements. Themes such as diversity, community, and restraints are of central import in foundational works in environmental ethics, including Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, and especially his essay "The Land Ethic" (1971). Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* also underlines these themes, and her concern about the impacts of agrochemicals on bird populations helped create the ferment for environmental ethics to influence the ethics and worldviews of those in the sustainable agriculture movement.

A growing number of religion scholars argue that this turn towards environmental sustainability is rapidly spreading through and influencing religious institutions, churches, and people of faith. I document and analyze the way these themes are evident in alternative agricultural practices and movements.

## The Return of “Place”

However, farming practices can tell us more—not only about ecological themes, but also about place. Farming practices and philosophies both reflect and reinforce the connection between religion and ecology, and also another connection, between ecology and place. Many people write about this, including Jackson, Berry, and Wirzba. The philosopher Edward Casey, in his 1998 book *The Fate of Place*, gives an intellectual history of the philosophy of “Place” and how place has been conceived in the Western world since antiquity. He adds to this dialogue about ecology and place by noting that place as a philosophical concept has been given short shrift, as the West has fixated upon Space and Time (1998: x).

Casey’s argument about place analyzes ancient myths and religious narratives; Hellenistic and Neoplatonic thought; early modern theories of place and space; and concludes with modern thinkers who are on the vanguard of the reemergence of Place over Space and Time in late modernity and postmodernity. Casey writes in this exploration that, “Integral to the genius of early modern thinkers from Descartes to Leibniz is a disdain for the *genius loci*: indifference to the specialness of place, above all its inherent ‘power’” (1998: 133-4).<sup>13</sup> This indifference to the parameters, boundaries, and uniqueness of place is one of the criticisms of industrial farming: the same farming technologies and methods are used to grow the same strain of seeds for the same international markets the world over, irregardless to local social and environmental

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<sup>13</sup> Regarding the power of places, see Vine Deloria’s *God is Red* (1994), and what this might mean for indigenous sustainable agriculture in a North American context. The author Nigel Pennick shares a similar thesis as do Deloria and Casey, writing, “We in the West suffer from what John Steele calls “Geomantic Amnesia,” a condition where place is no longer recognized as having an effect upon [an] individuals’ state of mind or well-being” (1998: 7).

consequences.<sup>14</sup> Critics argue that this process is inherently destructive to farm land, farmers, farm economies, and human and non-human bodies. For example, Vandana Shiva argues that such a uniform privileging of the world (i.e. Casey's world of Space and Time) as interchangeable components of inert matter to be manipulated and traded as commodities leads to "monocultures of the mind." She argues that such monocultures in the mind generate monocultures of culture and landscapes that are damaging to women, ecosystems, and sustainable regimes of traditional subsistence agriculture (1993).

Casey continues, asking how when "faced with the hegemony of Space, can we rediscover the special no-metric properties and unsited virtues of Place?" (1998: 201). His answer is by way of the body. In this answer he points towards the phenomenological tradition found in Whitehead, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty (forerunners to today's ecophenomenological tradition). He also mentions the work of Heidegger, Fachelard, Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari. His conclusion is that, "Despite the seduction of endless space (and the allure of serial time), place is beginning to escape form its entombment in the cultural and philosophical underworld of the modern West" (1998: 339).

My own interpretation of Casey's argument is that this call for recognizing the inherent worth and value of place is one of the major goals driving sustainable agriculture. This concern is seen in the emergence of the Slow Food movement; of Transition Towns; of Farmers' Markets trumpeting local produce; of Terroir (Trubek

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<sup>14</sup> For another perspective on this process of privileging a universal and uniform space over a particular, culture bound place, see both Harvey (1990) and Hornborg (1996). For an in depth exploration of what this does to us on both individual and cultural levels, and also to the unique places of the planet, see Berry (2000).

2008); of the concept of “food miles;” and of finding and using local and heirloom seeds, as seen for example in the work of Seed Savers Exchange. All of these sub-movements within the sustainable agriculture milieu advocate for the importance of a healthy, local place, where this “place” includes soils; what is grown on the soils; a reduction in distancing from the places where our food is grown; to even a specific, place-based taste that imbues locally grown food and value added items. It also includes movements towards place-appropriate, locally adapted varieties of flora and fauna, as compared to the few species of globally traded “place-less” (and tasteless) varieties of flora and fauna produced by industrial agriculture.

It is also seen in the experience of sustainable farmers themselves, as many argue that farming is an embodied act. In one sense, sustainable farming requires paying attention to local conditions and variables; and in another, it requires the actual use of the body and its senses and limbs and muscles to dig a trench, turn a compost pile, run a tractor, harvest a crop, prepare a booth at a farmer’s market, shear sheep, and to physically perform countless other farm related tasks.

One weakness in Casey’s work is that it focuses on the voice and ideas of Caucasian male philosophers. In part this is a reflection on the Western philosophical tradition, which is defined largely by those thinkers. However, there also exist other strains in modern and postmodern philosophy that also point towards the reemergence of place. One of these strains is the feminist care tradition, especially as it relates to animal ethics and embodiment, and thus by extension, how diet and ethical care can impact human-place practices (see synergies with the rise in concern of how farm animals are treated, and even the rise of “veganic” farming in some sustainable farming

subcultures—for example, Kadhigar farm in Maine) (Donovan and Adams 2007).

Another strain is ecofeminism, with its call for intersubjectivity and a return of the erotic (Glazebrook 2004). Further strains advocating for a return to embodiment and the need for this return in order to move towards sustainable ethics and lifestyles are seen in ecowomanism, deep ecology, and the bioregional movement.

A correlate of embodiment is a re-attunement to place, as many in these traditions are motivated by the devaluing of embodiment and care-based intersubjectivity. When people make an effort towards dwelling in embodiment, and this is coupled with the goal of ecological justice and the worldview of sustainable agriculture, then it becomes possible for a re-attunement to place to also occur, as place underlies embodiment (or vice versa: embodiment can only occur in a given place).

Given the above aspects of and trends within a sustainable agriculture worldview, it is no surprise that many within this worldview have a strident critique of industrial agriculture. These include critiques that industrial agriculture relies on toxic chemicals and petroleum products; is inherently brittle due to over-reliance on a few hybrid strains of food items; it disregards the welfare of animals and workers; and it produces food items devoid of flavor and nutrients (Norberg-Hodge, et al 2001).

Meanwhile, advocates of mainstream, industrial agriculture claim that sustainable farming is unrealistic in its assessment of industrial farming and criticize it for a variety of reasons. These include claims that sustainable farming is nostalgic and unreflectively opposed to progress; is unable to produce enough yield to feed 6.5 billion humans; its crops are susceptible to rot, blight, pests, and drought because of its

reliance on organic farming techniques; and lastly that it is flawed in its overall claims of superiority because there is minimal to no scientific proof behind its varied claims about its own benefits and its claims about the ills of industrial farming.

The difference in worldviews between these two types of farming, including the views one side holds about the other, influence values, emplaced bodies, and farm landscapes. They also can make for contentious political lobbying and uncomfortable neighbors, especially when both views and thus practices occur within a bordered community. And, just as sustainable farmers are involved in the production of place, so too are “conventional farmers...involved in the construction of places, only their places are quite different from those constructed by organic growers. And so we have two landscapes, two visions of community and two understandings of the world inscribed in the same geographical space. Therein lies the major site of friction between conventional and organic farmers” (Hetherington 2005: 30).

There are other criticisms against sustainable agriculture. Many of these criticisms are directed at USDA certified organic products and the production and consumption of such products. For example, much of the organic produce on U.S. grocery store shelves are actually grown in Global South countries, especially during the North American winter, so that these are export crops with a large ecological footprint. Furthermore, by growing for export, local farmers in poorer countries do not grow enough food to meet their own caloric needs (Fair Trade products are one response to this criticism). Another common criticism of organic produce is that it is too expensive and elite, catering to a bourgeoisie foodie upper class. Such arguments point out that health food stores and other shops where organic produce is sold tend to

be located in areas of affluence. As a result, there are “food deserts” in poorer areas where fresh produce (organic or industrial) is hard to come by. Issues of class and race tend to underlie this strain of argument.

Another criticism of sustainable agriculture is that not enough people are interested in becoming organic farmers. This means there will be a lack of willing farmers and people to train and thus supply will never meet demand. Coupled with this is a charge that a reliance on smaller scale polyculture acreage demands more workers and farmers and there are not enough of either to meet the needs of organic ideals. Lastly, many critics claim that organic has become a “greener” version of industrial farming. These critics point to the large monocultures of current organic farms while others maintain that organics have been taken over by corporate agribusiness-interests.<sup>15</sup>

Given this exploration of agriculture, it must be noted that there is another view that criticizes both industrial and sustainable agriculture, especially if either forms are practiced at increasingly larger scales. This third view of agriculture, with a broadly conceived understanding of agriculture as being dependent on settled communities of farmers who are engaged in domesticating a variety of plant species, is proposed by a minority of scholars, agronomists, and cultural critics. As already seen, Wes Jackson criticizes the reliance on till agriculture (as compared to no-till agriculture) and how this method of plowing soil leads to soil loss (a similar argument was originally made by Edward Faulkner in 1944). Another critique of human agriculture and the domestication of plants and animals and how this domestication reflects an urge to dominate nature

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<sup>15</sup> For one example of a fairly nuanced and balanced perspective on these criticisms, see Fromartz (2006).

can be seen in the work of Kirkpatrick Sale (2006). Meanwhile, both Richard Manning (2006) and Paul Shepard (1998) criticize the human practice of agriculture, with each author sharing a similar argument about how human genes and societies evolved in small-scale gatherer-hunter enclaves so that with the onset of settled agriculture humans “fell” from an idealized, prelapsarian eco-past. Another critic is Weston Price, who traveled the globe researching and reporting on indigenous diets and nutrition. He found that once food items from modern agriculture began to be consumed, never before seen tooth decay and other physical deformities entered into indigenous communities (2006).

Lastly, one of the most popular and widely read criticisms of agriculture comes from the neo-animist and communitarian Daniel Quinn. His books *Ishmael* (1992) and *The Story of B* (1996) outline his theory of the “Fall:” a point in history approximately 10,000 years ago, when humans ceased to be members of an evolutionary community of equals and began to act as conquerors. Quinn distinguishes between “Leavers” and “Takers” and argues that the latter, who are now spread throughout the globe, practice what he calls “totalitarian agriculture.”<sup>16</sup> Quinn argues that this shift to settled, large-scale, domesticated agriculture has led to exponential population growth and our current ecocrisis (and should not be confused with smaller scale itinerant agriculture practiced by Leavers).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Yi Fu-Tuan (1974) notes that peoples of the ancient East had a long history of destroying and altering their environments, often for agricultural reasons. Clarence Glacken (1967) equally shares a detailed process of human-nature relations in the West and the historical role of agriculture in human alteration of environments.

<sup>17</sup> For a similar discussion of “the Fall” within deep ecological and radical environmental subcultures, and the perceived role agriculture played in this event, see Taylor (2010: 78-80).

What all of these authors have in common is a critique of modern agriculture—its methods, technologies, underlying epistemologies, and the affects these have on our view and relationship with nature; and the impact that agriculture has on the health of human bodies and communities. They also criticize the impact agriculture, and especially modern agriculture, has on the health of soil, bodies of water, non-human animals, insects and microbes, and the climate. While most would be sympathetic to and would most likely promote sustainable agriculture over industrial agriculture (as Jackson does), they all nonetheless criticize “agriculture” as a human technology and lifestyle. For these authors, humans made a deleterious and damaging mistake as when we settled into permanent locations and began to actively replace native ecosystems with tilled agricultural fields approximately 10,000 years ago.

By looking at industrial farming/agriculture, sustainable farming/agriculture, and criticisms of any form of settled agriculture, we are able to see how both food and farming, and the values behind and wrapped up within them, are an important aspect of religion in America. This is especially true for the emerging religious agrarianism about which I write. Moreover, because values are so central to the worldviews behind both systems of farming, and because values are such an important part of religion and religious environmentalism, it is important to unpack what we mean by the term “values” and what role values actually play in religious belief, faith, and practice.

### **Why Religious Values?**

We have seen how any kind of agriculture involves religious, ethical, normative and value-laden claims that reflect a worldview. For religious agrarians, the values that permeate their worldview inspire and motivate them to actively participate in sustainable farming practices. This is because religion structures peoples’ lives in many different

ways. A religion may be operationally defined as a systematic set of narratives, values, and myths that are maintained and passed on by charismatic figures and institutions and that typically put forth a cosmology that is tethered to a belief in some sort of supernatural being and/or realm. Religious beliefs offer sanctuary in times of need; inspiration in times of hope; and a sense of grounding in today's wayward, fractioned, sped-up world. Religion also has many functions in peoples' lives. Belief and membership in a religious community can provide stability and a sense of purpose. The myths, narratives, and practices within a religion also provide life cycle rituals and influence lived practices like pilgrimage and prayer. They also offer a code of ethics to live by (for example, the Ten Commandments) and an annual calendar of activities in which a person can participate (for example, the High Holy Days for Judaism). Religion, or rather, religions, also help people generate and codify values so that they can attempt to live a life in line with the ideals and teachings of the religion to which they belong and also with their own personal ethics (which are in large part shaped by the religion to which they belong/were raised in). Religious values help Americans navigate both a contentious political system and a diverse religious landscape (Eck 2001).

Yet, religion is also importantly about difference, negotiation, and conflict, whether over competing conceptions of the sacred and where and how the sacred manifests, to competing values and ethics. Such conflict results in the formation of subtraditions within larger traditions, and also leads to the development of new religions or bricolage between existing subtraditions. This history of religious conflict is also true in regards to conflicts over value-laden food choices, including food choices that explicitly support sustainable agriculture, as well as those that by default gloss over any

understanding of how food is grown so that this distancing is itself a subconscious normative position. Given that “religion is the most volatile constituent of culture” (Prothero 2005: 5), it is important to develop religious literacy. One area where this literacy is lacking, both from within and without traditions, is what religious subtraditions have had to say about food and agriculture, past and present, especially given the current ecocrisis, and specifically the values that underlie food and agricultural decision making regimes. This dissertation is one corrective offered from the field of religious studies.

Furthermore, in a highly religious country such as the United States of America, religion and religious values play central roles in many landscapes: political, ethical, economic, institutional, and, increasingly, environmental.<sup>18</sup> Because values are central to discourses about sustainability and thus sustainable agriculture, it is important to be clear on what we mean when we talk about values. It is equally important to be clear about what we mean when we talk about religious values and how these relate to the values of sustainable agriculture.

Many values held by Americans are religiously based and/or impacted, such that “The clue to American values, including religious values insofar as they can be separated, must...be sought in the American revolutionary tradition. The fundamental elements in this libertarian social system were...the security of property [and] a body of

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<sup>18</sup> For a sustained, articulate examination of the history of the interaction between religion and politics in America, see Wuthnow (1995). For an interesting look at the cleavage in American values and politics that is in line with Wuthnow’s analysis, see the work of cognitive scientist George Lakoff (2004). His analysis points to the difficulty of changing values in individuals and groups. In regards to religious values and politics, Dionne and DiIulio point out that, “The best available data suggest that religious organizations and ‘relationships related to religion’ are clearly the major forces mobilizing volunteers in America” (2000: 5). Many of these religious volunteers that they research are involved in political activities, on both “sides” of the political spectrum. And, as my research suggests, some religious volunteers are now becoming actively involved in sustainable agriculture networks and politics.

thought whose most relevant origins can be traced to the leading Puritan theologians and social thinkers” (Van Allen 1978: 20). Max Weber’s thesis on Protestantism and the rise of market capitalism in the U.S. is also relevant here (2003). If Weber and Van Allen are correct, then one of the underlying bedrock values of America (both secular and religious) is a right to private property and the right to do with this property as the owner pleases.

Some environmentalists criticize this claim, arguing that market forces (and especially subsidies) only reinforce the unsustainable abuse of America’s ecosystems. This includes the “productionist” industrial agriculture model, where corporate behemoths are fiscally rewarded by the right of farmers to do what they please on their own privately owned lands.<sup>19</sup> Many who make these arguments, even if they acknowledge that the USDA and other governmental regulatory agencies monitor industrial farming practices (including especially the use of toxic chemicals), claim that nonetheless the government is beholden to agro-corporate interests and that these regulatory mechanisms are unsatisfactory and weakly enforced. This debate is central to the sustainable/industrial divide, and it exemplifies the politically contested landscape of agriculture, and thus its underlying values, in modern America.

Such a historical understanding of values (and rights) in our country has led to an extreme individualism that has become the de facto dominant value of modern America. This is because “Americans tend to think of the ultimate goals of a good life as matters of personal choice. The means to achieve individual choice, they tend to think, depend on economic progress. This dominant American tradition of thinking about success

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<sup>19</sup> For a perspective that views the private property-based modern market as a religious system (and one that is inherently destructive to other religions, and human and non-human communities), see Loy (1997).

does not, however, help very much in relating economic success to our ultimate success as persons and our ultimate success as a society” (Bellah 1986: 22). Many today add that this privileging of the individual does not lead to the development of sustainable environmental values or to environmental success—in fact, one of the insights of ecology is that all life forms (and all systems) are interconnected. When one life form becomes privileged in nature, it tends to eventually encounter limits that lead to its demise and/or systemic processes bring it into balance with the rest of the system. This argument holds that privileging individual, rational economic man [sic], and the value system based on this view of humanity, is one of the key contributors of the current ecocrisis.<sup>20</sup> The communities I study provide an alternative reading to this rampant individualism, and this is one of the reasons we should study religious institutions in general: because religious institutions are sites of value creation and maintenance. Scholars can also investigate if the values held in religious communities temper the individualism of modern America; or if they reinforce this individualism, for example as seen in the “health and wealth gospel” of some Pentecostal churches.

Meanwhile, in his systematic study of values, Richard Kilby defines values as “conceptions of the desirable or the worthwhile (and their opposites). This will include that which is subjectively felt to be worthy, important, better or best, good, or right (and their opposites)” (1993: 36). He also calls values “conceptions of the desirable” (1993:

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<sup>20</sup> Herman Daly makes such an argument from within the discipline of environmental economics (2010). See also Paul Hawken (1994).

36).<sup>21</sup> As conceptions of the desirable, values motivate, influence perceptions, shape decisions, and help structure identities and hopes for the future.

However, there often times exists a gap between the ideal of a professed value and the reality of putting that ideal into lived practice. This holds true for religious ethics and values, and also to values from those that guide a marriage to those that guide a parent-child relation. Such a gap is especially true for environmental values, which may be restrained from being put into practice by competing internal interests, values, and desires; and especially by systemic limits within our larger political and consumer systems.

Regarding specific values and practices related to food, Anna Peterson writes, “Like other spiritual practices, gardening and eating locally offer utopian moments, encounters with nature and with other people that embody possible alternatives to life as usual. They can help to reeducate our desires for more sustainable, humane, and mutual relations to nature. At the same time, consumption and food issues underline the gap between what we say we care about and how we act. In no other sphere of life, perhaps, do people contradict their own values so regularly” (2009: 108). This quote highlights the complex, contested internal and external nature of trying to align religious and environmental food values with practices that enable these values to be realized.

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<sup>21</sup> Kilby makes an important distinction between values and attitudes, writing that attitudes are “enduring dispositions that involve a concept (belief, meaning) of the object, have a ‘for’ or ‘against’ quality (have valuation implicit), involve some amount of feeling-emotion (are not cold beliefs), and motivate and produce an actions tendency...Much the same characteristics describe values...By convention ‘attitudes’ name dispositions held toward specific things...many attitudes will be based on underlying values...However, it would be a great mistake to assume that values are at work every time a person expresses an attitude. Rather, many attitudes are borrowed ready-made from others with no ideational or value foundation. Also, some attitudes are the result of such needs and psychodynamic processes as hostility, anxiety, and ego-defense” (1993: 38).

Values do not adhere only to individuals; a group can also express them, and they are equally shaped and challenged by other groups and/or membership within a group. As can be imagined, this process is loaded with power struggles and politics, and is influenced by gender, level of education and income, and prestige awarded to certain members of a group. However, this process of value emergence occurs in groups (kin, sport, institutional, religious) and it is a process in which all of the group members participate. Because putting sustainable agricultural values and their varied motivations into practice is so difficult, it might be easier to embody and practice them in a group setting. This group setting can be a food co-op, a Community Supported Agriculture farm, a farmer's market, or an intentional religious community that practices sustainable agriculture. My case studies and various research subjects are all members of some type of these group settings, and many join precisely because these group settings enable them to put into practice their sustainable agriculture, religious environmentalist, and religious agrarian values.

The process of value construction and practice in America is also contentious and volatile because of the First Amendment, which guarantees the separation of church and state. Without a top-down codification of values that is enforced by a government, it becomes possible for an at-large "competing market" of values, especially in relation to food (this does not mean the Government does not have legal rules that govern food production, which themselves are reflections of values), to exist. Given the contested nature of values in such a large postindustrial country, the process of value creation can be seen as "a continuous development towards a more fragmented culture" (Van Deth and Scarbrough 1995: 4). If correct, we can expect people turn to

religious groups for grounding, as such groups are a setting where people with shared values attempt to deal with fragmentation (of their own lives, of society at large, and of environments). Religious individuals and groups will also tend to make coalitions (political, religious, environmental) based on shared religious values. My research findings are consistent with these assumptions.

A corollary assumption follows from the above statement. This is that people are used to the values of both cheap, abundant food. These values are inculcated in Americans by the ubiquity of fast food chains, food advertising and marketing, and by default that the cost of food in America has remained relatively constant despite inflation in other areas of the economy. Here we can think of Bellah's laments—the right of individual consumers to buy food shipped around the world for a low price is a pinnacle of individual choice, and one that externalizes the ecological and social footprints that adhere to this value-laden food choice.

It is possible to also think of anthropocentric religious values that privilege human needs and desires, especially when based on immediate gratification and/or a belief in a transcendent afterlife, over more ecocentric religious values. The results of this might play out in a meal at a religious gathering where unhealthy, industrially grown food is served on Styrofoam plates where no one present questions the impact this meal has on the environment. As such, these value systems tend to be at odds with the values and goals of sustainable agriculture and religious agrarianism. For sure, these individualized and anthropocentric values can potentially fade, but this process of value change will take time.

However, there is a possibility the process of value change in regards to cheap, abundant food might speed up, especially in the case of severe crisis. Our industrial agriculture system may experience what Fikret Berkes calls a “resource crisis” (1999). He uses this term in relation to the concept of traditional ecological knowledge, arguing that traditional peoples tend to learn the value of a local resource (i.e. how this resource functions within the larger ecosystem and why and how it is important to the health of both the ecosystem and human community) only after they first diminish the resource, experiencing a “crisis” in the process. This crisis is needed for a learning curve to develop so that the resource in question becomes appropriately valued and managed once the crisis passes.

If this learning process is required for societies to learn the value of resources, and if the criticisms of industrial agriculture levied by Kimbrell, Shiva, and others are correct, then it can be argued that the current linear, input heavy, productionist industrial agricultural system is rapidly heading society towards a variety of resource crises: loss of ground water (as seen in the rapid drawdown of the Oglalla aquifer); collapse of monoculture hybrid crops due to pests or drought; poisoning of aquifers due to run-off of chemical fertilizers (see the “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico where the Mississippi River drains); the creation and release of a virus, such as swine flu; loss of topsoil; die offs of pollinating honey bees due to toxic chemicals used in farming; and salinization of agricultural soils. Any or all of these could result in a resource crisis that could potentially shift American values about food and agriculture in a short amount of time.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jared Diamond’s writing is consistent with this line of reasoning and interpretation. He writes that a group fails with decision-making about the environment for four possible reasons: (1) the group may have a failure to anticipate a problem before it arrives; (2) when the problem arrives, the group may fail to perceive it; (3) if perceived, the group may still fail in trying to solve it; (4) and the group may try to solve

In any of these possible scenarios, we will see the interaction of politics and values, and also of a group's social standing and values. Such interaction is indeed already underway in religious agrarian communities. This means religious agrarian groups have the potential to shape the values of individuals, and also, through those individuals and their involvement with larger society (through economic transactions, volunteering, and political lobbying), the values of society.

Attitudes within religious agrarian groups coalesce around a "value orientation" (Van Deth and Scarbrough 1995: 22) so that religious agrarian "values are distinctive not only because they are desirabilities, but, more importantly...they are *desirabilities in matters of action*" (1995: 29-30; author's italics). As will be seen, my research subjects translate their desires, or more accurately, their value orientation, into practice through engaging in the actions and habits of sustainable agriculture, creating what I am calling a religious agrarianism. Their value orientation is explicitly grounded in religious environmentalist concerns and these concerns impact their values and thus their actions. They also write that, "values are not individual properties but the social properties of persons who share a universe of meaning" (1995: 35).<sup>23</sup> For my research

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problem, but not succeed (2006: 421). This leads him to pronounce a big challenge facing humans today: "the challenge of deciding which of a society's deeply held core values are compatible with the society's survival, and which ones instead have to be given up" (2006: 409-410). Here we see again the role of values in the quest for sustainability.

<sup>23</sup> They also write, "people do not conduct their lives according to a singular moral discourse but according to several, and not necessarily compatible, discourses...Moreover, we can anticipate the interpenetration of discourses, and tensions between discourses, as the different worlds of, say, work and family, intersect" (1995: 36-7). This is one of the reasons putting values into practice is so hard—we often labor under different, and competing, value discourses. For example, an avowed vegetarian might be operating under a value discourse of animal rights, and this might inspire them to buy a soy product. Yet, in this purchase, they are also operating under the value discourse of individual choice in a market economy, and this purchase carries with it an ecological footprint and supports a consumer system that this same person may claim is harmful to animals and the environment.

subjects, this universe of meaning and habitus (Anderson 1991) includes both religious and sustainable agriculture/environmentalist universes.

I conclude this section by briefly turning to key findings from two social scientific studies of food values. One study offers a discourse analysis of Global North green food NGOs and investigates their values and strategies as they actively campaign for more just and environmentally sustainable food systems. The other study uses methodologies from food choice studies to investigate the reasons people decide to buy what they buy, where, when, and why, including the values and social conditioning that attends to these decisions.

In the first study, Tina Huey undertook a discourse analysis of green food NGOs and green food movements in a Global North context, including the use of media by these networks. She claims that, “With globalization has come a growing consciousness of the global consequences of local action, or the local consequences of global action. The symbolic repertoire of activist groups often includes narrative lore, normative discourse or some reference to overarching principles. For many social movements, an appeal to ‘the global’ now forms part of this symbolic repertoire, oscillating between universality and particularism” (2005: 124). This finding is actually consistent with the claim put forth by religion scholars Fasching and Dechant, who argue that, “the primary way in which ethical insights occur and are communicated within religious traditions is through story and ritual rather than through theory” (2001: 5). My interpretation of this is that sustainable food values are now being promulgated through stories that share and communicate global sustainability discourses and visions. Part of this development of values occurs when people engage in joining

CSAs, or from going to health food stores or farmer's markets and "ritually" buying and consuming sustainably grown and produced goods: Such practices allow environmentalists to embody their values. Furthermore, these practices are influenced by story and narrative: chemical farming is bad for the environment and damages sacred soils, whereas sustainably grown products are good for the soil, the environment, the body, and for family members. Such a narrative story is consistently found in the merchandising of corporate organic products, as well as on sign boards at farmer's markets, where farmers advertise organic produce grown on local farms.

Such narrative and imagery is increasingly prevalent in many current forms of sustainable agriculture media: poetry, literature, monographs, podcasts, webpages, and films. For example, the feature film-length documentary *Dirt!* speaks about soil as "the living, breathing skin" of the planet and how it is "the matrix of life on earth." The film laments how humans continually "demand...natural resources" which gain more value than the soil in which these items are grown and/or mined.<sup>24</sup> The film presents the now common ubiquitous critiques of chemical based monoculture farming; namely, how this farming kills the soil and the microorganisms present therein, poisons our waterways, and produces toxic food with no nutrients. The film then argues for a soil-loving sustainable alternative, weaving together interviews with many leading global experts and proponents of sustainable agriculture to present this alternative narrative and possibility.

I viewed this film as part of the first annual Gainesville (Florida) Environmental Film and Arts Festival, 2010, and observed the question and answer session that

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<sup>24</sup> [www.dirtthemovie.org](http://www.dirtthemovie.org)

immediately followed. A local farming couple that practices biodynamic farming and who runs a CSA stated that “We definitely feel like the soil is sacred.” Another panel participant works for the Florida Organic Growers Association and shared how their background in horticulture and their experience with the training that they received regarding the use of pesticides and fertilizers to grow monocultures “doesn’t really work.” Such sentiments and experiences—about industrial monocultures being bad and the soil being sacred—are not atypical sentiments expressed by supporters of sustainable agriculture. Rather, such value-laden narrative statements are often found in multiple forms of media and within varied contexts within sustainable agriculture milieus.

Huey continues, arguing that, “Perhaps the most visible topic of contention in the globalization of capital, aside from the labor practices of branded clothing manufacturers, is food” (2005: 125). Food (and thus farming) is again seen as a globally contested trope; one imbued with values, and with a concomitant growing religious discourse about specific sustainable food values.<sup>25</sup> Her study concludes by arguing that, “local solutions are not privileged in the debate about food in the North” (2005: 135). I actually challenge such a conclusion. Rather, I argue that this perceived lack of privileging local solutions is changing. In fact, local solutions are becoming privileged, and religion is playing a role in this process as religious agrarians are embodying and bringing to the fore local, place-based solutions that are becoming more central to the debate, and especially to the solutions proffered, of food issues. This is also seen in a European context, with the rise of Slow Food, and in the UK, where many

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<sup>25</sup> As Dave Horton argues, “Food is hugely important to the performance of green identity among environmental activists...food is a significant ingredient of green distinction” (2003: 70).

churches and church networks support Fair Trade ideals and companies. I expect such trends to continue, and furthermore expect a strong religious presence to develop within the Global North sustainable agriculture media networks Huey investigated.

I now turn to the second study, where E.P. Koster uses food choice methodology to analyze “the central question in food choice research: ‘*Why does who eat what, when, and where?*’” (2009: 70; author’s italics). Koster’s research highlights the many variables and factors that contribute to what we eat, where, when, how, and why, from biology, physiology, and decision psychology, to marketing, economics, and learning psychology (2009: 70-71). Religion and religious values are two of these variables, and important ones at that. Koster also posits that, “with respect to food habit formation and change much depends also on so-called sensitive periods in life. Thus, most of our basic food habits are formed in infancy and early childhood and these are hardest to change, but periods like late adolescence when people start living in pairs and form their own ‘traditions’ and other major re-orientations in life such as divorce or retirement are good moments for changes in food habits as well” (2009: 75). What is telling in this quote is that there is no mention of religion (although there is mention of “traditions”)—whether religious ethics, taboos, customs, and/or rites of passage. Yet, religious communities to which people belong tend to influence their members all throughout their life. This includes when people enter into a new community, or when a community attempts to embody new values, all of which have the potential to impact food habits.

While for this author “food choice is a learned behavior” (2009: 75), it is one that is heavily influenced by values and social peer groups. I found that a number of my research subjects support sustainable agriculture practices precisely because they *do*

want to influence the diets, health, lifestyles, and values of their children, as well as those in their respective religious communities. In this respect, my findings support the above claim.

Lastly, regarding environmental values more broadly, including concern about sustainability, polls suggest that a vast majority of Americans are concerned with environmental issues, ranging from climate destabilization to species extinction to pollution. The researchers Kempton, et al point out that this concern “is not strongly related to social elites,” (1995: 7) but rather permeates many sectors of American society.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, both Wall (1995) and Taylor (1995) provide arguments which claim that people tend to be motivated to care about the environment when they perceive risks to their own health or the health of those they love.<sup>27</sup> Such an anthropocentric value system need not be at odds with environmental protection, but rather suggests that many people are motivated to care for the environment for values and genuine concerns related to personal health, safety, and aesthetics. My research both challenges and supports this argument, as will be explained later.

What is important to note is that both of the above studies avoid discussing religion directly. My dissertation helps remedy this consistent gap in sustainable food

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<sup>26</sup> This should not be interpreted though that all American citizens care about the environment, or care about it equally. And for sure there are class, race, and gender differences in this concern and care. For example, Mark Stoll argues that in African American cultural groups, religion is both a central motivator and a major cause of activist concerns (2006). Traditionally, these concerns have tended to be social in nature and it was not until the onset of environmental racism in the 1980s that the African American community took a more active interest in environmental concerns. But even here their approach and values are informed by their religion and tend to be divergent from the approaches and concerns of Caucasian Americans. My experience at Koinonia lends support to his analysis.

<sup>27</sup> Jeremy Benstein argues that it is impossible to escape a “centric” worldview. As he points out, fish have pisco-centric views of the world; horses, equo-centric; and cats, felino-centric (2006: 54). Yet, he points out that, “the very existence of a human-caused environmental crisis argues for exceptional human capabilities, which bestow upon us an exclusive status with concomitant responsibilities” (2006: 54). For a similarly nuanced discussion about anthropocentrism, see Katz (2000).

studies that use social science methodologies. In comparison to these studies, I argue that we cannot understand agricultural systems and practices without attending directly to religion. However, they nonetheless tell us important things about general food values, including especially that food choice decisions are multi-faceted, and that peer groups and social values play a key role in such decisions. Furthermore, any understanding of food and farming in North America, and of environmental problems and movements generally, must address religious values. Religious agrarianism provides an excellent case study for exploring the intimate biocultural connections between and mutual shaping of religion (values, practices, institutions, politics, and teachings) and the environment.

### **Theory and Method: Lived Religion**

Before moving on to an exploration of agrarianism in a North American context, and thus what I mean by religious agrarianism, I briefly explore my major methodological lenses. This exploration pulls together the values just discussed, and especially values related to food and farming, and highlights why religionists must pay attention to the barriers and successes of how religious groups and individuals are able to put these values into practice.

Because religious and environmental values are so central to an understanding of religion and nature issues--and of sustainable farming in particular--I utilize a theoretical lens that allows me to recognize what these values are and how they arise in my research subjects. I also use a theoretical lens that helps explain how my research subjects use their values and motivations to shape larger religious networks and institutions of which they are part. Therefore, I utilize a lived religion approach in this dissertation. A lived religion approach to studying the phenomenon of religion allows for

scholars to make sense of how and in what ways religious subjects shape religious beliefs and values; and more importantly, such an approach allows scholars to see how non-specialists shape their own religious worlds, at times in concert with and at times at odds with the larger “top-down” traditions in which they are participants.

The trope “lived religion” gained standing in the field with the work of Robert Orsi, and the first systematic account came with the 1997 publication of David Hall’s edited volume *Lived Religion in America*.<sup>28</sup> In essence, lived religion takes the symbolic, material, ideational, and emotional worlds that lay-religious practitioners create and privileges these worlds as being worthy of study. Rather than privileging the religious teachings, theologies, and institutions of elite religious experts, lived religion scholars head to the street, both literally and figuratively, to see how the “average” person within a faith tradition is creating a meaningful religious world that works and makes sense for them and their needs. As Julie Byrne writes, “In the last decades, scholars have increasingly turned to popular sources and lay subjects to tell the story of religion outside church walls...Exploring everyday piety calls for attention to whole lives of faith and broad religious cultures, putting us more in touch with what has been called ‘lived religion’: the fluid piety that always overflows official vessels” (2003: 10-11). For my research subjects, such “piety” overflows into agricultural fields and supermarket shelves.

Robert Orsi’s *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street* (2002) remains the standard bearer of lived religion scholarship, as it helped lay both the foundation for and legitimacy of this

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<sup>28</sup> American religious history expert Charles Lippy utilizes the term “popular religion” (1994), although the phrase is synonymous with lived religion and the latter term is the most popular one used today.

approach to studying religion.<sup>29</sup> Orsi's introduction to his updated version contains some of the key theoretical insights and methodologies of a lived religion approach, and I will share some of them now. To begin, he classifies lived religion as, "religious practice and imagination in ongoing, dynamic relation with the realities and structures of everyday life in particular times and places" (2002: xiii). Religion, for Orsi, "is approached in its place within a more broadly conceived and described lifeworld, the domain of everyday existence, practical activity, and shared understandings, with all its crises, surprises, satisfactions, frustrations, joys, desires, hopes, fears, and limitations" (2002: xiii-xiv). This preamble leads to Orsi's key theoretical point, which is that

The study of lived religion situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches all religion as lived experience, theology no less than lighting a candle for a troubled loved one; spirituality as well as other, less culturally sanctioned forms of religious expression...Rethinking religion as a form of cultural work, the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas—all as media of making and unmaking worlds. This way of approaching religious practice as fundamentally and always *in* history and culture is concerned with what people *do* with religious idioms, how they use them, and what they make of themselves and their worlds with them, and how in turn people are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making as they make these worlds...Religion approached this way is set amid the ordinary concerns of life as these are structured at various moments in history and in different cultures, at the junctures of self and culture, family and social world, and on those occasions when the religious imagination...takes hold of the world [and] as it is taken hold of by the world (2002: xix-xx).

I share such a lengthy quote because many of Orsi's claims and insights are reflected in my own approach to religion, and thus to my interpretation of religion and agriculture. For example, my qualitative research with members of Hazon/Shearith Israel and Koinonia only makes sense situationally, including within larger debates and ideologies about agriculture, politics, and sustainability. These concerns are reflected in

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<sup>29</sup> Also see Orsi, 2003.

the practices and values, both religious and secular, of my research subjects as they attempt to live out their religious agricultural sensibilities. This attempt to live out and practice religiously-motivated values highlights what Orsi calls “religion-in-action,” which is “religion-in-relationships between people, between the way the world is and the way people imagine it to be” (2002: xx). This also includes religion-in-action with the larger biological world, of which agriculture is one important aspect.

Orsi himself acknowledges this biological material aspect, writing that, “The emphasis in the study of lived religion is on *embodied* practice and imagination, as men, women, and children exist in and move through their built and found environments. The material world is not inert background to cultural practice; it is its essential medium” (2002: xxi). Thus, joining a CSA, planting a row of nitrogen-fixing legumes, humanely raising a pig—all of these have the potential to become embodied religious acts within a lived religious agrarian worldview.

Moreover, religion-in-action is always transforming, is influenced by and representative of relations of power and gender, impacts culture-at-large, and is also impacted by culture-at-large. This is why for Orsi “the study of lived religion vividly opens out the tremendous creativity of religious practice and imaginings as it uncovers the limits of them” (2002: xxiv), leading to what he calls a “hermeneutics of hybridity” (1997: 11). I argue that the lived religious landscape of contemporary America is generating tremendous hybridity, creativity, and imaginings in regards to a plethora of environmental issues—and at the same time, this creativity has its limits when the harder work of translating values into practice becomes evident. Agricultural landscapes thus become a central focal point where religious environmental imaginings

and practices are lived out and transformed, bringing with it ripple effects throughout the larger American cultural, religious, environmental, and political landscapes.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, David Hall argues that scholars of lived religion must recognize “the laity of actors in their own right” (1997: viii) and that these actors “live with and work through multiple realms of meaning” (1997: xi). My research is consistent with this understanding of lived religion, as my work suggests that religious Americans sift through contending layers and realms of meaning—ethnic, political, ecological, spiritual—as they create, embody, and act out an environmentally and agriculturally informed religion-in-action.

Rebecca Gould builds on why it is important to privilege lay religious actors as they work through these multiple realms of meaning. She found in her study of homesteaders in the Northeast that, “Practice, among other things, involves the art of making choices and the choices we make constitute a significant part of the individual and cultural traditions we create” (2005: 222). In other words, her homesteading research subjects developed practices based on having to make tough choices in a society they viewed as being unsustainable. The process of making these lifestyle choices, and the values that went into these choices and the practices they led to, created a dynamic lived religion that had homesteading at its core. She found that this homesteading practice was built on top of and grafted into a larger homesteading

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<sup>30</sup> As David Harvey points out, “Values and goals (what we might call the ‘teleological’ as well as the ‘Utopian’ moment of reflexive thought), are not imposed as universal abstractions from outside but arrived at through a *living process* (including intellectual enquiry) embedded in forms of praxis and plays of power attaching to the exploration of this or that potentiality (in ourselves as well as in the world we inhabit)” (1996: 56; my italics). This means that my research subjects arrive at their religious agrarian values by a living process embedded in both religious and sustainable agriculture praxis (and their fusion), while at the same time they attempt to articulate a liberative potentiality, freeing modern food systems from the tyranny of industrial capitalist agriculture.

tradition, while at the same time adding to the tradition and bringing it toward new directions. My research represents a similar finding: value-laden sustainable agriculture practices both shape and are shaped by the traditions in which they occur, whether Christian or Jewish. Furthermore, these values and practices are informed by a larger environmental agrarian tradition, while at the same time bringing this tradition into a religious direction via lived practice. Lastly, the practices of my research subjects are leading American Christianity and Judaism (broadly speaking) into new directions.

Our understanding of lived religion, and our accuracy in recognizing and theorizing about it, is further helped by the work of Thomas Tweed. He writes that theories of religion are “*sightings* from sites. They are positioned representations of a changing terrain by an itinerant cartographer” (2006: 13). By this he means that the map (theory) is not the territory, but rather reflects the development of a particular field and the standpoint of the person using the theory in a particular place and time. Thus, and akin to Orsi, all theories and theorists undertake theory-in-action. My own interpretation of my research subjects and my research data is thus influenced by my training in religion and nature and American religious history; by my personal experience living and working on organic farms and in health food stores in South Carolina, California, Washington, New Hampshire, and Scotland; and by being exposed to sustainability subcultures via this employment history and by studying ecovillages, soil and society, and ecophilosophy in Scotland, England, and Australia (and by being a Willing Workers on Organic Farms volunteer in Greece). My interpretation, and indeed my whole research project, is not to be reified, but rather should be read as a sighting from a site—including significantly the physical sites (congregational buildings, monastic

campus, conference centers, telephones and computer, urban cityscapes and rural landscapes, shopping centers and grocery stores, and farmlands) where my research was undertaken.<sup>31</sup>

Tweed operates within a lived religion lineage, and brings to this tradition his own insights about transmigratory and transtemporal flows (1997), writing that, “Whatever else religions do, they move across time and space. They are not static. And they have effects. They leave traces. They leave trails. [They transform] peoples and places, the social arena and the natural terrain” (2006: 62). All of these attributes of religion are in play with my research subjects and research topic, including especially the realm of values as they pertain to food/farming/the environment. As I demonstrate, the agricultural values and practices of some U.S. religious citizens are not static, they do have effects, and they transform the social (and political) arena and natural terrain. The larger traditions within which my research subjects reside are also being transformed, as the traces of my subject’s environmental and agricultural concerns are filtering up and out, leading to new ways of viewing human-nature interactions within American Judaism and Christianity.

### **Theory and Method: Network Theory**

Because food items, sustainability discourses, and religious institutions are now global in their flows, I also utilize a network approach to studying religion and nature issues. This approach works in tandem with a lived religion approach, as the network approach is “attentive to ways in which local, grassroots, official, national, and

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<sup>31</sup> Or, as Tweed himself claims, “Scholars function within a network of social exchange and in a particular geographical location, and in their work they use collectively constructed professional standards. They stand in a built environment, a social network, and a professional community. In this view, theories of religion are sightings from particular geographical and social sites whereby scholars construct meaning, using categories and criteria they inherit, revise, and create” (2006: 18).

transnational actors continuously and creatively construct, transgress, and appropriate the boundaries between specific religious and non-religious practices and discourses. These multiple situated perspectives (which often lead to contested canons, traditions, and orthodoxies), in interplay with the researcher's own personality, determine religious studies' proper subject matter." (Vasquez 2005: 237).<sup>32</sup> I echo this statement, and urge religious studies to take as its subject matter biological flows of food (and other material objects) and the religious environmentalist values, discourses, and practices that these flows help create. My research project is one example of taking these flows seriously, including the larger networks within which these flows participate.<sup>33</sup>

Vasquez builds upon the above claim, writing elsewhere that

places are always interconnected and marked with crisscrossing relations of power. This is precisely where the metaphor of networks can be fruitful, allowing us to embed space and the practices of place-making in dynamic fields of domination and resistance [where] the worldviews, beliefs, and behaviors of particular individuals cannot be mechanically read from their location in a given network [and where] meaning, orientation, and intentionality are not just commodities that circulate but are constitutive of the networks themselves. Within and through networks, actors carve out spaces to dwell, itineraries, and everyday routines, drawing from religious symbols and tropes to reflect on and orient their own praxis and to 'sacralize' nature and build environments. Networks also embody and produce moral geographies (2008: 168-9).

I argue that a "lived-network" approach allows us to make sense of the ways in which religiously concerned environmental Americans are sacralizing nature, building agricultural environments, and constructing and participating in sustainable agriculture networks that are local, national, and international, all of which produce moral

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<sup>32</sup> For a critical, self-reflexive exploration of actor network theory and thus a network approach, see Hassard and Law, eds (1999).

<sup>33</sup> Arjun Appadurai similarly writes about the various global flows of ideas, ethnicities, media imagery, technologies, and finances that constitute modernity (what he terms ethno-, media-, techno-, finance-, and ideoscapes) (1996). To his list I add ecological flows, or what I term "ecoscares."

geographies. As David Chidester and Edward Linenthal write, “the ‘pivoting of the sacred’ that occurs through the work of ritualization and interpretation allows virtually any place to become sacred...sacred meaning and significance, holy awe and desire, can coalesce in any place that becomes, even if only temporarily, a site for intensive interpretation” (1995: 14). If they are correct, and if we take Vasquez, Orsi, Tweed, and others seriously, then the sustainable agricultural landscapes, farmer’s markets, and religious networks that support and advocate for these “sacred” sites becomes a product of American religion that needs to be studied. They also become sites where the power-laden, lived praxis of making-place-sacred occurs.

Furthermore, a lived religion approach allows for us to makes sense of and understand the constantly changing and constructed values, motivations, ideals, practices, teachings, and networks of religious agrarians and how these impact the “pivoting of the sacred” of which Chidester and Linenthal write. This view is rhizomic in that it allows for local actors in a “horizontal society” (Taylor 2004: 158) to shape their own worldviews and practices; yet it is still vertical in that it recognizes larger structures of power, especially in regards to food production and distribution (and the corporate and governmental politics that shape such production and distribution).

### **Theory and Method: Grounded Theory**

The above section outlines the key theoretical approach I utilize in this study. The current section briefly explains the key methodological tools I use. To begin, as this is a study of lived religion, I use methods that help capture the complexity and vibrancy of religion-in-action as my research subjects navigate and shape complex, interrelated networks that reflect and construct environmental, religious, and agricultural worldviews and material landscapes (religious and biological). My research is therefore guided by

the following sentiment expressed by Emerson, et al, who write, “The ethnographer’s central purpose is to describe a social world and its people” (1995: 68). This means that during my fieldwork, and especially my repeated visits to my research sites, one of my objectives is to take thorough notes about what I am witnessing and experiencing, and to what I am being exposed. Who are the key actors in the social situations that I am witnessing and in which I am involved? What concerns are expressed, or glossed over, in the various interactions of my research subjects in the (religious) social world they shape and are shaped by? What interactions with nature are occurring, and why? Such questions guide my scholarship and shape my approach to fieldwork.

I am also motivated in my ethnography and fieldwork by the following claim from Borneman and Hammoudi, who write that the “fieldwork experience...provides an opening to dilemmas in the contemporary world” (2009: 18). I have already explained how sustainable agriculture issues are a dilemma of the contemporary world, and the social world of my research subjects sheds insight into how some religions in America are responding to this dilemma.

Furthermore, for Borneman and Hammoudi, “Fieldwork encounters...are modes of ethical engagement wherein the ethnographer is arrested in the act of perception. This arrest can lead both to a productive doubt about the ongoing perception of the phenomena in interaction and to the possibility of elaborating shared knowledge...fieldwork is the registering of sensory impressions in a (temporal) process of mutual subject-discovery and critique, an engagement with persons, groups, and scenes that takes into account the dynamics of our interactions as well as the differences between our locations and those of our interlocutors” (2009: 19). Because I

am familiar with sustainable agriculture issues and subcultures, I am fairly capable of entering into discussion about and observation of the material and social anthropological world that is built up around these issues in North American/Western European contexts. As a non-practicing Jew and a non-Christian, I felt more discomfort and was on a greater learning curve regarding the lived religion component of my research. Entering into religious dialogue and learning about the religious social worlds of people I had never met before was therefore the more challenging aspect of my fieldwork and which provided greater juxtaposition about “the differences between [my] locations and those of [my] interlocutors.”

Besides undertaking ethnographic fieldwork, I utilized grounded theory methodology to help learn about the social, religious, and ethical worlds of my research subjects. Grounded theory is a subset of qualitative research, which is an inductive approach to generating knowledge about social worlds used to generate theory by interpretation of collected data. Qualitative research investigates “words rather than numbers [and has] an epistemological position described as interpretivist, meaning that, in contrast to the adoption of a natural scientific model in quantitative research, the stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman 2001: 264). This means that not only does a qualitative approach privilege ethnographic fieldwork as a valid method to capture and help interpret a social world, it also privileges grounded theory.

Grounded theory is the “discovery of theory from data” (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 1-3), versus discovering theory from *a priori* assumptions. Glaser and Strauss call grounded theory “theory as process” (1967: 32), meaning the social world described by

grounded theory is never claimed to be complete and does not offer one-size-fits-all claims. Rather, grounded theory is open ended and as more research is carried out with research subjects, the theory is changed, altered, and built upon. Such an approach is consistent with the lived-network theoretical lens that I adopt for this project—because the values, practices, beliefs, and networks of my subjects fluid, grounded theory provides me with methodological tools to capture this fluidity. It also allows me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the various discourses, rationales, and relationships that go into shaping the fluid religious, biological, and social worlds of my research subjects.

Furthermore, grounded theory attempts to generate a theory “which relates to the particular situation forming the focus of the study. The theory is ‘grounded’ in data obtained during the study, particularly in the actions, interactions and processes of the people involved” (Robson 2002: 190-1). The people involved in grounded theory research are located by using theoretical sampling. They are also found by the researcher choosing key informants, where the persons chosen to be interviewed and studied help the researcher formulate theory by being “ideal types” who are representative exemplars of the social phenomenon under investigation (2002: 193). In grounded theory, “one does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (2002: 23). The particular situations of my study are the interaction/s between religion and sustainable agriculture in a North American context. My choice of research methodologies allows for what is relevant to this area of study to emerge during my interactions and interviews with my research subjects, especially the key informants I

located through initial and repeated visits to my research sites. Through my visits I was able to find those most involved with promoting and practicing sustainable agriculture within my research groups and I conducted face-to-face, over-the-phone, and e-mail interviews with them.

The interviews I undertook with my research subjects were also informed by grounded theory methodology. This methodology maintains that, “the questioning [of research subjects] allows interviewers to glean the ways in which research participants view their...world” (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 57). Therefore, I located my theoretical sample by interacting with, observing, and interviewing the key actors involved in sustainable agriculture issues in my research communities.

Prior to my fieldwork, I generated a list of interview questions that became the basis of semi-structured and open-ended interviews with sustainable agriculture religious actors who became my research subjects. As Charmaz explains (2006), in grounded theory the data that accumulates from initial interviews is transcribed and key indicative phrases within this data become units of analysis that are coded into categories. Such coding and subsequent generation of thematic units of analysis become the building blocks for future questions, so that in grounded theory an iterative, open-ended, constantly building understanding of a social world gradually develops. This understanding is also shaped by ongoing literature review and repeatedly revisiting transcribed interviews. Therefore, in grounded theory there is never a “set in stone” questionnaire that is followed over the whole course of a research project. Rather, consistent with grounded theory, my research questions and focus of my research changed over the course of my project, reflecting new insights and leads that were

discovered in the codes and categories of early data and by new knowledge uncovered in literature reviews. This means the questions I was asking my research subjects at the end of my project were built upon, but did not necessarily resemble, the initial questions I asked at the beginning of my project.

For example, as I learned about the history of farming and sustainability at Koinonia through various interviews, I changed my questions so that I was able to continue to develop a deeper understanding of this history, leading to new constructed themes and categories of analysis. Equally, the more I learned about Jewish environmental concerns and teachings through literature review and web-based research, the more I brought such learning into my interviews with Jews, while also bringing in insights and knowledge gained from earlier interviews. Lastly, the more I learned about agrarianism and its history within the North American context, the more focused and nuanced my questions about agrarianism and environmental agrarian concerns became during later interviews. By using grounded theory, I developed my own trope and category of “religious agrarianism,” which I will explain below. First, however, I will give a brief history of agrarianism, focusing especially on its development within the United States.

### **Agrarianism**

Agrarianism holds a special place within the mythical and historical narrative of the United States, building especially on the political philosophy and agrarian ideal espoused by Thomas Jefferson. The place agrarianism holds in our domestic pantheon of social and political identity therefore equips the term with a certain amount of social capital that is now being used to build environmental, political, and religious networks. In fact, a key notion underlying the various agrarianisms of Western Culture is “the idea

that agriculture and those whose occupation involves agriculture are especially important and valuable elements of society” (Montmarquet 1989: viii-ix) such that “agrarianism may enjoy a significant future” (1989: 221).

Although the conclusion offered by Montmarquet’s just-quoted magisterial study of agrarianism fails to predict the growing role religious environmentalist--and environmental concerns in general—might come to play in a North American agrarianism, it nonetheless points towards agrarianism’s continuing influence on our body politic.<sup>34</sup> In this study, Montmarquet singles out Wendell Berry as the modern agrarian writer *par excellence*, justifying this claim based upon Berry’s prolific career writing about agrarian issues from a post-Bretton Woods, post-Rachel Carson, post-Earth Day perspective. Berry himself writes that

We agrarians are involved in a hard, long, momentous contest, in which we are so far, and by a considerable margin, the losers. What we have undertaken to defend is the complex accomplishment of knowledge, cultural memory, skill, self-mastery, good sense, and fundamental decency—the high and indispensable art—for which we probably can find no better name than ‘good farming.’ I mean farming as defined by agrarianism as opposed to farming as defined [pace Thompson, Jackson, and Fick] by industrialism: farming as the proper use and care of an immeasurable gift (2003: 24).

Meanwhile, Thomas Hilde defines agrarianism as “a nonsystematic philosophy that claims variously that a sense of nurturing stewardship, deep understandings of place and labor, virtuous character developed through rooted communities, and even a spiritual relationship to nature and cosmos are normatively significant features of the practice of nonindustrialized agriculture...One thing all versions of agrarianism

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<sup>34</sup> Kim Smith offers a similar conclusion, writing that, “Agrarian ideology has, if anything, become more ubiquitous as farmers seek allies and policy makers try to make sense of the economic and social problems facing rural America. Its persistence suggests that there is more to this tradition than scholars have recognized: that it expresses values many Americans embrace, that it offers a useful way to understand the problems of farmers and the rural community generally, and that it may even point us toward solutions” (2003: 4).

share...is a conception of the land as much more than a material resource” (2009: 20). Lastly, Troy Cauley, writing in the early 1900s, states that, “Agrarianism may be roughly and tentatively defined as an economic and social system under which the chief method of making a living is that of tilling the soil, with a consequent rather wide dispersion of population and a relative meagerness of commercial intercourse. It is, probably, *the antithesis of Industrial Capitalism*” (1935: 3; my italics).

Given these above definitions, it is easy to see how agrarianism both fits within the lineage of and appeals to those American citizens who are supportive of environmental issues, especially those issues related to sustainable agriculture. However, this appeal to environmentally concerned citizens and devotees of sustainable agriculture was not originally evident in the U.S. agrarian tradition. For example, W.B. Bizzell comments that, “*agrarianism signifies an organized effort on the part of the farm population, or a socially conscious group of farmers, to secure a redistribution of land or the establishment of law of conditions more favorable to the use and occupation of land. An agrarian revolution is concerted action on the part of farmers to bring about economic or social changes that promise to improve farm life conditions*” (1926: 2; author’s italics). So while we see here a history of social and economic critique (minus a sustained environmental critique) and concern for the livelihood of farmers, this history has been in reference to particular events, epochs, and regions within American history, including epochs when the majority of Americans (and thus American voters) were active farmers.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> I recognize that this history was in large part about male, Caucasian land-holding farmers.

Even though Bizzell comments upon policies of the early Republic that shaped later agrarianism, notably the transfer of vast tillable land from public to private domain; the rapid increase in population; the use of increased machinery and farm technology; the importation of new livestock breeds; the development of transportation and facilities; the extension of farm markets into growing cities; and the rise in scientific knowledge about agriculture (1926: 10), these trends reflect an American politic of the late 1800s and early 1900s. While contemporary agrarians criticize these same processes, today's agrarians must also contend with post-Green Revolution technologies; greater industrialization and mechanization of farming; a more apathetic American public that has significantly reduced its number of working farmers; and international agricultural markets that are controlled by agri-business corporations.<sup>36</sup>

In order to dig deeper into why agrarianism has a continued and even growing foothold in certain sectors of today's America, we need to follow Bizzell's and Cauley's exposition about the roles industrialism and capitalism played in shaping modern farming. Indeed, this exploration joins streams with the varied criticisms that modern champions of sustainable agriculture have of capital-intensive, industrial farming. For example, a thoroughgoing critique of the machinations of Industrialism is found in the rise of English Radical Agrarianism of the late 1700s/early 1800s (Chase 1988), and this critique helped shape some of the agrarian ideals and narratives in late 1800/early 1900s America.

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<sup>36</sup> Bizzell writes that in the late 1800s, "The balance of power was clearly on the side of the wealthy combines. The great corporations which rapidly developed into trusts used the machinery of government to accomplish their ends" (1926: 157). The same charge against government-backed corporate control of farming is a prevalent theme within today's agrarianisms. This gives evidence that there are indeed parts of a consistent lineage between the older concerns of agrarianism and the more contemporary concerns of environmental and religious agrarianisms.

As the historian Malcolm Chase shares, “agrarianism is central to an understanding of the social history of the first industrial nation [i.e. England]” (1988: 3), where “the term ‘agrarian’ is not employed here as the inappropriate synonym for ‘agricultural’; nor does ‘agrarianism’ signify the views of rural labour [sic]. It is rather with the industrial working class that we are concerned, and with those of their responses to economic, social, and political dislocation which sought solutions in and on the land” (1988: 3). Chase is writing here of the era of mercantile and industrial expansion based out of Britain’s various industrial centers of power—Manchester, Newcastle, Liverpool, and London. This era was in part precipitated by and in large part contributed to the continued enclosures of the English (and Scottish and Irish) countryside, so that, “Agrarianism was centrally concerned with skill, security, independence, and status...So, far from being some retarded throwback of preindustrial, ‘traditional’ society, agrarianism can—and indeed must—be located precisely in the experience of labour [sic] during industrialization” (1988: 8).

Similar themes can be deduced from today’s agrarianism, especially given that modern environmental agrarians are Berry’s lamented “losers” in the ongoing process of industrialization and global enclosures of agricultural lands and markets. This means that although American agrarianism developed within the politics of the States, it did and still does argue against this now pan-global history of agricultural industrialization and loss of farm labor and culture.

Further international links are embedded in today’s agrarianisms. For example, the American permanent agriculture movement of the 1930s and 1940s was influenced by the writings of Sir Albert Howard, whose famous treatise of course helped spawn the

“organic” agricultural movement (and played a major role in the development of Wendell Berry’s agrarian ideals). However, Howard himself was heavily influenced by observing the various regional farming practices of India, which included witnessing and measuring the effects of the copious amounts of compost Indian farmers added to their soils.

It must also be noted that agrarianism in the U.S. has often been a regional movement. This is most clearly seen in the book *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. This regional agrarian movement was in part a response to the growing mechanization of agriculture, a changing political landscape (both regional and national), and was influenced by a post-Civil War culture of Caucasian Southern Gentleman Farmers who tended to have aristocratic and paternal control over regional politics.<sup>37</sup>

The historian and political philosopher Paul Murphy studied the Southern Agrarians along with other more modern agrarian movements and found that in the history of the United States, “The passage of years [has] revealed an almost protean quality to Agrarianism. It [has come] to mean very different things to a variety of different thinkers” (2001: 3). However, Murphy found that the Southern Agrarians “attempt[ed] to respond to questions being asked by others besides southerners: Is it possible to satisfy the felt needs for community, leisure, and stability in the dizzying whirl of modern life? How do we validate values in a disenchanting and secular age?” (2001: 4). Such questions are still at the forefront of today’s environmental and religious agrarianisms.

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<sup>37</sup> This culture was heavily influenced by the rampant patriarchy found throughout the South, as discussed in Wilson (1980) and Heyrman (1997).

The scholar Kim Smith provides us with an important link between these past agrarians and the dominant agrarianism of today, what she calls “environmental agrarianism” (2003). This most recent strand of the agrarian tradition provides the major taproot upon which religious agrarianism is grafted, so it is important to understand the development and worldview of environmental agrarianism.

Smith devotes much of her monograph to highlighting the importance of Wendell Berry, who in Smith’s interpretation is the iconic “founder” and exemplar of modern environmental agrarianism. As she states, “Berry is a central figure in the greening of American agrarianism. Since the 1960s, he has been a leading expositor of a set of ideas designed to forge a politically effective union of small farmers and environmentalists” (2003: 1). Berry’s agrarian thought is consistent with and builds upon earlier agrarian concerns about the effect industrial capitalism has on farm communities and farmlands, and thus on society as a whole.

According to Smith, Berry “claims [small farmers] are essential to [the] *ecological* health [of a society]: it is environmental rather than political values that farmers cultivate—virtues that are (he claims) otherwise lacking in industrial capitalist regimes” (2003: 2; author’s italics). She notes that Berry’s agrarian vision depends on a rejection of traditional agrarian stalwart concerns, such as “individual independence, the sanctity of property rights, and the meaning of economic freedom” (2003: 2-3), and instead Berry offers “a provocative blueprint for an alternative, ecologically sensitive agrarian society based on the value of stewardship” (2003: 2-3). Berry’s ecologically informed agrarianism prompts Smith to claim that, “Berry’s agrarianism is not Jefferson’s, nor the Populists’. That is precisely his significance: by importing environmental ideas into a

framework of agrarian thought, he has revitalized agrarianism and helped to ensure its continued relevance to American social and political thought and practice” (2003: 4).<sup>38</sup> Thus, according to Smith, Wendell Berry’s writings become the starting point for a nuanced, introspective, culturally powerful, and sustained environmental agrarian criticism of modern day industrial capitalism, as well as the political, economic, and agricultural systems that industrial capitalism has spawned.

Many, if not all, of the other books on agrarianism that I have read during this research project all point to the significance of Wendell Berry in creating this environmental agrarian tradition. Berry’s influence upon contemporary sustainable agriculture issues is such that it has in large part led The University of Kentucky Press to publish a multi-volume “Culture of the Land—A Series in the New Agrarianism” series, edited by Norman Wirzba.<sup>39</sup> Each of these volumes contains the following passage at the beginning of the book:

This series will be devoted to the exploration and articulation of a new agrarianism that considers the health of habitats and human communities together. It will demonstrate how agrarian insights and responsibilities can be worked out in diverse fields of learning and living: history, science, art, politics, economics, literature, philosophy, religion, urban planning,

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<sup>38</sup> Related to this, she writes, “If Berry’s ecological agrarianism doesn’t look particularly innovative to us, it is because he makes the marriage of agrarian and environmental thought seem so natural that we assume agrarianism *always* implied ecological sensitivity—or that ecological sensitivity always implied support for family farming. It did not; indeed, for much of American history agrarians had little interest in environmental issues, and environmentalists for their part have had little good to say about farming. Berry’s importance to the evolution of these traditions lies precisely in his ability to resolve their fundamental ideological differences” (2003: 7). Meanwhile, Paul Thompson offers a similar point of view, writing that, “From a North American perspective, the intellectual and political opportunities for an alternative [to industrial agriculture] seem to spring from the original Jeffersonian vision of the citizen-farmer, from the remnants of the small-farm populist movement that has resisted industrialization all along, and from the cultural critique launched almost single-handedly by Wendell Berry in the late 1970s. In other words, a true alternative to the industrial vision must be found in agrarian ideals” (2010: 53).

<sup>39</sup> The most recent edited volume of Berry’s essays on food and agriculture was released in 2009. Berry’s writings (poetry, fiction, and non-fiction) are all influenced by his liberal Protestant background and thus contain an underlying religious message about creation being a holy sacrament. This theme is explored in eds. Shuman and Owens (2009).

education, and public policy. Agrarianism is a comprehensive worldview that appreciates the intimate and practical connections that exist between humans and the earth. It stands as our most promising alternative to the unsustainable and destructive ways of current global, industrial, and consumer culture (Freyfogle 2007).

This passage contains many of the central elements of today's "new agrarianism," which includes Berry's environmental agrarianism and what I am calling religious agrarianism. Both of these agrarianisms recognize that "Good land use is likely to occur...only when it stands as a shared aspiration. Society must embrace the goal and work toward it" (Freyfogle 2007: 2). As religion is part of society, and as discussed earlier, values represent aspirations, then it becomes evident that religious values (including religious environmentalist values) are now mixing with sustainable agriculture and environmental agrarian values, and this mixing is changing American food culture. As Freyfogle states, "A culture writes its name on land for all to see...The land reflects not just what people have done but who they are, what they understand, what they value, and what they dream" (2007: 1). It is a mistaken assumption to disregard the power and influence that religion has on shaping American culture, and thus American landscapes and the values contained therein.

Given the above exploration of agrarianism, I argue that a modern day, environmental agrarianism for the twenty-first century contains the following values, ideals, claims, and attributes:

- it is both art and practice
- it is essential to a healthy society, culture, and environment
- it embraces technology, when appropriate, and places the use of technology within the limits and standards of the land and the communities (human and non-human) that are dependent upon the land for their survival—therefore, the use of science and technology is a derivative of and is shaped by the needs and constraints of local land bases and local ecosystems

- it views land, and especially the soil, as more than a mere inert resource for an extractive economy; rather, land, and thus soil, is seen as the basis of the total human economy
- it takes stewardship of the land seriously, to the point where stewardship is one of the key driving values and ideals of a modern, ecologically informed agrarianism
- the practice of an environmental agrarianism is a learned skill
- it is a comprehensive worldview
- it criticizes the short-sightedness of the extractive, industrial economy, including especially productionist agriculture
- it can and often does have a spiritual and/or religious component
- it values democracy, freedom, particularity, and independence
- it argues for propriety and familiarity with local lands, people, and customs
- it critiques dominant land use laws and patterns (whether local, national, or international), and the free-market ideologies that support these
- it is built upon a longstanding historic tradition and lineage (especially political) within Western culture
- it develops and promotes systems thinking, including the role humans, farm communities, agricultural markets, and human customs play within various interlinked ecological, cultural, and economic systems
- it is holistic
- it privileges the vocation of farmers-as-stewards (vs. seeing “good farming” as a backward, ignorant, culturally taboo [especially for educated Caucasians] profession)
- it is open to building networks with others (NGOs, lobbyists) at both national and international levels for advocating and promoting agrarian concerns and ideals

With this overview of agrarianism, and especially environmental agrarianism, in place, coupled with my earlier exploration of religious and environmental values, networks, and lived religion, I am now ready to explicitly develop what I mean by “religious agrarianism.”

## Religious Agrarianism

Wes Jackson writes that, “In the earliest writings we find that the prophet and scholar alike have lamented the loss of soils and have warned people of the consequences of their wasteful ways. It seems that we have forever talked about land stewardship and the need for a land ethic, and all the while soil destruction continues, in many places at an accelerated pace. Is it possible that we simply lack enough stretch in our ethical potential to evolve a set of values capable of promoting a sustainable agriculture?” (1985: 13). In many ways, this quote is central to the religious concerns this dissertation investigates. Religious agrarianism is a developing set of practices that brings explicit religious environmentalist concerns, values, and ethics into the perennial problems of soil destruction. This destruction has become amplified since the onset of the Green Revolution, and the environmental agrarianism of Berry, et al represents that tradition’s most up-to-date attempt to deal with the issue. As we have seen, it is in large part since the publication of Lynn White Jr.’s 1967 article that religions have started to take environmental and ecological issues seriously.

Such concern has been slow to develop, in no small part because White specifically targeted Western Christianity as the culprit of said crisis. The earliest responses from apologists (whether from inside a tradition [known as ecotheology] or from scholars of religion) to White’s charges looked into the sacred texts of their various respective traditions (or traditions they studied), searching diligently for green passages as evidence of environmental responsibility so as to counter White’s argument. Such a defensive ecological hermeneutic has come to be called the “mining” approach to religion and nature issues. An “ideal type” of such an approach is HarperOne’s New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, *The Green Bible* (2008). This Christian version

of the Bible is printed on Forest Stewardship Council certified paper, has St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Creatures" as the first prayer on the opening page (possibly as a nod to Lynn White, who stated that St. Francis was the Christian eco-saint par excellent), and in regards to the topic of this dissertation, tellingly includes poetry from Wendell Berry.<sup>40</sup>

The growth of religious environmentalism has also been inspired by seminal events like Earth Day, the publication of *The Limits to Growth*, the Rio Earth Summit, and the growing ecumenism surrounding religion and ecology and evangelical Creation Care have all contributed to an accelerated growth of religious environmentalist concerns.<sup>41</sup> These concerns, coupled with a more sophisticated understanding of food politics and sustainable agriculture issues, is leading some religious environmentalists to embrace environmental agrarian concerns and values. As Gary Fick shares, "agricultural sustainability is inherently holistic. It includes all of the essentials of agriculture. It includes the past, the present, and the future. It includes all of the social, cultural, and ethical linkages in the food system as well. Thus religion is a natural component of holistic, sustainable thinking, and academics like me have erred when we have left it out of the picture" (2008: 6). Not only have academics left religion out of the sustainable agriculture variable, most people of faith have left sustainable agriculture out of the religion variable. Religious agrarianism is a developing corrective that people of faith are embodying and attempting to put into practice, thus allowing a growing

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<sup>40</sup> For a summary of a general ecological hermeneutic approach to the Hebrew Bible and New Testament (and that can be applied to texts from other traditions), see Habel and Trudinger (2008).

<sup>41</sup> For a very recent volume exploring religious environmentalist concerns in North American Christian communities and places of worship, see McDuff (2010).

number of Americans to equally embody and put into practice environmental agrarian concerns.

Moreover, religious agrarianism places the practice of sustainable farming into a larger, theocentric worldview that sees Creation as being holy and worthy of reverent care and respect.<sup>42</sup> Religious obligations and duties follow from such a worldview, so that sustainable agricultural practices become a way that religious agrarians can live out their faith concerns. As Paul Thompson notes, “The traditional agrarian view of stewardship can be summarized as a religious duty to protect and foster the beauty and integrity of God’s creation. The primary flaw can be summarized, as well. Traditional agrarian stewardship is conceived as a duty ethically subservient to production; hence when stewardship would entail constraints on production, duties to nature seldom prevail over the productionist ethic. As such, if stewardship is to serve as a component in an environmental ethic for agriculture, it must be broadened and reshaped” (1995: 72). Religious agrarianism provides this exact paradigm of a broadened and reshaped stewardship ethic: because religious agrarians identify the land with a theistic Creator, and because their values, lives, and ideals are shaped in such large part by their religious beliefs, these agrarians represent a new addition to contemporary sustainable agriculture and environmental agrarian concerns.

Religious agrarians also add to and expand the political, social, and cultural components of contemporary agrarian concerns. Kim Smith points out that there is a democratic agrarianism that has informed American politics and which has focused on

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<sup>42</sup> I speak here of an explicitly North American religious agrarianism which pulls upon a dominant Christian tradition. My research shows that both Jews and Christians hold a variety of theocentric worldviews based on various understandings of “God” as conceived and developed within Abrahamic faiths.

the values found within family farms. Religious agrarians do not necessarily make this exact claim, but some do argue that ecologically informed religious communities that support sustainable agriculture/agrarian/environmental justice issues are such a repository of democratic and social ideals that are needed to combat industrial capitalism. My research subjects share the same critiques of industrial farming and capitalism that environmental agrarians develop; the difference is that these critiques are developed out of specific religious and ethical traditions. Therefore religious agrarians bring faith-based ethics and concerns for justice and equality to their sustainable agriculture values (see especially chapter seven).

What this means is that there are two dominant strains feeding into religious agrarianism. One strain pulls upon the history of agrarianism proper, and especially modern environmental agrarianism as exemplified in the writings of Wendell Berry and the values, goals, and ideals found in the list I created above. The other strain is an amalgamation of the unique religious traditions, sacred texts, teachings, and modern institutions within which religious agrarians reside. Both of these strains contain critiques of modern industrial capitalism, and both see the land and soil as having intrinsic value. In the case of religious agrarians, this value is theistic, and thus carries religious duties that are entirely consistent with the goals of environmental agrarianism. To date, religion has been an essential component of human culture. Some religious bodies and individuals are now actively fostering faith-based sustainable agricultural lifestyles that are joining with and beginning to shape today's American agrarian tradition. My research provides evidence of this transition.

I conclude this section, and thus this chapter, by sharing two quotes from Ronald Jager's book *The Fate of Family Farming*. I feel these quotes succinctly wrap up the various issues about religion, religion and nature, and religious agrarianism in a North American context that I address in this dissertation. To begin, he writes, "For some individuals [in America] this twofold quest, for viable alternatives and for valid response [to the perceived ills of industrial farming], is a deeply spiritual impulse, arising from a moral or religious commitment to live in healthy and honorable ecological harmony with the earth and with the rest of humankind. For them, reflecting on the fate of farming is anything but a one-dimensional economic matter, but rather a heavily values-driven and yet very practical quest for new forms of sound husbandry and good stewardship in their best and ancient senses" (2004: 221-2). His second quote states that, "For the true agrarian, land is everything. This may be an oversimplification, but the land is where the agrarian scale of values is grounded" (2004: 55). My dissertation claims that religious agrarians bring these values into practical quests for good stewardship of lands and soils that are seen to be God's creation.

The remainder of my dissertation seeks to make this argument, drawing on the fieldwork I carried out with Congregation Shearith Israel and Koinonia. My next two chapters introduce these communities and the networks of which they are part, and then I compare and contrast their religious agrarian themes and concerns about locality, health, and justice in subsequent chapters. Meanwhile, throughout this dissertation I will focus on specific narratives from my research subjects themselves that underscore their own faith/religious reasons for becoming involved in religious agrarian lifestyles. Such a focus underscores the lived religion, religion-in-everyday-practice-and-concern,

bottom-up ways that religious participants in America put their values into practice in regards to sustainable agriculture issues.

## CHAPTER 3 KOINONIA AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS AGRARIANISM

### **Lay of the Land**

This chapter offers a history of Charles Jordan, and thus Koinonia. Without an understanding of this founding figure, as well as Koinonia's institutional and communal history, it is difficult to place Koinonia and its permaculture practices within the emergent phenomenon of religious agrarianism. We will therefore also explore what permaculture is so that in succeeding chapters we can see how permaculture enables Koinonia to engage religious agrarian topics of locality, health, and justice. A brief history of sustainable farming within the larger tradition of Christianity is also offered, as this helps contextualize Koinonia's place within a lineage of human-agricultural interactions that have been shaped, broadly speaking, by the Christian worldview.

### **A Demonstration Plot for God**

The drive to Americus takes the traveler deep into Southwestern Georgia and provides a snapshot into rural life in the upland South. There are Mennonite communities; African American Baptist churches; Methodist churches; migrant communities of Latino farm laborers and their respective churches and *tiendas*; trailer parks with more than just a hint of poverty; and miles of agricultural monocultures. The latter range from industrial chicken and hog farms to the ubiquitous regional pecan groves to acres of soybean, cotton, and corn.

The town of Americus was founded in 1832 and today it has become a pilgrimage destination of sorts, for it is where Habitat for Humanity maintains its

corporate offices.<sup>1</sup> The two colleges in Americus, Georgia Southwestern State and South Georgia Technical College, attract a number of young adults to the area. Coupled with the staff, volunteers, and visitors who pass through to visit Habitat or who stop on their way to Plains (home of President Jimmy Carter), these students help create a vibrant cultural life in this otherwise rural, historically agricultural Georgia community. The closest interstate is well over an hour away, with the closest city, Macon, being a two-hour drive and Atlanta a three-hour drive. Both are northeast of Americus, so that the town is more rural and poor than urban and diversified.

It is this rural, agricultural identity, along with the Jim Crow background, that originally attracted Clarence and his wife, Florence, to move to a large swath of run-down farmland outside of Americus in order to put their theological vision into practice and begin Koinonia in 1942. At that time, Americus was even more rural and more dependent upon agriculture for its identity than Americus of today with its colleges and visitors to Habitat. Back in 1942 the Jordans, along with friends Martin and Mabel England, “went to Sumter County and there, alongside Route 49 about eight miles southwest of Americus, were 440 ordinary-looking acres of soil, slightly eroded and virtually treeless. Through some power of hidden persuasiveness and sense of rightness that passes between man and earth, Clarence said: ‘This is it.’” (Lee 1971: 33).

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<sup>1</sup> Millard Fuller and his wife, the official founders of Habitat, had moved to Koinonia and along with Jordan started building affordable housing for poverty-stricken African American neighbors on Koinonia’s property. This became the idea behind Habitat, which Fuller started after moving to Americus in 1976. Thus Americus is a popular destination for both church groups and international tourists seeking to learn more about and to honor Habitat for Humanity; however, it is not well known that Habitat was equally the brainchild of Clarence Jordan, as most associate the founding with only Fuller.

## Clarence Jordan

Jordan came of age, both physical and spiritual, in the pre-Civil Rights South. Born into a Baptist family on July 29, 1912, Jordan began at a young age to question the teachings and hymns of his Baptist upbringing that preached equality before God. Jordan's experience as a youth of the reality of Georgia at the time was that there was blatant racism both inside the church doors on Sunday, and outside the church doors every other day of the week. Jordan also noticed the inequalities that resulted from the landed aristocracy, or "good 'ol boy network," that kept both low-income white and black farmers poor and indentured.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, he decided to become a farmer "and to try to lift the awful burden from the poor man's back by showing him how to get a lot from a little land. He would seek to work in partnership with the poor farmers. A volatile mixture of guilt and a rage for justice was stoking up a lifetime of pressure" (1971: 10).

This conviction to help poor farmers led Jordan to matriculate in the Georgia State College of Agriculture at the University of Georgia. He also became a member of the Baptist Student Union and began preaching in local churches. While at agricultural school he joined the ROTC and was scheduled to enter into the U.S. Cavalry. However, his background with the Bible, and especially Jesus' Sermon on the Mount found in the Gospel of Matthew, led Jordan to become a pacifist and to walk away from armed service. Jordan instead entered into the ministry and became a New Testament scholar at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In essence, Jordan became a soldier for Christ, fighting for racial and economic equality.

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<sup>2</sup> For in depth investigations into this aspect of a racialized, religiously sanctioned Southern agricultural aristocracy, see Isaac (1999) and Wilson (1980). For these struggles within an emergent Southern, Caucasian, agrarian intellectual tradition, most famously encountered in the work of "The Twelve Southerners" and their manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* (2006), see Murphy (2001).

By 1942, Jordan had enough firsthand witness of “the nervous eyes of the leather-skinned rednecks who saw it as their community responsibility to keep the Negro iced with fear” (1971: 3). He had tired of witnessing “the day-to-day routines of white Christians who would not even acknowledge the Negro as fully human” (1971: 3) and who saw “negroes” solely as farm labor, and cheap farm labor at that.

While Jordan’s Southern white counterparts were heading to Europe to fight World War II, he realized he had a fight of his own to take up in the rural South:

He was determined to fight fascistlike oppression in Georgia with something that southerners were almost as familiar with as they were their guns: Christianity. The difference was, Jordan did not talk about the ‘Gee-zus’ of the feverish radio evangelist, or the soul-saving Jesus of the crude highway sign, or even the slick Jesus of the sanctuary. He talked about Jesus the man, as if the guy actually worked and sweated, experienced love and hurt, and had about him all the shrugs and shuffles of a down-to-earth human being (1971: 4).<sup>3</sup>

Motivated by his interpretation of the Biblical Jesus, and “preaching that the ideas of the New Testament either had to be incarnated or rejected” (1971: 5), Jordan “established an experiment in Christian communal living on a farm in Sumter County, right in the heart of southwestern Georgia, and declared brotherhood, nonviolence, and economic sharing to be its fundamental guidelines” (1971: 5).<sup>4</sup>

As the historian Charles Marsh explains, “Jordan believed that the only way authentic change could transpire in southern race relations was through ‘incarnational

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<sup>3</sup> It could be argued that Jordan is a theologically informed ecological progenitor to Casey’s “return of place.” For example, “The essence of the incarnation and the resurrection, Clarence said, was that man has to deal with God in the flesh” (1971: 186). And for Jordan, this Jesus-of-the-flesh was this-worldly; humble; got his hands dirty in the soil and local politics; and taught his followers to manifest love in this world, this place, in this community—now--by working and living together off the land.

<sup>4</sup> For a sustained analysis of Jordan’s life, the founding and history of Koinonia, and the reaction of local whites and African Americans, see: Dallas Lee (1971); Tracy Elaine K’Meyer (1997); and Faith Fuller (2003). Jordan’s own interpretation of the New Testament, known as “The Cotton Patch Gospels,” are also worth reading as they give insights into Jordan’s Southern agrarian theological beliefs and teachings and are exemplary examples of unique Protestant American interpretations of the Bible (1993, 2005).

evangelism,' and that meant making Christian truth concrete in community and in shared life with the excluded and the oppressed" (2005: 56). Jordan himself saw "life in the body of Christ from the perspective of Sumter County, Georgia, [and which] involved three interconnected passions: the practice of nonviolence as the moral disposition of the Gospel; the preservation, cultivation, and protection of the soil, 'God's holy earth'; and the proclamation and provision of hope to 'those who suffer and are oppressed'" (2005: 69). Given his cultural background in poor rural farming communities of Georgia; his professional training in scientific agriculture; and his theological training and beliefs in incarnating Christ's early egalitarian communities of the faithful, Jordan, with support from his wife, decided to "walk his talk" and founded Koinonia to bring change to the South and to America at-large. By being a "demonstration plot" of advanced farming practices, interracial living, and Christ-centered community life, Jordan hoped to inspire other Americans, whether Christian or otherwise, to overcome the poverty and racism of the rural South.

To this end, Jordan began farming at Koinonia by hitching himself to a plow, as the community did not have enough capital in the first years to purchase a steer or ox! He also launched a soil conservation program of terracing; used ground-up peanuts as fertilizer; established a "cow library" and egg and seed cooperatives; shared farming tips with neighbors; and held seminars on farm related topics for both races. Therefore, from its beginnings, Koinonia has had a theology of the soil and has attempted to put into practice progressive, sustainable farming techniques.<sup>5</sup> However, as with religious

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<sup>5</sup> For an updated version of a "theology of the soil" written by a Christian agronomist and soil toxicologist, see Hall (2002).

communities everywhere, Koinonia's history of practice has not always lived up to the ideals of its visionary founder.

### **Koinonia in the 1960s**

Koinonia's history as an intentional religious community is as rich and textured as the red clay soil found in its agricultural fields. As with any Christ-centered intentional religious community, there have been continual struggles with attracting and maintaining committed members and with remaining true to incarnating the vision of Jesus. Koinonia has also continually struggled with developing and maintaining on-site cottage industries and successful farming practices and has had to deal with violent responses from the Americus community based on Jordan's interracial vision. Except for the violent responses, Koinonia still grapples with the other issues on a daily level, even today.

Koinonia dropped to just four members in 1967, with the Jordans and the Wittkampers being solely responsible for a 1,100-acre farm and pecan business. This led to severe soul searching by Jordan, and his friendship with Fuller (who moved to the community with his wife during these lean years) helped pull him through this period. The two of them focused on combating the American ideal of competition and getting ahead (and in effect prefacing Bellah's critiques of American individualism), eventually beginning a program of providing quality housing to low-income African Americans who lived in the area. This war against "the matter of land tenure" (1971: 208) led to the creation of Habitat for Humanity and highlights Jordan's commitment to an agrarian ideal. For example, a 1935 tract on agrarianism states, "A true agrarian economy is characterized by a general diffusion of property ownership. Each family should own outright a sufficient quantity of land and equipment to afford it a decent and satisfying

living with the application of reasonable effort and foresight” (108). Jordan shared this agrarian vision and wedded it to a theological interpretation of the Book of Acts. Jordan even proclaimed that, “We need to return to the Old Testament idea that the earth is the Lord’s; it’s still His property—no man can give you a clear title. If you trace the title back far enough, somebody stole it” (1971: 209).<sup>6</sup>

Jordan and Fuller’s Fund for Humanity, which they began in 1969 (and which Fuller renamed Habitat for Humanity when he left Koinonia and moved to Americus), prefaces today’s micro-credit lending. Rather than giving out high-interest loans so local residents and poor sharecroppers could not afford a house, Jordan and Fuller via the Fund for Humanity allowed poor African American neighbors to move into homes built on community property under loans that were free of interest. Jordan died in 1969 while working in his green, one-room writing shack that still stands amongst the pecan groves he helped plant. These pecans provide Koinonia with the majority of the community’s income, helping fuel a mail order business that led to the construction of on-site processing, baking, and packaging plants that still function today.

### **Koinonia from the 1970s through the 1980s<sup>7</sup>**

Before his death in 1969, Jordan and Fuller had changed the name from Koinonia Farm to Koinonia Partners and began to emphasize communication, teaching, and application as the core focus of the community. Koinonia also became incorporated as a nonprofit during this era and developed a board of directors and bylaws.

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<sup>6</sup> He also lobbied his neighbors that “You ought to spend at least as much trying to help house your poor brothers whom you have seen as you do trying to house God whom you have never seen” (1971: 222).

<sup>7</sup> Much of the information for the post-Jordan 1970s, 1980s, and volatile 1990s comes from Koinonia resident David Castle. Castle and his wife moved to Koinonia in 1988 and David later served on the Board of Directors. His passing in 2008 was a loss for the community, and his widow subsequently left in 2009.

Furthermore, the community began to allot a living allowance to all community members (with income largely coming from produce and pecans).

Given the focus on communication and teaching during this era, leadership at Koinonia began to focus on clearer communication amongst community members, between the community and Americus, and from the community to the “world-at-large” via a pecan product catalogue. They also taught about farming, community life, and Jordan’s *Cotton Patch Gospels*, and began applying these teachings to a life lived in fellowship. This clarity of focus led to “an energized community [of] new visions, ventures, and variations” in the 1970s (Castle unpublished manuscript). A “fabric of partnership” (Castle) developed, based on Jordan’s vision of living in a shared, Christ-centered community. This partnership was seen in housing, agriculture, and business ventures.

In regards to agriculture, Koinonia has grown over its history row crops (mainly soybean and peanuts), pecans (with shells being spread back over the soil to make compost), muscadine grapes (for wine and jams), and a variety of other crops. Koinonia flourished with the onset in the 1970s of both Jesus and back-to-the-land movements, providing a stark contrast to the four members of 1967. During this time many structures were built on the property and many committed pacifists and hippies and Christians came to live and raise families and attempt to incarnate Christ’s love by living in a farming-based community. Also during this era, the farm grew corn, peanuts, pigs, squash, and okra for farmer’s markets and domestic use. Sewing and tie-dye enterprises were also created.

Despite this energy, the seeds for community conflict were sown. Although embodying a partnership vision of blacks working and eating with whites, there was a trend of whites coming to live at the community, but very few blacks doing the same. Many of the African Americans involved with the community were nearby residents or those who had homes from the Fund for Humanity and who walked to work. So while all received paychecks, not all were equally committed to partnering in business and housing. As Castle writes, “This situation would plague Koinonia through the ‘80s and come to a head in the early ‘90s as part of an ‘unfinished reformation’” (unpublished manuscript).

Will Wittkamper, who had been involved with the community in some capacity since 1953, led the farming during this era and he instituted organic farming practices. In part these practices were organic by default, in that the community did not have enough income to buy large amounts of chemicals. The community was also inspired by the back-to-the land ethos of the time and equally benefitted from abundant farm labor.

Community life during this time faithfully held to Jordan’s vision: each day began with prayer and a worship period at 8am and a brief devotional was given at the shared noonday meal. However, “Work is an excuse to be together as much as to create a product. The spiritual experience in relationships seems very important. Whether work at Koinonia is primarily to be a business or an activity for spiritual growth has always been in tension” (Castle). This tension, as well as the tension between those working for a paycheck (who tended to be local blacks) and those working in partnership (who tended to be white), began to surface in the 1980s and boiled over in the 1990s.

By 1980 Koinonia had twenty-four resident partners, eleven children living in the community, and many volunteers. Castle depicts three threads that bound the community during this era: an inward focus and search for deeper spiritual life; the maturation of outward ministries, especially the growing success of Jordan's Cottonpatch Gospels; and at the end of the '80s the surfacing of an "unfinished racial reformation" (Castle). The community suffered another loss during this era when Florence Jordan, co-founder of Koinonia, died in 1987.

The community also became very active in anti-war demonstrations and in supporting the rights of Latin Americans suffering under Reagan-era policies. Active campaigning against the training of soldiers at the School of Americas began in earnest in this era and this continues to be a focus of Koinonia members to this day. The community also underwent a sustained period of institutionalization with the creation of handbooks, guidebooks, living allowances, and requested vacation time. Many original buildings were torn down and new ones were built. And the onset of a "dark night" (Castle) took hold as the '80s turned into the '90s.

### **Koinonia in the 1990s**

Castle shares that in the 1990s

Koinonia gave up the communal, common purse for a non-profit organizational model. Even though the economic pattern changed, many still referred to Koinonia as an open intentional community. It was open in the sense that visitors could come and go and Koinonia did not maintain a doctrinaire statement of belief that people had to accept in order to be a part of the community. This would keep Koinonia from being identified with the more staid, inflexible, cultic organizations. Jordan's belief in a more experimental, free-flowing, creative milieu was maintained (unpublished manuscript).

However, this free-flowing milieu allowed for underlying racial tensions to boil up and for more vocal black workers to argue that if Koinonia wanted to "walk its talk," then an

African American should become the executive director of the incorporated businesses and community (this position started in 1994). So while the main ministries of the community were building houses, advocating for prison reform, and working with children and youth, there was internal dispute over how the community should be structured and who should be in charge.

One tension was that local blacks who worked for Koinonia as an incorporated business wanted the life that white community members were voluntarily giving up when the latter became community residents. A common phrase arose amongst black workers was, "We've learned how to make everything out of nothing" (Castle). These community workers felt that Koinonia should pay more salary and that a black person should be in charge of directing the community. To deal with this tension the Board of Directors appointed a six-member committee in September of 1992 that was charged to create structural changes that would appease the concerns of all members. The Board decided that everyone would become a partner of the community and get paid, but there would also be "resident partners" who lived full time on community property. It also came to pass that a local African American would become executive director of Koinonia. However, by 1999 Koinonia was in a sizeable and dangerous financial hole of \$744,000. It turns out that the Executive Director had been embezzling funds to their own private account and that of their local black friends who also worked at Koinonia and this had placed the community in a state of financial and emotional crisis.

Koinonia members called 1999 the "Year of Recovery." That year, outside consultants were brought in to help the community overcome its financial debt. With their input, community members decided that 800 acres would be sold, so that today

Koinonia has 573 acres of land, of which eighty-five acres are tillable and another ninety are in pecan groves. New leadership was found as the old Director had been fired, and financial record keeping became more transparent. Lastly, Koinonia remained active in its mail-order pecan business and still advertised itself as a place, a spirit, and a ministry.

### **Koinonia in the 2000s through Today**

The community's fortunes changed after 1999. The terrorist bombings of September 11<sup>th</sup> affected the community in particular ways, especially the militarized response of the U.S. Government and its invasion of Iraq. This military campaign touched a nerve in Koinonia, helping mobilize the community after the tumultuous 1990s. Through its history, Koinonia has been committed to the ideals of Christ-inspired pacifism; this was evident in its ministry on race, and in protests and campaigns against the School of Americas that began in the 80s. Therefore, after George W. Bush led the post-9/11 invasion of Iraq, members of Koinonia once again became active in local and national peace campaigns and peace vigils.<sup>8</sup>

Another important event occurred in 2002 when community bylaws were changed. Eight people began to sit on the Board of Directors and David Castle was made Chairperson of the Board. Also in 2002 John Hall became Coordinator of Operations. His background as a dairy farmer in Vermont helped the community focus on farm maintenance and upkeep. Another important event occurred in 2002: Koinonia once again became financially solvent. Lastly, a new Partner Covenant was created, with eight covenant ideas that were drawn up to guide the vision of the community.

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<sup>8</sup> In 2008 the community received the Community of Christ International Peace Award.

These included a covenant that the community would “be a voice for peace, nonviolence, and social justice” in the community; that community members would “work toward making home, church, and community a ‘demonstration plot for the Kingdom of God;” that the community would “strive toward living more simply, recognizing the terrible inequities of wealth, healthy, property and opportunity;” and that the community and its members would honor the covenant that they are “To be a steward of the earth, recognizing the beauty and wonder of the earth as God’s creation” (Castle).<sup>9</sup>

This last covenant is central to my argument. Koinonia is an intentional Christian farming community that has commitment to stewardship of God’s creation as one of its many principles and values. Furthermore, it is a Christian farming community that has a very strong critique of industrial farming and late capitalism. This combination of a commitment to stewardship and a thorough critique of industrial capitalism and agribusiness have been central features of American agrarianism dating back to the late 1800s.<sup>10</sup>

In April of 2003 this covenant was further elaborated upon during a “Visioning Weekend.” Fifty community members and friends attended this event and agreed to proactively meet five challenges that Koinonia faced. The fifth challenge they

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of this strain of Protestant Theocentric and “Creator-centric” environmental ethic of wonder, see Dewitt (2000) and Gustafson (1996).

<sup>10</sup> For example, in an exploration of the rise of U.S. agrarianism following the Civil War and running through the 1920s, W.B. Bizzell shares that, “Class consciousness grew rapidly in almost every section of the United States immediately after 1870 [because capitalists] adopted the policy of the combine, both for financial profits and for increasing economic and political power. The farmers finally realized that their individualism had made them ineffective as an influence in politics and in the business relations affecting their own interests,” for “The balance of power was clearly on the side of the wealthy combines” (1926: 157). The dawning realization that corporations in the latter decades of the 1800s were beginning to dominate farming markets led to the formation of agrarian-based political parties like the Grange, The Farmers’ Alliance, The People’s Party, and The Farm Labor Party.

recognized and agreed upon was the “Demonstration of new community based and environmentally responsible ways of farming, including availability of plots to foster economic development for individuals and families” (Castle). This dual covenant and concern, coupled with a history of progressive farming dating back to Jordan himself, has inspired Koinonia to pursue permaculture and organic farming methods. This combination of principles and practices make Koinonia an exemplar of what I am calling religious agrarianism.

### **Koinonia’s Current Structure and Vision**

In November of 2007, the community accepted a new Vision Statement that reads, “We are Christians called to live together in intentional community sharing a life of prayer, work, study, service and fellowship. We seek to embody peacemaking, sustainability, and radical sharing. While honoring people of all backgrounds and faiths, we strive to demonstrate the way of Jesus as an alternative to materialism, militarism and racism.” Koinonia has established a community structure that developed in response to both the turbulent 90s as well as to the visioning exercises held earlier this century. The community self-selected three ideals that it has chosen to structure and guide its next fifty years of existence; these three themes emerged during the visioning weekend and are education, hospitality, and sustainability. Therefore, five days a week the community has a shared lunch meal in the cafeteria that is open to visitors, as well as a community potluck on Sunday evenings (the earlier practice dates back to when the Jordans founded the community).

Besides these shared meals, the community has a museum with artifacts that outline Koinonia’s rich history. The community also has a gift shop on-site that sells various books authored by Clarence Jordan and a wide variety of community products.

Visitors can buy Koinonia t-shirts made from organic cotton, fair-trade chocolate products, peace poles and Cotton Patch mugs made by community members, and can purchase a wide variety of books about sustainability and liberal, progressive Christianity. There is also on-site camping and a dormitory-style community building where people can rent rooms and take part in community life for a short period of time.

The names of the rooms in the dormitory housing are a “who’s who” of progressive Christian and non-Christian peacemakers and include a write up on each person on the door and bed stand: Martin Luther King, Jr.; Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Dorothy Day; Mother Teresa; Gandhi; Rachel Corrie (a young U.S. woman killed protesting construction of Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands); Rosa Parks; and Nelson Mandela.

Two buildings over from the dorms/cafeteria is a community library open to visitors and which contains sections of books on crafts and building; peace; non-violence; community living; family and marriage; natural health; and religion. In the section on science visitors can peruse books by Aldo Leopold, Charles Darwin, E.O. Wilson, Al Gore, and Helen Caldicott. In the section on gardening there are titles by Wendell Berry; a 1972 edition of Rodale Press’ famous book *Organic Farming*; a wide variety of books devoted to maintaining soil health via organic farming methods and composting; Albrecht papers; and selections on the founder of biodynamic farming, Rudolph Steiner.

The community’s outreach also includes providing tours for school, church, and other types of groups. Upwards of 2,000 visitors pass through in very busy months. The tours include a showing of *Briars in the Cottonpatch*, a video about the history of

Koinonia, and a guided tour through the community's permaculture gardens. All of these activities are geared towards professed goals of hospitality, education, and sustainability.

Those who want to immerse themselves deeper into Koinonia's patterns and rhythms can apply for three to four month-long seasonal internships. Resident interns help with farming, work in the pecan-business, share building maintenance duties, and complete office tasks. Those interns who are "called" to become a community member can apply to become community partners and if accepted are able to reside at Koinonia for up to a year or more. After this time, the prospective member will either leave or apply to be a candidate for stewardship. Stewards are those who have (ideally) committed the remainder of their lives to residing at Koinonia, taking part in its various ministries and requisite jobs and tasks. This system is intended to keep another scenario of embezzlement from occurring; protects the community from "free-loaders" and gives current stewards the opportunity to accept candidates for stewardship; and allows visitors and interns an opportunity to experience community life to see if they are truly committed to pledging their lives to Koinonia.

In concluding his history of Koinonia's past forty years, David Castle writes that, "Prophetic organizations are always called to be the forerunners of the next era...Dramatic environmental and milieu changes plus staggering technological developments require new ways of being and new ways of working. How to be relevant today as a 'demonstration plot for the Kingdom of God' is our current challenge. We are called again to play a decisive role in defining and shaping the course of human life on planet Earth" (unpublished manuscript). This calling has motivated Koinonia from its

inception, as founders and participants have sought to be a demonstration plot for interracial living; to challenge “empire” and the military-industrial juggernaut; and to embody and put into practice sustainable farming techniques in order to demonstrate sustainable stewardship. I examine the ways that Koinonia is currently embodying sustainable stewardship by putting into practice their religious agrarian calling below. First, however, I dig deeper into Koinonia’s critique of empire and see how this critique is consistent with agrarian criticisms of industrialization and thus in part motivates the community’s sustainable farming practices.

### **New Monasticism and Schools for Conversion**

I return to one of my larger arguments about lived networks by quickly exploring Koinonia’s continued history of actively partnering with other like-minded groups. These lived networks include past relationships (both agricultural and religious) with Bruderhof, Hutterite, and Society of Brothers communities in the 1950s, and a variety of current lived network relationships today.<sup>11</sup> These current networks include partnerships (whether by correspondence, physical visits, meetings at various conferences, invited presentations, and/or sharing of links on websites) with progressive Christian social organizations like Sojourners and Catholic Social Worker Houses, red-letter Christian groups that actively campaign for social and environmental justice. They also maintain active lived-network partnerships with communities that have been inspired by one-time Koinonia members, like Habitat for Humanity and Jubilee Partners (the latter group houses immigrants and teaches them English and other skills so they can adapt to American society). Other lived relationships include active collaboration with

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<sup>11</sup> For relations with Bruderhof, Hutterite, and Society of Brothers, see Lee (1971).

sustainable agricultural networks such as permaculture groups, Fair Trade suppliers, and Georgia Organics (the state's most active and visible organic group that helps farms gain Federal certification).

Lastly, Koinonia maintains active membership in an emerging domestic Protestant movement called "New Monasticism," and it is partnership and membership with New Monasticism that enables Koinonia to further its own pacifist history. This is because both share the critique of government-sanctioned military force and economic machinations that benefit corporations at the expense of the world's poor and the planet's ecosystems—for both groups, this symbiotic relationship is what constitutes "empire," and both feel this is antithetical to the empire of love and compassion that Jesus preached and embodied.

The New Monastic movement is in part an anarcho-primitive challenge from those within Protestantism who believe that Christ's true teachings and actions require them to move to the margins of American society and minister to the poor, homeless, and broken. In his study of an emergent American monasticism, Charles Fracchia argues that, "What I see developing as one current of the 'new monasticism' is not just an examination of and return to the ideals of the past, but a response to present society" (1979: 5). His study prefigures the response to the present waste, destruction, and spiritual anomie of North American society (including "fallen" Christianities) that the New Monastic movement feels called to challenge. He also writes that, "A tendency towards the production of quality food...and towards the production of both aesthetic and practical goods that emphasize quality design and workmanship marks the growing cottage industries of the 'new monasticism.' Intimately related to this concept of jobs,

work, and money is the concern for environment. Taking as little as possible from the environment is a corollary of the philosophy of working to sustain oneself” (1979: 19). It is possible to trace the above “new monastic” trajectory in Koinonia’s own history, from its back-to-the-land ethos of the 60s and 70s, increasing environmental concern from the 80s onwards, and long-lived desire for authentic Jesus-centered communal life. This institutional and communal history has resulted in today’s community structure and Koinonia’s active use of permaculture and active membership in New Monastic networks.

New Monasticism has developed within the larger lineage of monasticism that Fracchia describes. This much more contemporary monastic movement has roots in Jonathan Wilson’s 1997 treatise, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre’s After Virtue*. At the time of publication, Wilson was an Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. In his book, Wilson laments that the current Western church is not living up to the life and teachings of Jesus and is not faithfully preaching the gospel. In other words, Wilson argues that those Christians who are faithfully incarnating the pre-Constantinian church’s example have become a minority voice within a larger, secular, consumer, and thus compromised Christian country. Wilson believes Christianity is compromised because as American culture becomes fragmented along pluralistic lines, the church becomes fragmented. As he states, “Th[e] gospel and mission of the church never change, but the circumstances in which we witness to and live out the gospel do change. With changing circumstances

comes the need to rethink how the church lives faithfully and witnesses the gospel” (1997: 2-3).

Wilson’s analysis supports my argument for a lived network approach to understanding the greening of parts of North American religions—in this case, Protestant Christianity. The larger New Monastic movement takes Wilson’s clarion call for re-inhabiting Christian community (1997: 65-6) to heart and accepts as valid his claim that, “there are times—and I have argued that this is one of them—when the life of the church has been so compromised that we no longer are capable of fulfilling faithfully our mission. At such a time, the church must withdraw into a new monasticism, not in order to avoid a ‘bad’ society, but in order to recover faithful living and a renewed understanding of the church’s mission” (1997: 71). Wilson ends his theological discourse by outlining four characteristics of a new monasticism (1997: 72-5), pointing out that, “Although the new monasticism must be intended for the whole people of God, the discipline that it requires will be achieved only through small groups of disciples that are themselves committed to the vision and discipline...oriented around particular work or life circumstances” (1997: 74). For Koinonia, this vision and discipline is oriented around a particular lived embodiment of Christianity that dates back to 1942 and now includes a commitment to sustainable stewardship and religious agrarianism.

Wilson’s heartfelt exegesis on re-inhabiting the Christian church in a fragmenting world struck a chord with other Christians living in community. His call for radical new discipleship triggered a response from these less well known but vibrant fringes of American Christianity. The New Monastic Library now publishes a series devoted to “Resources for Radical Discipleship,” and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (not to be

confused with Jonathan Wilson) is their series editor on publications devoted to this New Monasticism. The series foreword reads,

For over a millennium, if a Christian wanted to read theology, practice Christian spirituality, or study the Bible, she went to the monastery to do so. There, people who inhabited the tradition and prayed the prayers of the church also copied manuscripts and offered fresh reflections about living the gospel in a new time. Two thousand years after the birth of the church, there is a new monastic movement stirring in North America. In keeping with ancient tradition, new monastic's study the classics of Christian reflection and are beginning to offer some reflections for a new time. The New Monastic Library Series exists to share reflections from new monastic's and to print classic monastic resources unavailable elsewhere”(Rutba House 2005).

These new monastic leaders further recognize their indebtedness to Wilson, writing that, “Our origins are primarily in free-church Protestantism, and our communities do not often look much like traditional monasticism. We stole the term ‘new monasticism’ from our friend Jonathan Wilson and from his theological reflection on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre” (2007: 1).

A variety of church and Christian intentional community leaders responded to Wilson’s call for a new monasticism by organizing a gathering at St. John’s Parish Church in Durham, North Carolina in 2004. This meeting was hosted by a New Monastic center, Rutba House, and the participants claimed that, “In an age when ‘Christian’ America is the ‘last remaining superpower’ in an all-out ‘war on terror,’ we’ve begun to think that once again it is time for a new monasticism. Indeed, this is how we see the Spirit moving in North America today” (2005: ix-x).

To this end, the group developed twelve “marks” of this new monasticism they are helping to birth on American soil. These are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather “helps name the unique witness these neo-monastic communities have to offer the rest of the church” (2005: x). The twelve marks help guide the lifeworlds of New Monastics,

and together they encourage New Monastics to relocate to what they call abandoned places of empire, which include decrepit inner city urbanscapes; to share economic resources with the needy and with other New Monastics; to offer hospitality to strangers; to fight racism within churches and communities and to work for reconciliation; to humbly submit to Christ's Body as it is embodied in the Church; to create community and to live in proximity of other New Monastics who share a common approach to life; to care for the part of God's Earth that is given to them to steward, and to also care for local economies; to commit to conflict resolution and peacemaking; and to live a life of disciplined contemplation (2005). The group justified these twelve marks by asking, "Why wouldn't the church who finds her identity in a history of exodus and exile, in the story of a Refugee who was executed by an Empire and resurrected by the King of the universe, want to be where God has been active all along—on the margins and in the abandoned places?" (2005: viii).

In another book, Wilson-Hartgrove writes that,

In every era God has raised up new monastic's to pledge their allegiance to God alone and remind the church of its true vocation. These people have not been perfect...These saints who've called us back to our roots generation after generation remind us that the roots of God's kingdom are rhizomes. They spread beneath the surface, effecting change from below. It is a quite revolution—one that is often ignored by the newspapers and missed by the historians. But it is, in the end, how God plans to save the world...radical hope is the heart of the monastic impulse (2008: 54-55).

We see hear again Orsi's trope of lived religion in practice, and that Koinonia is an active partner in this emerging new monastic network, which has as one of its marks caring for the earth.

These marks of a new monasticism and this overarching sentiment help ground Koinonia into a larger neo-monastic movement that is challenging today's "empire" of

corporate-funded lobbying, military excursions, and neglect of the poor. Clarence Jordan can be interpreted as manifesting this Spirit when he created Koinonia at the margins of abandoned farmland in rural Georgia during the height of the racist Jim Crow Southern empire. Marks two, three, and four were also put into practice by Jordan well over sixty years ago. Mark ten is also significant for the purposes of my argument. Koinonia has active partnerships with a local coffee shop that sells organic and fair trade products; sells their produce at various local farmers markets; and is in the process of creating a meat CSA, where people in the larger Americus community can buy shares in the cows, pigs, and goats being raised on the farm. By creating a permaculture demonstration plot in rural Georgia, literally at the margins of today's corporate controlled, globalized, monoculture food system, Koinonia is embodying a Christ-inspired New Monastic religious agrarian lifestyle.

Another New Monastic author, Tom Sine, writes that this movement has emerging leaders who are, "committed to calling people to a more authentic, embodied, whole-life faith...[who] tend to be outwardly focused in mission...are relational, organic and communal with virtually no bureaucratic, hierarchical models of leadership, unlike many denominational and nondenominational churches...[and] *tend to be concerned about a broad range of social issues, including social justice, reconciliation and creation care.*" (2008: 39, my italics). Thus, many New Monastics have created food pantries and soup kitchens at houses where they live in Christ-centered community, living lives of contemplation and dedication to peacemaking and the poor, serving those abandoned by empire without judgment. Many also have helped create community

gardens and undertake other activist work in racially divided, economically depressed parts of the country.

This broad range of attributes and these issues of concern have been present at Koinonia since it was founded, and they have gained even more support in the ideals of today's community stewards. Community members are passionate about and committed to issues of social justice, reconciliation, and creation care. Furthermore, Koinonia regularly hosts Schools for Conversion workshops. These are workshops where the twelve marks are discussed and those who attend are giving tools for putting radical discipleship into action within their own communities. Some of these tools are related to the tenth mark, which is a mark about tending to the plot of God's earth, as Norman Wirzba notes. Wirzba describes four possible New Monastic practices, including the practice of growing a garden. As he writes, "The palpable identification between humanity and soil (*adam* from *adamah*) is lost on us" (2005: 145) and growing a garden (preferably organic) can help overcome this lack of identifying with the earth. By participating in and hosting Schools for Conversion, Koinonia maintains an active membership in lived networks of Christians who are motivated to care for the earth by participating in sustainable farming and who strive to embody environmental justice in today's wasteful industrial food systems.

### **The Agrarian Example of Koinonia**

Koinonia's current farming practices and agricultural landscape took root in large part due to the vision, dedication, and hard work of a community member who lived on the property beginning in the late 80s and who left in February of 1998, Jim Everett.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This is a fictional name as Jim is one of my research subjects.

The Mennonite Church sent Everett to Koinonia after graduating from Michigan State University in 1983. For a year and a half he commuted between the Habitat office in Americus and Koinonia where he worked under the head gardener, Ray Rockwell.

A strong desire to travel overseas landed Everett in Bangladesh, where the Mennonite Central Committee assigned him to live from 1985 until 1988. As he recalls, “Being rather disillusioned with such work by the end of it, and not having other ambitious visions, I decided to return to Koinonia as a volunteer in June 1988 and worked my way up through the membership process to the stage called ‘partner’ by 1990 or 91. This is similar in nature to what is now referred to as a ‘steward’ and I was the last partner to join the community as it was then structured (and also the last to leave, in Feb. 1998).”<sup>13</sup>

Everett was present during the community turbulence of the 90s, and his own recollections are that the years from 1993 until he left were the most trying times. As he explains, “Koinonia had been for many years racially divided between the white partners, to whom simple living was cutting-edge spiritual discipline, and a group of long-term black employees, with sharecropping in living memory and no desire to move toward anything resembling such a life.” After the Board of Directors, which served as a legally mandated advisory role to the community partnership, switched the community to a corporate structure, the community decided to pay members based on comparable wages for similar jobs found within the larger region. The Board also hired its first CEO, “a charismatic black preacher who believed in prosperity theology...have faith and act as if you have it. The result was that within two years (1993-95) most of the former

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<sup>13</sup> This and subsequent quotes are from an email correspondence received 7 July 2009.

partners had left, the place was some \$800K in debt, and clear cutting of the forestland was under way to finance this. At the same time ‘modernizations’ were undertaken without regard to economy...carpeting and air-conditioning the office, removing most woodstoves and replacing them with gas heaters, etc.” This is Jim’s perspective on the beginning of the “dark night” of the community’s soul that eventually ended in two cases of embezzlement by two subsequent CEOs and about which Castle writes in his community history.

Within this milieu of changing corporate structure and conflicting community visions, Everett had successfully built up Koinonia’s organic garden. The garden he worked in was part of a larger community history of organic farming as this term is commonly understood and defined in today’s parlance. Everett writes that

The tradition of organic gardening at Koinonia began in the early 1950's with Will Wittkamper, whom I never met, though I did get to know his wife before she died...she was still at Koinonia when I returned from Bangladesh. Will used to debate organic versus conventional farming with Clarence frequently, and the tradition of the two systems existing side by side continues to the present, presenting a unique opportunity for people to experience both (usually, I think, to the benefit of organic gardening at Koinonia and at large!).<sup>14</sup>

Although Jordan was progressive about certain farming practices, he was also open to using chemicals when needed. This was in the 1940s and 50s, when such a perspective was influenced by the agricultural training he received during WW II, when the use of chemical weapons was slowly transferred to America’s farmlands. His use of emerging conventional methods was geared towards helping the community and local sharecroppers achieve financial solvency and within this context, strategic use of chemicals was allowed. However, as Everett relates, Jordan was open to debating the

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<sup>14</sup> This and all remaining quotes are from an email correspondence on 14 July 2009.

merits of this strategy. This tension alluded to exists to this day on the campus, as most all of Koinonia's income is generated by their pecan products made from monoculture pecan groves that are treated with chemicals. This tension will be further elaborated upon in subsequent chapters.

Part of this tension is the success that Everett had in building up Koinonia's organic garden. From Wittkampers's time until Everett's hard work, "the main goal of the gardens was food production for the people living on site, with occasional local marketing." However, "By 1995 the organic garden was nearly the last vestige of the former community left, and it represented alternative values, liberal theology, and simple lifestyle; as over against the more mainstream values of the regime then in power. Moreover, each department of Koinonia was urged to become self-sufficient or more financially, and this prompted me to have the garden area certified organic and begin marketing produce through a cooperative then in existence in Atlanta." Community infighting, politics, and financial demands eventually led Everett to leave the community and delve deeper into practicing, embodying, and promoting permaculture. Today he says that he is "a happy pagan in the woods. The permaculture ethics are the closest thing I have to moral codes these days." He and his current wife have their own permaculture homestead and actively return to Koinonia to help lead permaculture trainings and to work with Koinonia's current lead farmer.

Everett defines permaculture as "a system of overall farm design which includes organic, and even occasionally, aspects of conventional farming. Its goal is not to be dogmatic but to be effective. For instance, I still have some dumpster-diven chemical fertilizer. I have been gradually dribbling it out, mostly as a starter for the humanure

compost” he and his wife are making at their homestead in the woods outside of Macon, Georgia. Everett’s definition highlights some of the internal tensions within sustainable agriculture enclaves and the polysemous meanings of sustainable agriculture. For him, permaculture can use chemicals if the need arises, but proper permaculture design and implementation should make this be a last resort, for if a permaculture system is designed efficiently and properly, all the nutrient needs of the entire system (outside of sunlight and rain) should be generated by the system itself. Given this is an ideal that takes many years to achieve in practice (if ever, as there is no truly closed system in nature), many permaculture farmers do indeed use off-site inputs in order to keep the system running. Which inputs are permitted from off-site can thus become a point of contention, as some permaculturists are fine with chemicals, and others eschew these as they see them as being inimical to the sustainable ethos of permaculture.

Everett was exposed to ethnobotanical farming, permaculture, and agroforestry when in Bangladesh, where he delved deeper into his lifelong love of plants and organic farming. This experience of forest-based farming, coupled with the edible forest ideal of permaculture, resulted in Everett’s efforts to design Koinonia’s certified organic gardens along the tenets of permaculture. Therefore, both the current farming activities and sustainable agriculture vision of Koinonia thoroughly bear the stamp of Everett’s influence from his time as a community member. Part of his legacy has manifested in a program of permaculture trainings, held once or twice a year, during which the community’s land becomes a living classroom.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> I attended a permaculture training in February of 2010 and my research findings will be adumbrated in chapters five through seven.

Permaculture, the kind of farming that Everett brought to Koinonia, is rooted in the work of Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren.<sup>16</sup> Mollison defines permaculture as “a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labour [sic]; and of looking at plants and animals in all their functions, rather than treating any area as a single-product system” (Mollison 1979: 1). Or, as Wes Jackson says, current industrial farming privileges part over whole, whereas sustainable farming methods like permaculture privilege whole over part (1987). This is one of the key critiques of modern farming by environmental agrarians and is a consistent theme found within Wendell Berry’s corpus. Of import to my argument is that religious agrarians agree with this critique.

The “fruits” of this working with and observation is to create permanent agriculture based on systems of “whole landscapes and soil complexes” (1979: 3) that climax in permanent, edible forests cultivated by “generations of care and knowledge...found in stable [human] communities” (1979: 3). This matches well with the agrarian idea of cultural permanence in place, where non-industrialized sustainable farming is practiced and passed down through successive generations.

As with agrarianism proper, permaculture is not a romantic or naïve worship of nature and soil. Rather, it usually focuses on human needs, and encourages disciplined action in nature that leads to farm health. This is seen in Mollison’s influential early work when he writes, “If there is a single claim that I could make, in order to distinguish

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<sup>16</sup> Permaculture was developed by both Mollison and David Holmgren and became the basis of an intentional ecovillage they founded in Australia called Crystal Waters. Mollison’s name is more often associated with permaculture than is Holmgren, although both actively write and lead workshops on permaculture to this day.

permaculture from other systems of agriculture...is that [it] is primarily a *consciously designed* agricultural system” (1979: 6). Mollison and Holmgren teach that an agricultural system that is consciously designed saves energy within itself; can handle outside energies from sun, wind, and fire without being overwhelmed; allows for the arrangement of plants so they form symbiotic relationships with other plants, so that the system flourishes; allows for the system designer to place plants, houses, and other material artifacts in desirable locations; it can be designed to suit a specific climate and a specific landscape/ecosystem; and it can provide for energy, construction, recreation, and food needs (1979: 6).

Around the world many have been inspired by and educated in permaculture design. The movement is particularly strong in Western Europe, North America, and Australia, with a domestic United States publication, *The Permaculture Activist*, being one of the leading voices within the movement. Koinonia advertises its permaculture trainings within this magazine. Moreover, Chuck Marsh, one of North America’s permaculture pioneers who has helped build Earthaven ecovillage outside of the Black Mountain/Asheville areas in North Carolina, was invited to Koinonia to help develop their vision for sustainability in June of 2008.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Koinonia’s farming is thoroughly influenced by permaculture ideals and the community is immersed within regional and national permaculture networks.

Koinonia brings a unique Christian perspective to permaculture, thereby helping mold its own shifting, maturing, sustainable religious agrarianism. One community

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<sup>17</sup> A cursory summary of this meeting is available in the *Koinonia Farm Chronicle* (Fall 2008) on page five.

member who moved to Koinonia with his wife in the mid-1990s is Patrick Smith.<sup>18</sup> After living in community in California and working with dairy farms in the northeast, Smith and his wife came to Koinonia to raise their family. Smith had taken a month-long wilderness survival class before their move to Koinonia and currently is an avid dumpster-diver and wild crafts various food sources for his family. He also worked closely with Everett before the latter left the community, leading him to explain that Everett's permaculture worldview greatly influenced his own about farming, as well as the perspectives of the current farm leader, Joel Taylor.

In April of 2002 Smith helped organize a seminar hosted by Koinonia titled "Celebrating God's Creation! Exploring Demonstrations of Ecologically Sustainable Living." This seminar was part of Koinonia's larger series of seminars titled The Clarence Jordan Center for the Advancement of Christian Discipleship. The flyer for the seminar reads, "We will be involving participants in the Christian life of the current day Koinonia community as well as exploring other 'demonstration plots' of deep ecology within The God Movement. In continuity with Clarence Jordan's original vision, Koinonia's current residents and staff continue to struggle to discern the meaning of living sustainably in Christian community in the new millennium." Part of the objectives of the weeklong seminar Smith organized was to "deepen the theological foundations upon which we can build a more socially and environmentally active church." It is possible to read in Smith's vision for the seminar many of the same concerns shared by contemporary New Monastics. This seminar also places Koinonia at the early vanguard of Christian communities that are attempting to discern and put into practice sustainable

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<sup>18</sup> This is a fictional name.

lifeways and practices. The institutional support Smith received in developing and hosting this conference shows Koinonia's strong and continually maturing commitment to sustainability, especially via the vehicle of agriculture; this support includes an important theological dimension, so that Koinonia is also in the vanguard of religious agrarian communities.

Smith scheduled the seminar to occur during the annual Earth Day celebration. Over the course of week, seminars included some of the following workshops, as described in the seminar pamphlet: Opening the Book of Nature, a workshop "designed to help you connect to the Christian tradition of learning spiritual lessons from nature;" Religion, Theology, and Environmental Crisis; a talk by Everett titled "'Spiritual Permaculture': Redemptive Living on Sacred Land;" and a wild edible walk led by both Everett and Smith, titled "Seeking the Morning Manna." Lastly, workshops were offered on ecofeminism and on "Christian Activism in the Environmental Peace Movement." Such topics articulate the diverse approaches that Koinonia and others in progressive Christian circles like readers of *Sojourners Magazine* and the New Monastic movement are developing in regards to interrelated issues of peace, activism, justice, and sustainability. These approaches and theological standpoints thoroughly infuse and influence Koinonia's approach to religious agrarianism.

Moreover, although this conference was open to people of all faiths, it largely attracted other progressive Christians. Presenters at the seminar included Quakers, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and representatives from NGOs Habitat for Humanity, Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, and Servants in Faith and Technology-Southern Institute for Appropriate Technology. Again we see that Koinonia

has developed active lived network partnerships with other NGOs and communities of faith regarding sustainability. This unique fusing of permaculture principles, lived networks, and Koinonia's own Christian practice dating back to 1942 makes Koinonia an exemplar of religious agrarianism and situates the community at the forefront of a rapidly greening North American religious landscape that is taking food issues seriously.

The evolution of Smith's own perspective on Koinonia's religious agrarian practices can be seen in an article he wrote for the community's quarterly newspaper and which gave a summary of Koinonia's farming history.<sup>19</sup> Tasks and jobs have been divided into separate categories under the new community model, and each task has its own coordinator. Therefore, farming has its own team that is typically staffed with interns and there is a farm coordinator who makes most of the important decisions regarding how the farm will follow the covenantal vision worked out earlier in the new Partner Covenant. Smith writes that the new coordinator "has fully entered into his calling to restore the visionary work began by those who dressed and caressed the trees and soil before him. I am convinced that Joel Taylor is the one who is now called by God to lead us into a renewed commitment to care for the environment which sustains us" (2009: 5). Furthermore, Smith finds evidence that "From the very beginning of Koinonia, there has been recognition of how important a responsibility it is to be good stewards of this corner of creation that God has entrusted to us" (2009: 5). A deeper analysis of specific religious agrarian practices currently being implemented by the community and an analysis of interviews with community members in charge of implementing these practices occurs in chapters five through seven. For now I will turn

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<sup>19</sup> See "Koinonia Farm: A Community of Biodiversity" (2009: 5).

my attention to a summary of Christian approaches to agriculture, and especially sustainable agriculture.

### **A Brief History of Christian Farming**

Because of the conversion of Emperor Constantine, the history of Christian farming is more complex and widespread than the history of Jewish farming I explore in the next chapter. This is by default of both gross numbers and total acreage, given that Christianity became the religion of empire. Its dominance and hegemony was challenged by internal division and the rise of Persian and Ottoman Muslim empires, but given the overall time period and span of continents, it is only possible to give brief brush strokes of an historical outline of Christian farming. Even here we must be cautious, for “The single most important generalization to be made about the attitudes toward nature held by the peoples of the classical world is that these varied greatly throughout the long span of ancient history” (Glacken 1967: 13).

The early Christian communities struggled with their identity—were they Jews and thus an agricultural people now living in diaspora, or were they a new people? Paul helped clarify this ambiguity in forceful terms so that the agricultural history of the Hebrew Bible and the sacrifices to Yahweh quickly lost their power as identifiers within emerging proto-Christian communities. Christ’s atoning sacrifice was for all humans, and despite three centuries of persecution, this message nonetheless found a home in Constantine and thus the Roman Empire. Therefore, the centralized roads and agricultural practices and technologies and overall politics of Rome became Christianized, while Christianity became Hellenized.

Underneath this Hellenistic bedrock was a split between rural and urban, already evident in the philosophy of Socrates. Although Aristotle developed a natural

philosophy, the Greek antipathy towards the rural, and towards nature generally, was influenced by the thoughts of Socrates and Plato (Bender 2003: 162-166) and by the utilitarian and aesthetic views of nature found in the Stoics (Glacken 1967: 52). All told, the Hellenistic world was built upon a cattle economy that led to massive deforestation, coupled with the glorification of the rational, urban world that clung to the idea of a past golden age of soil fertility (1967: 132-3). However, the Hellenic concept of a virtuous citizenry was influenced by Aristotle's *Politics*, including the idea that "a healthy agriculture [is] an indispensable condition of a healthy society" (Montmarquet 1989: 26).

It is upon this mix of Israelite and Hellenic worlds that Christianity took root. The cosmology given in Genesis became the lens through which Christians viewed nature, with this view holding supreme until the beginning of geography in the 1800s and then the publication of Darwin's theory in 1859. The story of the Fall from Eden found in Genesis "became important to the Christian idea of nature because it is the source of the belief, widely held through the seventeenth century, that the fall of man has caused disorder in nature and a decline in its powers" (Glacken 1967: 154).

Another development of the fusion of the Genesis cosmology and Hellenism is that, "The theme that man, sinful though he be, occupies a position on earth comparable to that of God in the universe, as a personal possession, a realm of stewardship, has been one of the key ideas in the religious and philosophical thought of Western civilization regarding man's place in nature" (1967: 155). This idea of stewardship, and the cosmology offered by Genesis in general, has been decried by those like Lynn White, Jr. and Norm Habel who blame religion (and especially Christianity) for the current ecocrisis, while apologists like Calvin Dewitt and other

Christian ecotheologians interpret this passage as a challenge to be benign stewards. The latter reading is one that my research subjects at Koinonia (and equally some of my Jewish research subjects) employ to justify their religious agrarianism (see especially chapter five).

Agriculture and general human conceptions of nature in the Christian Middle Ages were built directly upon a Biblical worldview. Leading theologians like St. Basil and St. Augustine saw creation as an act of the Creator, so creation was thus viewed as an act of love. Although it is a place of sin and the goal is salvation, nature nonetheless is something to be studied and appreciated, with Augustine even teaching that nature is not evil, but rather it is humans who are evil. However, “It is a distinction that lies at the root of Christian belief and in the Christian attitude toward nature: one should never become so entranced with the beauties of nature that he [sic] mistakes them for anything other than creations like himself” (1967: 197). Therefore, while there was a physico-theology that developed during the patristic period, there was also the development of an ascetic, monastic, otherworldly view within Christianity that included feelings of contempt for nature, yet that saw manual labor as a source of pleasure.

Under St. Benard, St. Francis, and Alan of Lille, monastic communities developed and believed that through their labor it was possible to create paradise out of chaotic wilderness. The result of this worldview was the clearing of forests throughout Europe. At the same time, Muslim ideas about nature crept into the Christian West, building on dormant Aristotalean ideas of telos, so that by the time of St. Albert, ideas of a designed earth influenced viticulture, horticulture, and agriculture. Later in the Middle Ages, “the combination of technical skill in agriculture with the ability to provide spiritual

care made the monasteries following the Benedictine Rule very powerful in many parts of Europe” (1967: 308). Therefore the positive valuation of labor, the view of mankind as agent of God working to create a Christian civilization that guided souls towards salvation, and increasing technological mastery over nature all contributed to a reworking of landscapes across Europe with monasteries at the forefront. The result was the feudal, agricultural Christian kingdoms that dominated the region until the 1600s whence began the rise of mercantile capitalism and also the onset of the Protestant Reformation.

While this history is presented as linear, it was not without theological battles that influenced human-nature perceptions and interactions. The spread of Christianity was clearly met with resistance. Lastly, there were plagues, famines, floods, and droughts, so that the common peasant working agricultural fields did not necessarily occupy a world of abundance.

It should also be kept in mind that, “the productivity of [peasant] labor was fundamental to the vitality of the [medieval] economy as a whole” (Campbell 1995: 77). This is because domestic agriculture supplied the raw materials medieval industry needed, and also supplied towns with their fuel and provision needs. In other words, the Christian West (privileged because it is from this heritage that European colonizers and farmers of the Americas descended) was built upon the backs of peasant agriculture. Almost all immigrants to North America were Christian agriculturalists, either directly, or at most a few generations removed (except of course for mercantile capitalists, seaman, and those with city-based trades). Furthermore, all were intimately familiar with agricultural cycles and lifestyles, as the urban-rural split of industrial

agriculture is an invention built upon a modern day ideology and the abundance of cheap oil.

The theological gestalt of Christian Europe, during both its agricultural heyday, and then under the burgeoning auspices of the Industrial Revolution, was that, “Piety was an active ally compatible with...desired changes in nature. Creating a landscape fit for Christian settlement for conversion and colonizing was a reward of piety” (Glacken 1967: 293; see also Weber 2003). This worldview helped lead to a “conquest of paradise,” as European colonizers disrupted the “New World” with invasive flora and fauna and brought with them farming practices (and underlying conceptions of human-nature relations) that radically altered the landscapes of North America (Sale 2006). It is within this worldview that the technological developments of World War II and the discovery of oil as a source of energy led to the industrialization of agriculture and the current rebuttal of this mode of food production by Wendell Berry and other ecological agrarians. Lastly, it is within this milieu that Christian religious agrarians now operate, including my research subjects at Koinonia.

### **Ecological Ethics, Sustainability, and Christianity**

In this section I briefly explore emerging holistic human-nature concepts from within Western (and especially North American) Christian circles to highlight how Christian religious agrarianism in North America is a recent phenomenon made possible by recent developments in ecotheology. I also provide a few brief examples of North American Christians who are practicing forms of religious agrarianism that are similar to that practiced at Koinonia. These examples suggest that Christian religious agrarianism is a North American phenomenon in its nascent stages, but given the rise of ecotheological sophistication over the past thirty years coupled with the rise of creation

care and concepts of stewardship, it is likely that this phenomenon is only going to grow.

One of the leading ecotheological voices for developing a Christian ecological ethic is the recently deceased James Nash, who speaks about ecological sin and defines this as “a defiant disrespect or a deficient respect for the interdependent relationships of all creatures and their environments established in the covenant of creation, and an anthropocentric abuse of what God has made for frugal use” (1992: 119). By taking ecology and sustainability seriously, Nash argues that Christianity must redefine itself and reconfigure human-nature relations; this will lead to the redemption of humans from living in ecological sin. The path of ecological salvation rests on what Nash calls Ecological Dimensions of Love, which are based upon the dimensions of Christian love: beneficence, other-esteem, receptivity, humility, understanding, communion, and justice (1992). These dimensions of Christian love are on display at Koinonia and many of these values directly motivate the Christian agrarian practices of the community. As we will see, the justice component of love is one of the key themes uncovered during my research into religious agrarianism.

Another leading voice within Protestant environmentalist circles is Calvin DeWitt, a zoologist who founded the Au Sable Institute. DeWitt begins his treatise on his hoped-for Christian response to environmental issues (2007) with a quote from John Calvin. In the shared passage, written in 1554, Calvin is offering commentary on Genesis 2: 15. He writes,

The custody of the garden was given in charge to Adam, to show that we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition that, being content with the frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain. Let him who possesses a field, so partake

of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be inured by his negligence, but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated...let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved (2007: 5).

This passage is significant because it evidences a Reformation-era concept of responsible, holistic, Christian-centered agriculture; and because DeWitt is using it to show other Christians that the great theologians of their tradition were concerned about proper, healthy human-earth relations. In other words, if a luminary such as Calvin was concerned with “sustainable” farming, then is such a concern no less important for Christians today?

DeWitt answers in the affirmative, arguing that the Creator offers seven provisions to humans so we may have a bountiful life. The second of these is soil building, where “The dynamic fabric of roots, soil organisms, and soils that bind together the surface of the biosphere makes one stand in awe of God’s patience as Provider...Soil building helps to hold the whole world together. It helps support creation’s integrity by renewing the face of the earth” (2007: 17). Here we see an ecologically informed understanding of the importance of soil in maintaining sustainable societies, a view assiduously championed by ecological agrarians, and now, religious agrarians. In fact, like ecological agrarians, DeWitt laments that, “*Agriculture* is being displaced by *agribusiness*” (2007: 37). Such a view from Christianity is a recent development of the last ten to thirty years, made possible by the analyses of people like Wendell Berry, Wes Jackson, and Paul Thompson, as well as by organic luminaries like Howard and Rodale.

Even earlier evidence for placing what I am calling a religious agrarian concern for sustainable agriculture in North American Christianity can be found in an edited book titled *Farming the Lord's Land: Christian Perspectives on American Agriculture* (Lutz 1980). For example, in this volume, C. Dean Freudenberger, an agronomist and professor in the School of Theology at Claremont, writes that agriculture must be sustainable and just. He offers five suggestions that can move America towards a sustainable agriculture: a science of limits, an understanding of the social and environmental impact of farming methods, the adoption of bio-intensive agriculture based on crop rotation and biodiversity, smaller farm sizes, and just international food relations (1980). Freudenberger shares a profoundly religious agrarian concept at the end of this list, itself one of the motivating values that inspire the Christian agrarians of my research. He writes, "Land is a gift in covenant. It is God's creation, not ours. It is a corporate gift for all generations. As Christians who are trustees of this endowment, we have freely accepted the invitation to achieve justice and sustainability in the management of the land and its water resources" (1980: 141). Such a sentiment thoroughly imbues the religious agrarian worldview of many of the Christians I researched and encountered at Koinonia.

Given the back-to-the-land movements of the 1960s and 70s, coupled with the Jesus People movement of the same time, it is certainly plausible and highly likely that similar Christian-based concepts of holistic farming and land stewardship were already present in North America at the time of Freudenberger's writing. However, with the perceived increasing evidence of the deleterious effects of industrial agriculture, coupled with the continuing ecocrisis, Christian attention to environmental issues has

grown by leaps and bounds since the Rio Earth Summit in 1989. This growth has resulted in recent eloquent and sophisticated theological treatises on topics from sustainable agriculture (Graham 2005) to climate care (Spencer, et al, 2009) to a whole gamut of Christian perspectives on a variety of interconnected environmental issues (Bingham, ed. 2009).

Moreover, with the onset of ecotheology and religious environmentalism and the flourishing of an American sustainable food culture that is penetrating far into the mainstream, Christian communities the country over are rapidly developing religious agrarian values. This is therefore resulting in a plethora of Christian religious agrarianism being put into lived practice around the country today. Antecedents exist in the Shakers (Jensen 2004) and in the long and continued history of the Catholic Social Worker movement, with movement houses often times having organic gardens that supply them with produce (as seen, for example, at Haley House in Boston, Massachusetts). However, it is predominantly the last ten years that have seen a proliferation of Christian communities and institutions engaging in sustainable farming, from Anathoth Community Garden in North Carolina (Bahnson 2006) to Lamb of God farm in Illinois (Moll 2007) to a backyard church garden in ??? (Rossi 2008). There are many other examples to be found, and it is within this larger religious agrarian milieu that Koinonia is situated. Because they offer permaculture workshops, participate in a variety of lived networks, and host Schools for Conversion, Koinonia is situated to be a leading voice and exemplar of Christian groups attempting to put religious agrarian values into practices.

I now move to chapter three where I introduce Hazon and Congregation Shearith Israel in order to advance my argument and to enable a rich comparison between contemporary Jewish and Christian religious agrarian practices. After chapter three, I enter into an analysis of my fieldwork, arguing that the practices of Koinonia and Hazon reflect the greening of North American religious values within various subtraditions, and especially the integration of sustainable agrarian ideals and religious agrarian values of locality, health, and justice.

CHAPTER 4  
HAZON AND JEWISH RELIGIOUS AGRARIANISM

**The Spirit of Adamah**

[E]ven though our ancestors didn't know this, and wouldn't have said it this way, our tradition compels us, mitzvot, obligations, the Torah compels us to be sustainable in our agriculture. It compels us to take care of farmers and to not put small farms out of business...I think that there will be a growing trend towards ethics, environmentalism, ecology; eco-Judaism is going to continue to grow, continue to be influential on the Jewish community. Tremendously influential, I think. More than most people recognize today.

—Rabbi Joshua Hillel<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I begin with a brief overview of the role American Jews have played in American politics. This overview helps to further one of my larger arguments about these “leading edges” of certain politically active American religious groups in regards to sustainable food issues and their potential to impact both agricultural policies and (at least perceived to be) environmentally friendly lifestyle choices. I then turn to an exploration of Judaism and ecology, briefly outlining some of the key Jewish approaches (both textual and organizational) to environmental problems that have emerged from within Judaism.<sup>2</sup> Couched within this analysis will be a brief history of Jewish agricultural farming communities that have existed in America. After this I discuss the more environmentally progressive manifestations of American Judaism, paying particular attention to Hazon. With this in place, I end the chapter by turning my attention to my case study exemplar, Congregation Shearith Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from a fictitious name for a research subject.

<sup>2</sup> Judaism, like most religions, is a very broad tradition, and it is equally as accurate to say “Judaisms.” As the Jewish studies and rabbinic scholar Michael Satlow explains, “Judaism is not going to become any single thing, and Jews will continue to struggle with their tradition, using these resources to construct meaningful Jewish life within cultures and societies that rarely are characterized by a single outlook. Judaism tomorrow will be like Judaism today and yesterday—a family of communities struggling to make sense of a common identity and tradition” (2006: 291). This point obviously holds for Christianity, as well, which has significantly more followers and subtraditions.

The reader should keep in mind that, consistent with my lived network approach, religion adapts and changes on the ground to meet the needs of practitioners. As environmental agrarian concerns create hybrid spaces within communities of faith, it should be understood that these communities will eventually change various aspects of their respective religious traditions. Judaism in particular has a long history of flexibility (and counter history of orthodoxy), extending back to the Rabbinical codification of Halakhic law codes; as Burton Visotzky articulates, “This spirit of continuing change in Jewish law [via] Oral Torah [means the creation of Judaism is] an ongoing and not static process” (1999: 76). My research suggests that this process of continual change within Jewish lifeways and teachings is now responding to sustainable farming issues, as Jewish communities redefine what it means to keep kosher; install organic garden plots in backyards of homes, Jewish Community Centers, and synagogues; and reinterpret legal and rabbinic tradition in light of contemporary environmental sciences as these apply to agricultural issues.

### **North American Politics and Judaism**

American Jews are disproportionately politically active compared to almost all other faith-based segments of the American republic. Political scientists Kenneth Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown posit that this is a result of the social status of Jews; as a group, Jews face possible persecution and anti-Semitic policies and behaviors and this sense of social marginality influences their political activism.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Jewish political activism in America tends to support liberal politics, even though most Jews are

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<sup>3</sup> Such an analysis for why Jews vote for liberal policies is challenged by Rabbi Irving Greenberg, who points out that Jews have been accepted and assimilated into the national collectivity of America at larger and larger scales beginning in the 1950s and 60s, as evidenced in part by a “soaring intermarriage rate” (1999: 37).

Caucasian and wealthy, two indicators that typically signify conservative, Republican voting trends. Despite these demographics, “many Jews actually regard liberalism as the very essence of Judaism itself” (2007: 274).

Wald and Calhoun-Brown shed other insights that provide explanatory power for my overall argument about religiously motivated lived networks of liberal environmental activism devoted to both sustainable agriculture and larger agrarian issues. As political scientists, they use statistics, polls, voting records, and survey results to understand voting behavior and political activities of religious citizens. One of their findings is that religious activists tend to focus their energy on public policy issues. This political activism tends to be motivated by a mix of group identity, group status, theology, worldview, and institutional interests (although religious leaders tend to embody the latter). I argue throughout that values, and especially sustainable agrarian values, are both shaped by and embedded within religious groups and networks. Thus, it is important to recognize that liberal Judaism has within itself a high level of grassroots religious activism. This activism is readily seen in the organizational structure and political activities of Hazon, which range from bike rides devoted to raising awareness about environmental issues like climate destabilization to supporting Community Supported Agriculture partnerships.

Furthermore, regarding activism, including religious activism more broadly, Wald and Calhoun-Brown’s work suggests that local community activists “are harnessing the potential of religious faith to organize people to address the material realities of their lives...Working through congregations, these organizers use religious practices, worldview, and culture to empower people to address the concerns of their

communities” (2007: 137-8). This sort of organization to address community concerns (and for the purpose of agrarian concerns, this community is extended especially to the soil) is evident in the local practices of New Monastics like Koinonia, and in the food campaigning undertaken by leaders within Hazon. An example of the latter is addressing material issues of food poverty (nutritional, environmental, and ethical) by creating lived networks that join CSA farmers with synagogues and temples around the country while also advocating for Jewish CSA members to become politically active in local food politics. It is helpful to understand the progressive Jewish food networks as exemplified by Hazon in light of the political analysis of religious activism offered by Wald and Calhoun-Brown.

However, there is more to Jewish liberalism than simply fear of possible anti-semitic, Conservative voting regimes. Rabbi Sidney Schwarz, founder of the Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, delineates a strong tradition of liberal, ethical concerns within the American Jewish tradition. As he explains, “Few commitments unite Jews as much as a commitment to create a more just and equitable society” (2006: xxi). Schwarz recognizes a tension within American Jewry along the lines studied by Wald and Calhoun-Brown. He terms the fear of persecution “Exodus consciousness,” which is a trend within Jewish history of Jews to solely be concerned about their survival as a persecuted and chosen people to the detriment of engaging society at large and working on social justice issues for all people. However, at the other extreme is the Jewish capacity to generate, hold, and embody what Schwarz calls “Sinai consciousness.” This consciousness is a definable trend within Jewish history to

develop and work towards universalistic and altruistic ideals that apply to all people, regardless of faith and nationality.

Schwarz identifies a key Biblical injunction that both defines the purpose of Judaism and inspires Sinai consciousness. This is the injunction found in Genesis 18:19, when Yahweh tells Abraham to *la'asot tzedakah umishpat*, which in English can be translated into the mandate to “extend the boundaries of righteousness and justice in the world” (2006: 4-5). Furthermore, Schwarz’s exploration of traditional Jewish concerns for social justice includes a strident critique of American affluence and consumerism that is in solidarity with similar critiques levied by both New Monastics and Robert Bellah. This critique and the mandate to do what is right and just that is found respectively within both rabbinic and Biblical Judaism is reflected in the liberal voting behaviors and active social justice lobbying of American Jews.

Schwarz identifies seven core values of the rabbinic tradition that are related to social justice and which have influenced the liberal political activism of American Jews (2006: chapter 8). Some of these include *chesed*, or loving-kindness and compassion; *kavod habriot*, or recognizing the dignity of all creatures because they are created by God; *bakesh shalom*, or to seek peace and pursue it; and *emet*, or inner and outer integrity and truth. A variety of these same social justice concerns blend into Jewish environmental concerns, including loving kindness and compassion (towards farm workers, farmers, and non-human life forms found on farms); recognizing the dignity of all life forms so that traditional concepts of kosher are being challenged (see especially chapters six and seven); and the effort to match inner values with outer practice, so it is possible to live a life of integrity in regards to religious agrarian issues.

Schwarz offers one further insight into Jewish culture and politics in America (broadly speaking), as well as an ambitious claim about Jewish history: “Judaism brought into the world the notion of social responsibility” (2006: 249). This history of Jewish concerns for social justice and social responsibility manifest in Jewish sustainable food circles as quintessential agrarian concerns (see, for example, the quote at the beginning of this chapter from one of my research subjects).

### **Judaism, Ecology, and Relationships with the Land**

In this section I outline in broad strokes various Jewish relationships (material and ethical/religious/legal) with the land, placing more emphasis on recent historical manifestations found within a distinct American context.<sup>4</sup> This will help give context to the emergence of Hazon and to Jewish religious agrarianism. To begin to understand modern, and especially North American, Jewish ideas of and relationships with the environment, it is important to have a brief overview of Jewish history. As early Israelites were a farming people, agriculture played a significant role in the Hebrew ritual calendar. Many commentators note the agrarian basis and agricultural meanings of a variety of prayers and mandated practices found within the Hebrew Bible and early Israelite religion. In general, food played a large role in early Hebrew religion as well as in structuring social relations, including relations with Yahweh.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hiebert (2008), Davis (2009), and Hillel (2007) all provide excellent analyses of early Hebrew relationships with the land and provide hermeneutical analyses of early Biblical teachings regarding ancient Israelite landscapes.

<sup>5</sup> This point is convincingly argued by Gillian Feeley-Harnik in *The Lord's Table: The Meaning of Food in Early Judaism and Christianity* (1994). See especially chapter four, “Food Symbolism in the Judaic Tradition,” including the discussion on page 72 of the language of food in early Judaism. See also Davis (2009) and her exploration of early Hebrew agrarianism; Comins (2007); and the following from Jeremy Benstein: “There are few elements that are as connected in people’s minds and lives with Judaism and Jewish culture as food...all holy days and celebrations have an obligatory festive meal at their center, most festivals have specific foods associated with them, and most important, the dietary requirements of Judaism, the laws of *kashrut*, are a central focus of traditional Jewish observance” (2006: 150).

Jewish relations to the land are also shaped by the fact that Jews have in large part had to define their identity within minority enclaves set amidst and amongst violent anti-Semitic settings.<sup>6</sup> For example, Jews in Byzantium suffered under oppression from early Christians, who had turned their own rage of being oppressed by Rome onto their neighbors. Such rage resulted in Jews facing growing oppression from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE in Palestine; for example, in the Palestinian kingdom Jews could not intermarry nor own slaves.

These arrangements of empire precipitated “a first step in the alienation of Jews from the land, a process that ended with their becoming a nearly completely urban people in the Middle Ages” (Scheindlin 1998: 65). Once they became an almost thoroughly urbanized people living in ghettos, Jews (and by this time it was rabbinic Judaism within diasporic communities) turned inward to both the Written and Oral Torah. This overall historical process of Jews turning away from an agrarian past (Davis 2009) was exacerbated when Arabs conquered Jerusalem in the eighth century. As Scheindlin explains, “Conditions under Islamic rule favored urban life and trade, and Jews were affected by this empire-wide trend, becoming ever more urbanized and drawn away from agriculture and toward commerce” (1998: 76).

A third historical arrangement, the lack of land titles, further removed the majority of Jews from agricultural livelihoods, customs, and lifeways. In medieval Europe, the great majority of Jews living under feudal arrangements “either never came into possession of land or were sooner or later driven from it” (Scheindlin 1998: 100). Living in such a context would have made it difficult for European Jews to develop in-depth

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<sup>6</sup> For a powerful exploration of this topic, including how the term Judeo-Christian is extremely problematic, see Schwartz (1997).

agricultural practices, identities, and customs, so that the idea of “place” would have retreated to the periphery of Jewish concern. In part the contemporary secular and then religious move towards Zionism, including a strong love of the land of Israel and urge to farm this land for self-sufficiency and Jewish identity, has been shaped by this history of displacement from Middle Eastern, North African, and European farmlands.

This brief overview of Jewish displacement from the land does not capture the intricate complexities, politics, and counter-examples that without doubt equally constitute Jewish history. Nonetheless, and at a scale that far exceeds the historical relationship Christians and Muslims have had with the land and agriculture, Jews were systematically kept from developing a similar political, ethical, and living religious relationship with various Middle Eastern, North African, and European landscapes. This history shaped Jewish religion and therefore contemporary Jewish environmental concerns. Furthermore, it has directly contributed to the reason North American Jews are the most active in developing Jewish environmental ethics.

Jews in North America fuse scholarly, rabbinical, and lay approaches to the ecologic crisis within a larger North American environmentalist milieu built upon the legacies of Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Earth Day, back-to-the-land, and environmental justice movements. As the leading Jewish environmental campaigner of Israel Jeremy Benstein writes, “the new creation of Jewish environmentalism is largely a product of North American Judaism” (2006: 211).<sup>7</sup> These North American Jews, along with Jews from around the world, are finding rich resources within this topophilically

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<sup>7</sup> For an in-depth exploration of the unique history of, key players within (including especially Abraham Joshua Heschel and Arthur Waskow), and leading groups that have shaped North American Jewish environmentalism, see Seidenberg (2005). Meanwhile, Jewish scholar Hava Tirosh-Samuelson writes of “the uneasy relationship between Judaism and ecology” that currently exists in Israel (2006: 32).

(Tuan 1974) disenfranchised history that nonetheless speaks to an ongoing dialogue of Jews with their God regarding “eco-mitzvot.” While such a move is a reinterpretation of tradition based on religious environmentalist concerns and not a traditional interpretation of “Jewish religion,” it is nonetheless a valid move and gives evidence to how religions morph and change based on the lived needs of followers (Tomalin 2002; Mack 2001; McCutcheon 1997; Gross 2000; Vasquez 2011).<sup>8</sup>

### **Jewish Agrarianism in North America**

Despite the above history, there were indeed Jewish farming enclaves in Europe, Russia, and the Middle East; however, most Jews in North America nonetheless emigrated from urban Ashkenazic regions of Europe. However, once in America, Jews—whether Sephardic or Ashkenazic--settled in cities and spread westward, in the process creating numerous intentional Jewish communal agricultural experiments over the past one hundred and fifty years at various sites throughout America (Bartelt 1997).

The first Jewish agricultural colony was Ararat, founded in 1820, while the peak of Jewish agricultural colonies occurred from 1881 through approximately 1940, when during that time period over one hundred colonies were created. The earliest of these agricultural experiments were started by German Jews, but it was with the onset of Russian pogroms that an effort to relocate, fund, and settle Russian Jewish immigrants across the United States in agricultural colonies began in earnest. This movement coincided with an increasing urbanization of America, creating access to abundant farming acreage, often in remote locations spread throughout the country. As Moses Rischin explains, “Our understanding of the first era of Jewish continentalism would be

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<sup>8</sup> Or as religion and nature scholars Bauman, et al explain, religions are going through an “ecological reformation” that includes steps of reform, recovery, and outright replacement (2011: 60).

incomplete...without some appreciation of the most dramatic, inspiring, and disastrous venture in the whole history of the Jewish westward migration: the founding of agricultural colonies” (1991: 37).

Overall, three basic problems led to the downfall of almost every attempt at creating these Jewish farming communities. These were “lack of farming expertise, poor soil, and insufficient funds” (1997: 354). Despite these failures, as Robert Goldberg points out,

Few American Jews realize...that they need not look back thousands of years to their biblical ancestors nor across thousands of miles to the Israeli *kibbutz* to come face to face with their *Jewish agrarian heritage*, for no group in modern America was more obsessed with the agrarian idea in their fashion than their forefathers who between 1881 and 1915 founded over forty agricultural colonies [sic] across the length and breadth of the American continent. This collective effort in America was ideologically inseparable from an international Jewish Back to the Soil Movement that saw Jews establish dozens of farming settlements that extended from Argentina to Palestine, from Russia to Canada as well as in America and elsewhere (1991: 69-70; my italics).

Goldberg continues, positing that, “despite [their] failure[s], the utopian dreams that informed many of the pioneers who invested their lives in [Jewish] agricultural colonies are a tribute to the social idealism that has illumined many phases of American Jewish history and that has made its most pronounced contribution to the labor and socialist movements” (1991: 68). This social idealism is now interacting with and contributing to environmental and modern day religious agrarian movements.

In other words, the historic legacy of North American liberal Jewish politics and active engagement with social movements has created the ferment for the development of the robust, emergent Jewish religious agrarianism that my dissertation explores. Besides this political and agricultural background, there also exists a sophisticated and burgeoning Jewish (and especially North American) approach to environmental issues.

The environmental ethics of this movement have equally helped lay the groundwork for the Jewish agrarianism of Hazon and the various synagogues and temples that join CSA partnerships under their aegis.

### **Jewish Environmental Thought**

Judaism includes the potential for a strong, anti-environmentalist strand of thinking. This is exemplified especially in Orthodox circles, where midrashim and halakhic reasoning tend to privilege a male-centered legal tradition that sees Yahweh's creation not as a biocentric place of reverence but as a creation where an ongoing Divine covenant with humans was put into place. Within this legalistic and religious perspective, human action and fidelity to God's laws is paramount and concern for nature can be interpreted as idolatry. Nonetheless, "Biblical law specified in great detail the proper treatment of the soil, animals, and vegetation of the land of Israel in order to maintain Israel's religious ritual purity and moral integrity" (Tirosh-Samuelson 2006: 27).

With the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the development of rabbinic Judaism, Torah became the center of Jewish life and its concern with ritual purity and moral integrity moved from the inner sanctum of the Temple to how Jews were to live in diaspora. Such a privileging of Torah meant that, "rabbinic Jews would experience the natural world through the prism of Torah" (Tirosh-Samuelson 2006: 28). The twofold pressures of both living in secluded ghettos away from farm land and the fear of idolatry contributed to a prism that viewed the natural world to be, at best, a peripheral concern for most rabbis.

This understanding of rabbinic Jewish history, coupled with the history of displacement from the land discussed earlier, leads to a second starting point in regards to contemporary Jewish environmental thought. Because rabbinic Judaism has its

focus (religious, legal, intellectual, social) on Torah, the inclination to “mine” Jewish texts so as to apologize for Jewish complicity in the ecological crisis and to provide evidence of Jewish environmental concerns has been tempting. However, this approach leads to what Bradley Artson describes as a “contextless collage of Rabbinic and Biblical sayings” that avoids “the more comprehensive consideration of how Jewish tradition might respond to the larger question of living responsibly with nature” in today’s world (2001: 162). In this, Judaism is not different from other text-based traditions, including varieties of Christianities that privilege the Bible. Rather than a decontextualized, apologetic, externally-pressured-to-look-for green insights, and finally meaningless mining approach to Jewish environmental thought, Artson argues that Jews need to create a second stage of contemporary Jewish environmental thought,

one which explores helpful conceptions of the Earth and humanity from within the context established by Jewish thought and writings. Although our tradition may say little directly about air pollution or about the polar ice caps, it does dwell at great length on how Jews are to live with the soil, on the sanctity of the Earth and its produce, the holiness of one particular place (*Eretz Yisrael*), and on particular times (*Shabbat*, *Yovel*, and the *Shemittah*). Perhaps if we begin with intrinsically Jewish categories we might construct a Jewish ecology, enriching the traditional structure of Judaism with a consciousness of environmental issues rather than simply tailoring Jewish religion to fit within the procrustean bed of a dismembered ecological Judaism (2001:162).

Thus, a vibrant, articulate, contemporary Jewish environmental ethic must first speak to a unique Jewish culture and history, rather than plunder this culture and history to find token passages and legal examples that can be applied to larger environmental concerns. According to Artson, such a second stage will create a true, even possibly a systematic, Jewish environmental ethic that is firmly grounded within Jewish cultures, cosmologies, and ontologies. His redaction also hints at some of the key agrarian

concerns shared by members of Hazon and Koinonia: proper living relations with the soil, the sanctity of Earth and its caloric bounty, and the centrality of place.

A central aspect of this Jewish cosmology is Israel, the land promised to Jews from God. However, because of the diaspora, the written and oral Torah are both central to Jewish cosmologies. Thus, while God commands various mitzvot, Jews are also obligated to say blessings (*berakhot*) of gratitude for the various created gifts God has promised and shared with his creation. Such historical and material gifts begin with the literal land of Israel and its bounty as described in the Hebrew Bible. The Torah, Artson explains, “prescribes gratitude to God as Sovereign of Israel; the Rabbis extend that response to the world” (2001: 167).

From this rabbinic perspective, the earth is the Lord’s, but by saying blessings, the various created objects of the earth encountered outside of the Holy Land of Israel are made sacred and, consistent with the original covenant of Israel as the promised land, are thus given over to Jews to use. This legal tradition of saying blessings “lent significance to the soil, to what emerges from the ground, and to the sanctity of all ground everywhere. The categories of the *berakhot* themselves valorize the Earth as a sacred and sustaining presence...They also enforce the insight that a sacred place is anywhere that life can thrive, that a sacred time is anytime Jews gather to eat and pray” (2001: 167-8).

Arston’s historical analysis of Jewish blessings and how this process widened the circle of what landbases could be counted as Holy helps create an internal Jewish ecological ethic, and one that can be argued is explicitly agrarian. We have seen that one of the guiding goals of environmental agrarianism is precisely to create sustainable

farms where a diversity of life can thrive; according to Arston's interpretation of the rabbinic tradition of reciting various Jewish blessings, these farms (especially if farmed by Jews) become hallowed ground if and when properly blessed. Such sacrality is compounded when the food grown on the farms is blessed, and is compounded further when this blessed food is consumed with and prayed over by other Jews.

If we build upon Arston's argument for a "second stage" Jewish environmental ethic/environmental thought, then we are able to return to the Jewish political tradition alluded to earlier in this chapter. This is a tradition that compels Jews to strive for justice. As Richard Schwartz explains, "Jews are required to protest against injustice and to try to agitate for change even when successful implementation appears very difficult" (2002: 3). Given the various issues of justice in regards to food production—in other words, taking seriously environmental agrarian critiques about how farm workers are treated, how farm animals are treated, how the soil is treated, and how farmers are treated in today's corporate controlled food system—then according to this line of reasoning, Jews are required to take food justice issues seriously. The epigraph for this chapter details one rabbi's belief that more and more Jews will precisely take environmental justice issues more seriously in the coming decades.

Of course, this is an ideal position for which Schwartz argues, built upon the lineage of Shabbat 54b found in the Babylonian Talmud. This passage states that, "Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions of his own family and does not do so is punished [liable, held responsible] for the transgressions of his family. Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions of the people of his community and does not do so is punished for the transgressions of his community. Whoever is

able to protest against the transgressions of the entire world and does not do so is punished for the transgressions of the entire world” (2002: 1). Given the inherent complexities of scale, complicity, and interconnectedness of environmental justice issues, it is impossible for any one person, regardless of faith, to always act in a just way. However, using food as a locus of putting into practice a Jewish environmental ethic allows for an attempt to be made. The Jewish concern for justice does indeed motivate many people who have joined Hazon sponsored CSA arrangements.

Let me briefly return to Richard Schwartz’s book, as it is a sustained attempt to develop Jewish environmental ethics given the ecological crises facing the planet today. According to Schwartz, Judaism contains within it strong Biblical, prophetic, and legal statements that require Jews to be actively involved in justice. Jews should be concerned with ethical issues that range from loving one’s neighbor, as seen in Leviticus 19:18 and Hillel’s version of the Golden Rule (what Schwartz calls in Hebrew *gemilut chasadim*, or “loving kindness”), to social justice and the need to both act righteously (*tzedakah*) and give charity, to concerns about peace, international relations, hunger, and of course ecological issues.

Regarding environmental justice issues, Schwartz argues that, “Many fundamental Torah principles express and make concrete the Biblical statement, ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’ (Psalms 24:1)” (2002: 39). According to Schwartz, this statement means that humans (and especially Jews) are to be co-workers with God in helping to preserve His creation since everything belongs to God. Another passage that Schwartz alludes to, and to which many other leading Jewish environmental thinkers use as well, is Deuteronomy 20: 19-20, which contains the

prohibition to not unnecessarily waste or destroy (*bal taschit*) anything of value, including especially fruit trees.<sup>9</sup> With this midrash of Torah, we see within the rabbinic tradition a burgeoning development of a concern for place. This concern is shared by Jewish religious agrarians, as seen in chapters five, six, and seven.

The emerging analyses of Jewish tradition that support these concerns are occurring because corporations have commodified the planet and have lobbied governments to craft Free Trade Agreements that buttress a global consumer economy, such that the planet is in peril. Schwartz's prescription for this diagnosis is one "[b]ased on biblical values of 'The earth is the Lord's' and *bal tashchit*. [Jews] must work to change the current system, which is based primarily on greed and maximization of profits and entices people to amass excessive material goods, thus causing great ecological damage. We must work for approaches that put primary emphasis on protection of our vital ecosystems" (2002: 52-3). This prescription and analysis of the current ecocrisis is consistent with those put forth by environmental agrarians and advocates of sustainable farming practices. It is an analysis contextualized, however, within a Biblical, and especially Jewish, context. It should be noted that such exegesis of Jewish scripture is proliferating and is helping to marry religious and environmental agrarian concerns within the lived practices of Jews in North America. We will encounter these calls for justice, as well as other explicit Jewish environmental ethics, in later chapters, as these are driving concerns for my research subjects.

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<sup>9</sup> For a strident criticism of how this passage has been taken out of context (Biblical and legal) and been turned into a clarion call for Jewish environmental stewardship, see Elion Schwartz's chapter, "*Bal Taschit*: A Jewish Environmental Precept" (2001).

## **A North American Jewish Vision of Transformation**

Jewish environmentalism today is generating a more visible presence, as reflected in the formation, development, and growing presence of Hazon, which has quickly become one of North America's leading voices for Jewish environmental concerns and the largest Jewish environmental group in the country in terms of membership. Beginning as a small non-profit in the Northeast in 2000, Hazon now has main offices in New York City and affiliate offices in San Francisco. The birth of founder Nigel Savage, Hazon currently has a Board of Directors that includes various Rabbis and Doctors, an Advisory Board, Chairs of various Hazon campaigns, Rabbinical Scholars, and a Staff of almost twenty full-time employees. Hazon's catchphrase signals the group's anchor in Judaism and reads, "The Torah is a commentary on the world, and the world is a commentary on the Torah."

The two main campaigns that define Hazon's work are bike rides (held in New York, San Francisco, and Israel) to raise awareness about environmental issues and to contribute to the emotional, physical, and environmental health of Jews; and work on helping American Jews and the larger American society develop robust, sustainable food habits and networks of sustainable agriculture. Both of these issues are of central import to Savage, who is both an avid biker and who supports the ideals and goals of sustainable agriculture.

To this end Hazon has published a sourcebook that outlines and defines their vision of sustainable food systems, called *Food for Thought: Hazon's Sourcebook on Jews, Food and Contemporary Life* (2009). The book highlights Hazon's work on sustainable food issues, with eight chapters on: Learning Torah; Gratitude, Mindfulness and Blessing our Food; Kashrut; Bread and Civilization; Eating Together; Health, Bodies

and Nourishment; Food and Place; and lastly, Food and Ethics: The Implications of our Food Choices. As can be seen, many of these chapters address explicit agrarian concerns and represent concerns shared by my research subjects who are involved with Hazon sponsored CSA partnerships. These are also concerns shared by my members of Koinonia, but for the Jews I research they are concerns germane to a unique Jewish tradition (see chapters five, six, seven, and conclusion). The overlap that definitely exists in the Jews and Christians I research occurs as a result of environmental agrarian concerns, and from the growing ecological reformation found within many pockets of the world's "dominant" religions, including Judaism and Christianity.

A fellow of Hazon's Food Program, Natasha Aronson, included a cover letter with my purchased copy of *Food for Thought* that asserts:

Rooted in more than 3,000 years of Jewish tradition about food, Hazon has inspired a growing conversation in the Jewish community about what we eat, where our food comes from, and how our food choices are so closely linked to our personal health and the health of our planet. Hazon is using food as a platform for Jewish education, drawing on the wisdom of our Jewish texts and sages for guidance as we confront contemporary food and environmental issues. Our food programs are designed to fulfill the Hazon mission: creating a healthier and more sustainable Jewish community, and a healthier and more sustainable world for all. People of all ages, from across the spectrum of Jewish practice and denominations—as well as those who are unaffiliated with the Jewish community and those from other faiths—participate in our food programs (author's emphasis added).

This communication legitimates Hazon's work by including it within the larger 3,000-year tradition of Judaism. It also explicitly mentions the "contemporary food and environmental issues" that define environmental agrarianism, including its religious aspects. This agrarianism, strongly associated with Wendell Berry, heavily criticizes the global industrial food economy and attendant fertilizer and other chemical input

monoculture farming practices that critics claim are destroying farming communities and soils. Furthermore, the passage articulates the mission that has guided Hazon since it was formed in 2000: creating healthier and more sustainable Jewish communities and a healthier and more sustainable global community.

It is important to realize that Hazon is not isolated from other Jewish organizations. Rather, its members and leaders are active in a variety of Jewish communities and form active networks with other faith communities, environmental NGOs, politicians, and local governing bodies. Hazon identifies as a progressive, articulate, environmental group, but one that is thoroughly grounded in Judaism. Members include Orthodox, liberal Reform, Conservative, Renewal, and cultural Jews, and is even welcoming of atheists and agnostics (though the latter tend to be in the extreme minority of members and typically have a Jewish background).

Such inclusivity of Jews from various backgrounds led Hazon founder Nigel Savage to assert that Hazon “works to create a healthier and more sustainable Jewish community—as a step toward a healthier and more sustainable world for all” (2007: xiii). To further the creation of more sustainable food practices, Hazon organizes CSAs so local, sustainable farmers can find customers and local Jews (and non-Jews, for it is not necessary to be a Jew to join a Hazon sponsored CSA). They also organize and host an annual Food Conference (which I attended in December of 2009) dedicated to exploring sustainable food issues from a Jewish perspective. Hazon also hosts a food blog called *The Jew and the Carrot* ([www.jcarrot.org](http://www.jcarrot.org)), which contains a clearing-house of reflection about and analysis of sustainable food issues, written by Jewish bloggers. Lastly, as the Xerox I received from Aronson describes, Hazon has created the “Jewish

Food Education Network[,], a network of Jewish food education resources, curricula and teacher training including *Min Ha'Aretz*, an 18-lesson interdisciplinary curriculum about food and Jewish tradition for students (typically grades 5-9), a complementary curriculum for families, and additional training and resources on *Food for Thought*.”

Sustainable food issues have become Hazon’s main concern. Efforts to advance this concern include the education of young Jewish children by teaming up with Jewish Day Schools, the development of CSA partnerships, and the creation of a vibrant on-line Jewish food community at *The Jew and the Carrot*. Taken together, Hazon is directly speaking to and meeting the growing demand and needs of North American Jews who are concerned about sustainable food issues, so that Hazon has become the leading voice for sustainable Jewish food issues in North America.<sup>10</sup>

This concern and call is shared in the Preface to *Food for Thought*, which states, in very agrarian yet equally very Jewish terms, that

How we eat is an extension of who we are. How we consume is a central manifestation of our relationship to the world...The conversation about how

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<sup>10</sup> One of my research subjects, Rabbi Greenberg of Temple B’nai Israel in Gainesville, FL, was not so impressed with Hazon, or at least with Hazon’s self-image and narrative that it presents to the Jewish and non-Jewish public. In his words, “I don’t really see it [i.e. Hazon’s Jewish environmentalism and food lobbying] as a new strain. I don’t think it’s really new at all. I think it is really a continuation of something that’s been going on for a long time. I think what is new is there’s new language and there’s a new generation, but every ten years there’s a new generation. When I was a student at UF [the University of Florida] thirty-five years ago now I remember we had a seder, a Passover seder we did at Hillel that was vegetarian and was connected with the earth and we did it sitting on the floor. That was thirty-five years ago, that didn’t start now. And I’m sure that thirty-five years prior to that there was the same thing going on. Every generation takes these issues into their own language and into their own consciousness and reimagines these things as being new issues. And I actually don’t think they’re new issues... I think these things were always present in the Jewish community. What’s different about Hazon, I mean why is Hazon growing? Hazon is growing only because people who are involved in these issues prior were involved in secular organizations. Hazon took through their bike rides and charismatic leader put a brand name on what was already there. People ate hamburgers before McDonalds; you can’t say McDonalds invented sandwiches. And I don’t think Hazon invented environmentalism. They may want to think they invented it; they didn’t invent it. They just gave a label that was very convenient and they branded it in such a way that people all the sudden became aware. But it’s branding and marketing is more what they did than really create a movement. I think the movement was there. I think you could see this echo in previous Jewish generations.”

we eat in a way that is enjoyable, sustainable and ethical; in a way that engages our families and our tradition, and also the unique circumstances of the world that we live in—that conversation, in our view, enriches Jewish life and makes the world a better place (2009: xi).

In other words, Hazon takes seriously the starting premise of this dissertation: eating matters. Furthermore, the choices of what we eat, how we eat it, and how the food that we eat is grown all assume religious significance for religious agrarians, including for the Jewish religious agrarian exemplars Hazon. For these modern religious agrarians, food choices that exhibit concerns about justice, ethics, and sustainability are being grafted onto existing Jewish traditions and lifeways so that Jewish identity is enriched. Moreover, this bottom-up re-imagination of tradition captures the essence of lived religion in action. It also emplaces Jewish religious agrarians in the trophic pyramid of calories; in other words, Hazon's Jewish dietary choices reflect cosmological views about values and practices in regards to the natural world, and especially the goals of sustainable agriculture. By taking sustainable agricultural issues seriously and merging these with Judaism, Jewish religious agrarians in Hazon are recognizing that they are part of a more-than-human world, and one where agricultural production is seen to have either positive or deleterious impacts.

The Preface continues, stating

And the interplay between the two elements [agrarian and religious] of that conversation is one that we want especially to encourage...we share a love of food and of learning, and the deep belief that learning about food and doing so through the double prism of Jewish tradition and contemporary challenges is vital to the creation of healthier relationships to food in the broadest sense...Our dream for the whole world? Abundant and healthy food for everyone, food that isn't produced at the expense of people or the earth, food that builds communities and encourages us to be our best selves (2009: xi).

The sustainable farming practices supported by Hazon participants are indeed inspired by their desire to be both their best Jewish selves, and also to be active participants in building local food culture and communities that nourish farmers, soils, and bodies. By entering into a living conversation about these issues, the Jewish religious agrarians of Hazon are helping to change the politics, religious identities, and food habits of the North American Jewish foodscape.

### **Shearith Israel**

Shearith Israel is an egalitarian Conservative synagogue that occupies a brick building built in 1904 located near the Briarcliff Campus of Emory University in Atlanta, a part of the city that is mostly affluent and Caucasian.<sup>11</sup> Located down a tree lined side street and surrounded by larger family homes, the synagogue is in the midst of renovating its building, installing eco-friendly light bulbs throughout their campus and flush-free urinals in the men's bathroom. Part of the campus is rented out two days a week to a Jewish children's school, to which they serve kosher meals made in a kosher kitchen maintained on site. Within three miles of the synagogue are Whole Foods natural food supermarket; Sevananda, a member-owned natural foods coop; a Kosher Gourmet-themed deli and store; Judaica Corner, a retail store that sells material artifacts (books, Talmuds, menorahs, clothing) of Jewish religion and culture; and the retail store for "Farmer D," a leading proponent of Jewish religious agrarianism and member of Hazon who sells sustainable farming tools and composts. Also within a short driving distance is Little Five Points, a trendy part of Atlanta home to cafes, restaurants, and an independently owned bookstore.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.shearithisrael.com](http://www.shearithisrael.com) "A Home for your faith, your family, your future."

On one level, this is a far cry from the rural, “Deep South” farming communities of Americus and its surrounding environs that is home to Koinonia. However, industrialized farming has its critics in areas as diverse as Americus and Atlanta. This is because the criticisms of industrialized farming developed by Berry and other environmental agrarians apply to both rural and urban areas, for in both areas the values and practices of food choices predominantly support industrial farming.

Furthermore, the sustainable agriculture worldview is supported and developed by scholars, activists, farmers, and researchers who live in places as diverse as Salinas, Kansas (home of the Land Institute) to Atlanta, Georgia (home of Daron “Farmer D” Joffe, who we will meet in subsequent chapters). Due to the “unsettling of America,” where only two percent of American citizens are involved in farming, the majority of Americans concerned about sustainable food issues are by default urban dwellers. Such demographics help make sense of the growing popularity of farmer’s markets and CSAs in urban areas, and thus the development of religious agrarian concerns in urban religious communities.

During my first visit to the synagogue, at which time I also interviewed the lead rabbi who was supportive of hosting a Hazon CSA partnership and during which I observed a Wednesday afternoon Tuv Ha’Aretz pick up, I was able to meet with a past president of the synagogue. My discussion with this synagogue member ranged from discussing the history of the synagogue to its contemporary identity to food and environmental issues. According to Mike Greenberg, an articulate, soft-spoken man of late-middle age who has been a member of the synagogue for thirty-one years, the synagogue actually began as an Orthodox community in 1904 under the leadership of

Rabbi Tobias Geffen.<sup>12</sup> In 1957 it switched to mixed seating, and about thirty years ago it became “traditional,” in the sense that the members were ritually observant but the rabbi decided the level of this observance. In 2001 the community became Conservative and egalitarian, in that women can read Torah (they have a female rabbi) and women can be included in the minyan needed for quorum.

Greenberg also explained that the synagogue is eclectic in its make up, ranging from an 85 year-old holocaust survivor to professionals with young children. He also feels that there is no division within the synagogue regarding the CSA and Rabbi Hillel’s vegetarian views (to be discussed in later chapters) and that the CSA group and rabbi tend to be more progressive in their Jewish and political views than the rest of the congregation. Greenberg was involved with the hiring of Rabbi Hillel, claiming the rabbi was hired for his humanist teachings and that environmental issues were not talked about in the hiring process. Nonetheless, since the rabbi began in 2006, environmental concerns have been brought to the attention of the synagogue, in large part because of the rabbi’s progressive environmental views and support of hosting a Hazon sponsored CSA partnership.

Greenberg further claims that of the 550 member families, most have been practicing Jews their whole lives or are from a Jewish background. There are a few converts, most from Christianity, while some converted from Orthodox Judaism because of the perceived exclusivity towards women in Orthodox teachings and practice. The synagogue is not liturgically liberal, as approximately ninety-five percent of the services are in Hebrew. Furthermore, more congregants have a desire to deepen their

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<sup>12</sup> This is a fictional name for my research subject.

understanding of Judaism and Jewish traditions, so a second female rabbi was hired to help hold Torah, mishnah, and Talmud classes. Greenberg explained that the synagogue as a whole is supportive of the CSA arrangement, but the majority of the synagogue are not Tuv Ha'Aretz members.

My very first Wednesday visit to the synagogue coincided with one of the final Tuv Ha'Aretz CSA drops of the summer season at which there were thirty two boxes present. Of these CSA members, approximately twenty-five belong to the synagogue proper; the rest are Jews who are not full time members, or are friends of CSA members and are not Jewish. In fact, the organizer of the CSA partnership who schedules the Tuv Ha'Aretz arrangement and Wednesday pick up and pick up activities is herself Jewish and an active member of Hazon but not a member of Congregation Shearith Israel. She approached Rabbi Hillel about using the synagogue as a place to start a Hazon sponsored CSA, to which the Rabbi agreed, in large part because he is friends with Hazon staff in New York (where he and his family lived and worked before relocating to Atlanta) and is an active voice in Jewish vegetarian movements. This arrangement will be further explored in the subsequent chapters as I use data gathered from interviews with the rabbi and CSA organizer to explore Hazon's religious agrarianism.

### **Lived Jewish Farming Networks**

Consistent with my argument about seeing emerging religious agrarian and larger religious environmental concerns as giving evidence of a lived networking within religious groups, Hazon maintains numerous active network partnerships with other North American Jewish environmental groups, NGOs, and non-profits. These include supplying Hazon-sponsored grants to emerging Jewish groups that are working on

environmental, and especially sustainable farming, issues. One such group that has received a Hazon grant and that shares we blinks with Hazon is the Jewish Farm School, which works toward “sustainable agriculture rooted in Jewish tradition.”<sup>13</sup> Begun in 2006 with help from Hazon, the Jewish Farm School runs summer camps and internship programs for young Jews in high school and college to learn about sustainable farming on successful organic farms. As their website states, “Our emphasis is on teaching practical skills while also educating about the larger context of our contemporary food systems, and how our traditional values and practices can inform our decisions and actions today.”

Here we see religious agrarian networks in action, and networks that explicitly use religious teachings and values to actively shape and change the values and practices of people of faith in regards to sustainable food choices by providing hands-on training and education regarding environmental agrarian concerns. These lived networks also provide a North American context within which Jews are reinterpreting and renewing their tradition in order to address contemporary sustainable food issues. Such pivoting of the sacred is a sign of religious agrarian work in action, with Hazon and Hazon’s rhizomic lived network relationships helping lead this movement in North American Judaism.

Other networks with which Hazon cross-fertilizes include the Teva Learning Center, which bills itself as “North America’s foremost Jewish Environmental Education Institute” (<http://tevalearningcenter.org/>). Teva has become one of the leading groups conducting on-site environmental education for Jews and many of their staff and former

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.jewishfarmschool.org/> Accessed Sunday 9 January 2011.

interns are now active with Hazon. The same holds true for former interns and staff of Adamah, an on-site organic farm located at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Connecticut.<sup>14</sup> Adamah runs three-month long summer interns for young Jewish adults who want to learn more about organic farming. As their website states, “Programs at Adamah integrate physical, social, spiritual, Jewish and ecological realms in order to inspire participants to a life of service—to the Jewish community and to the earth.” The Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center also hosted Hazon’s 2010 Food Conference East, showing the active networks forged by these leading Jewish groups working on sustainable agriculture issues.<sup>15</sup> Hazon maintains further active networks with other emerging progressive Jewish environmental groups and activity centers. These include Wilderness Torah ([www.wildernesstorah.org](http://www.wildernesstorah.org)), Eden Village Camp (<http://edenvillagecamp.org>), and The Jewish Climate Change Campaign ([www.jewishclimatecampaign.org](http://www.jewishclimatecampaign.org)).

The common concerns and active networks these groups maintain are indeed changing both the values and practices of environmentally concerned Jews in North America, as chapters five, six, and seven will explore. In these chapters we will meet some of these Jews and hear their own words about environmental and religious agrarian issues. We will also explore the concrete actions they are undertaking in the biological landscapes of sustainable agriculture fields, either directly or through joining a CSA.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://isabellafreedman.org/adamah/intro>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.hazon.org/go.php?q=/food/conference/2010CSA/program.html> Accessed Sunday 9 January 2011.

For example, The 2010 Food Conference East had workshops on, amongst other topics, permaculture, “Organic Torah: How to Think Like an Organic Farm,” “Jewish Values, Fair Trade, and the Highest Level of *Tzedekah*,” and a hands-on class on goat milking and cheese making with farmers from Adamah. Such diversity of topics and concern can possibly lead to burn-out and/or diffusion of focus amongst Hazon members. This has led Mark Jacobs to recognize that there are external and internal challenges to the development of a robust Jewish environmentalism, especially because “A diversity of religious cultures and a wide range of levels of religious and cultural knowledge create a challenge for organizing meetings and conferences at which all participants feel equally comfortable and empowered. Fortunately, most of the people who have been attracted to Jewish environmentalism have been eager to work through these challenges” (2002: 473). My experience at Hazon’s 2009 Food Conference in California is that Hazon makes a very concerted attempt to overcome possible sources of conflict within a small (but growing), active North American Jewish environmental community. The active networks maintained by progressive religious environmentalists help provide a mechanism to work on overcoming possible sources of theological discord.

Jacobs continues, stating that, “I have observed a broad array of ideas that lead American Jews to organize within their religio-ethnic community on environmental issues. They can be grouped into five categories: fulfilling Jewish obligation; fulfilling universal obligation; effecting broad cultural/political change; strengthening the Jewish community; and personal fulfillment...With rare exception, particular theological conceptions, halakhic (legal) obligations, and ethical analyses do not seem to be driving

forces for the organizing of specific activities or programs...Most individuals involved in Jewish environmental efforts are motivated by more than one of these beliefs” (2002: 464). We will see that a mix of these do in fact provide motivation for my research subjects to become involved with religious agrarian issues, but also, and significantly, ethical reasons are a motivating factor in Jewish religious agrarianism (see especially chapter seven on justice). I begin this exploration of religious values and their influence on religious agrarian practice by turning to one of the three religious agrarian themes uncovered by my research, which is concern for “the local.”

CHAPTER 5  
THE LOCAL ([FARM] LAND)

**Localizing Agrarianism**

The agrarian standard, inescapably, is local adaptation, which requires bringing local nature, local people, local economy, and local culture into a practical and enduring harmony”

– Wendell Berry (2003: 33)

Locally Grown: Thousands of Miles Fresher.

–Popular Bumper sticker

We take that very real image of the farmers in the field, and of course I make it into a metaphor of counting the bounty in our lives and being aware of what is in our lives. And even though our congregants are doctors and lawyers and professors and dentists, we can still have that imagery of the land very present in our own lives and use it as metaphors to enrich our lives even though we may not be farmers ourselves.

Q: And do you get affirmation from [congregants]?

A: Sure, absolutely.

—Rabbi Greenberg

This chapter develops an analysis of how concern for the local is a key element of religious agrarianism. It also explores links between concerns for the local as this concern manifests in sustainable agriculture and environmental agrarian worldviews and how these concerns in part influence religious agrarian concepts of locality. By analyzing research data from members of both Hazon and Koinonia, we are able to see similarities and differences in the values behind how Jewish and Christian religious agrarians include concern for locality—local farmers, local farmlands, and local economies—in their lived religion. Such perspectives about locality have led Hazon to become the leading religiously inspired CSA network in the country, as well as being one of North American Judaism’s strongest proponents of the religious agrarian concern

for the local. Meanwhile, Koinonia is an exemplar of religious agrarian concerns for locality by definition: Koinonia is a community that lives at a local campus and is putting into practice Christian religious agrarian concerns about locality.

Such concern for locality is not only present in religious agrarian worldviews, but is also present in contemporary North American culinary and food culture circles as well. For example, in the winter of 2011, The International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) hosted an annual regional food conference. Part of this conference was held at the famed James Beard House and included a session on regional foodways titled “Farm to Table: Urban and Rural Foodways.”<sup>1</sup> The website’s description of this part of the conference reads:

You care about where your food comes from. You have a relationship with farmers, fishermen and food purveyors who not only produce good food but [who] steward the environment. You believe that eating is a political act. In the last few years the local food movement has made enormous strides and gone from fringe to mainstream. What challenges do we still face in re-regionalizing production and shoring up our food systems? How can culinary professionals continue to bring good food to the table and expand access to healthy, fresh foods?

This description captures the rapidly developing environmental agrarian worldview and shows the increasing ubiquity of this worldview as it percolates up into the leading edges of America’s culinary landscape. Among the most important issues are environmental agrarian themes of: food politics; environmental stewardship; concern

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<sup>1</sup> <http://theculinarytrust.org/376/> Accessed 18 January 2011. The Culinary Trust has developed under different titles since 1984 and today works on preserving America’s culinary heritage, educating culinary professionals, and helping with providing hunger relief to America’s poor. They have incorporated a “Sustainability program” into their services and in 2010 this included an “Urban Food and Farm Mini-Symposium” during the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual IACP food conference in Portland, OR. This conference included breakout sessions on topics ranging from Growing Food in an Urban Setting, Backyard Chickens, Urban Food and Social Justice, to Local Meat, Connecting Producers and Buyers, Food, Culture and Community, to Growing a Sustainable Food City. Such topics highlight the emerging environmental agrarian concerns that are influencing many aspects of America’s food culture.

about knowing who grows your food, where, and how; concern for food health and quality; and “re-regionalization.” Central to these environmental agrarian concerns is the health of the land.

Environmental agrarians build on the larger agrarian tradition when they argue that without a healthy landbase from which to farm, it is not possible to have a healthy society, healthy body, or healthy body politic, themes which I explore in chapter five. These issues are central to the work of Wendell Berry, who writes, “There are, I think, three questions that must be asked with respect to a human economy in any given place:

- 1) What is here?
- 2) What will nature permit us to do here?
- 3) What will nature help us to do here?

...the first question has not been answered, or asked, so far as I know, in the whole history of the American economy” (1987: 146). This list of questions reflects some of the key environmental agrarian ideas and ideals that constitute Berry’s corpus. As Berry is the environmental agrarian writer *par excellence*, his influence on North American sustainable food concerns cannot be overstated.

Contemporary environmental agrarianism reflects this corpus, and overall environmental agrarianism includes concerns about fidelity to place; the desire to develop a learned husbandry that exhibits concern for locality; recognition of the agricultural and thus agrarian base of any and every human economy; and criticism of the industrial agricultural model of the United States that has never, as Berry charges, asked about the health of the land. Thus, knowledge of, concern for, protection of, and proper use of land are the paramount environmental agrarian concerns and should form

the bedrock of a healthy culture; or as Berry writes, the goal is to “regard the land as of ultimate value” (2005: 39). Such a sentiment spills over into the realm of theology, as seen in theologian Paul Tillich’s famous claim that religion deals with ultimate concerns and ultimate values. Furthermore, for environmental agrarians such concerns should ideally lead to the generation, over many years and decades (and eventually centuries) of a locally based farming culture that practices environmentally friendly, sustainable agriculture regimes. Such regimes will recognize that, “local soil and local culture, are intimately related” (Berry 1990: 154) such that both of these have an economic as well as cultural value (1990: 157). Without a local culture based on an historical, intimate, and loving knowledge of “any given place,” then “a place is open to exploitation, and ultimately destruction” (1990: 166). Environmental agrarians are concerned about the exploitation and destruction of local farms, local ecosystems, and local economies. Many of the people I talked to at Koinonia and in Hazon share these same concerns, so that concern for “any given place” is a central aspect of religious agrarianism. We also see here the re-emergence of place in Western ontologies, where the religious environmentalist processes of renewal, reinterpretation, and ecological hermeneutical retrieval are helping to support such place-based focus upon the local.

Furthermore, religion and values are central to discussions about agriculture, place, and agrarianism. For example, Berry has written that, “in talking about topsoil, it is hard to avoid the language of religion” (1990: 62). This statement is pertinent for my overall argument, and coupled with viewing land as the ultimate loci of values, allows for the entry of religion into environmental agrarian concerns about the land. When Berry wrote this phrase, he was discussing how topsoil both retains and expels water; and he

was concurrently describing how topsoil is also a living entity made from the dead, decaying bodies of countless organisms. As such, topsoil is not something humans can replicate; rather, it is something made only by the “Great Economy” (Berry 1990) of nature, and it is something that is needed for our survival. For environmental agrarians everywhere, we destroy healthy topsoil to our detriment. Conversely, if we build and maintain and replenish healthy topsoil, then we have the ability to flourish. The language of the sacred is necessary to discuss sustainable agriculture because society is literally the outgrowth of soil and land, even though we cannot comprehend how the miracle of soil works nor replicate this miracle in a laboratory.

### **Religion, Ethics, and Land**

This section presents a brief overview of some key thinkers who have wrestled philosophically with what proper human-land relations might resemble. The groundwork they helped lay became the ferment out of which Berry and other environmental agrarians grew. Their work also crosses over into the various ecotheological approaches to human-land relations that have developed in response to Lynn White Jr.’s analysis of the current ecocrisis. With this history in place, it is possible to see how contemporary religious agrarianism is in part influenced by the history of this systematic exploration of proper human-land relations.

The first, sustained, articulate early ethical defense of land came from Aldo Leopold in his 1949 classic, *A Sand County Almanac*. In this collection of essays, the forester, ecologist, and restorationist Leopold opines that, “It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value” (1970: 223). Leopold maintains that our “Abrahamic” conceptions of the land, coupled with an instrumental economic system built on

Lockean concepts of private property and labor-value, have led to the despoliation of American landscapes and wilderness areas. Therefore, we must rethink and re-feel our connections to and alter our relations with the land, basing these relations on an ethic of love and aesthetic beauty. Leopold argues that such a land-based ethics will alter human-land relations and the values that drive these relations. Environmental philosophy has in large parts been footnotes to Leopold, and rightly so; his challenge to the utilitarian, anthropocentric ethics of his day remain for many environmental agrarians forcefully pertinent. Like Berry, Leopold would prefer culture begin by asking what is here in terms of a healthy landbase, followed by asking: how can we fit our human culture and economy into this landscape? The religious agrarians I study are indeed asking such questions about the land.

While many credit Leopold (along with Thoreau and Muir as antecedents) for starting Western environmental ethics, there is another progenitor to environmental agrarian land ethics. This progenitor is the botanist and horticulturist Liberty Hyde Bailey, who in 1915 wrote his treatise *The Holy Earth: Toward a New Environmental Ethic*. Bailey wrote this book during a time of increasing urbanization and pollution, an era that was coupled with the first flourishing of industrial scientific approaches to farming. Within this context, he claims that, "Most of our difficulty with the earth lies in the effort to do what perhaps ought not to be done...A good part of agriculture is to learn how to adapt one's work to nature, to fit the crop-scheme to the climate and to the soil and the facilities. To live in right relation with his natural conditions is one of the first lessons that a wise farmer or any other wise man [sic] learns. We are at pains to stress the importance of conduct; very well: conduct toward the earth is an essential part of it"

(2009: 8-9). This is perhaps one of the earliest environmental agrarian calls for a localized sustainable agriculture based on an ethic of restraint and that calls for localized adaptation to and proper ethical relationship with the land. Bailey tellingly goes on to point out, based on his reading of the first lines of Genesis, that “The living creation is not exclusively man-centered: it is bio-centric” (2009: 23). Such an explicit call for a biocentric ethic predates Leopold’s famous Land Ethic by over two decades and helped lay the groundwork for today’s environmental agrarian milieu.

Bailey furthermore prefigures other relevant and dominant environmental agrarian themes, writing that

The farmer now raises a few prime products to sell, and then he buys his foods in the markets under label and tag; and he knows not who produced the materials, and he soon comes not to care. No thought of the seasons, and of the men and women who labored, of the place, of the kind of soil, of the special contribution of the native earth, come with the trademark of the brand. And so we all live mechanically, from shop to table, without contact, and irreverently (2009: 65).

While not as well known as his fellow pre-1970 Earth Day philosophers and scientists, Bailey nonetheless both presages and echoes similar critiques of the emerging industrial agriculture paradigm as does Howard (1972), King (2004), Balfour (2006), Faulkner (1944), and Steiner (2003); later, Berry (1977) and Fukuoka (2004); and today, Shiva (2000), Pollan (2006), Jackson (1985), Thompson (1995), and myriad others. These same criticisms of the emergent industrial farming paradigm of Bailey are echoed in the call by the IACP to “re-localize” food production. Thus, the environmental agrarian critique of the loss of a localized, land-based, sustainable farming culture has a century old lineage, and one that includes an implicit call for spiritual and religious values to be placed upon the land, as seen in the work of Bailey, Leopold, and Berry. Indeed, we see in the work of these three farmers, writers, and ethicists a move toward

ethics and religious like sensibilities (if not outright religious terminology and advocacy, where “nature” and land are central components of a new earth revering religious ontology) in their agrarian advocacy.

What might some other epistemological and ethical frameworks of a religious relationship with the land look like, and how might these marry with environmental agrarian concerns about the land to help build a religious agrarian approach to human-land relations? The Native American scholar, lawyer, historian, and activist Vine Deloria, Jr. presents one such viewpoint in his book *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1994). In this work, Deloria takes Western Christianity to task for its role in helping bring about today’s ecological crisis and the concomitant anthropogenic sixth largest extinction crisis in the history of the earth. Deloria faults Christianity’s linear view of salvation history that has distanced ethics from space and place and placed ethical concern into an eschatological belief system that is otherworldly oriented. In this respect, he would be in agreement with Casey about the West’s historic lack of concern for place. He is also in dialogue with Leopold in calling for a new religious based land ethic that, for Deloria, sees our landscapes as being imbued with sacrality and revelatory power. He uses traditional Native peoples as exemplars of this sort of ontological land ethic, writing that, “Today our society is still at a primitive aesthetic stage of appreciating the personality of our lands, but we have the potential to move beyond mere aesthetics and come to some deep religious realizations of the role of sacred places in human life” (2). The sustainable farmlands of our country that are being farmed by religious agrarians are becoming the loci of such a developing sacralization of the landscape. Many of my research subjects speak directly to this

sentiment (see below), and share Deloria's call that, "It remains for us to learn once again that we are a part of nature, not a transcendent species with no responsibilities to the natural world" (3). One goal of religious agrarianism is to indeed act with ethical responsibility to a divinely created world, where such ethics are part of a holistic worldview and that therefore give birth to holistic, sustainable farming practices (to be outlined below).

Other attempts to imbue landscapes with sacrality are well documented, and there also exists a growing effort to use environmental ethics and holistic science as vehicles for forming human-land relations based on religious sensibilities (Callicott [1994], Harding [2006], and Rolston, III [1999]). Although this dissertation focuses on Jewish and Christian approaches to building upon and re-forming sacred human-land relations in the context of sustainable farming regimes, it is important to note that these approaches are influenced by similar moves occurring within other strands of environmental and religious environmental ethics. I will next briefly outline the centrality of the "land" in bioregional thought to show how local lifeways developed around local landscapes are central to building a sustainable culture, one of the long-term goals of religious agrarians.

### **Bioregional Thought about the Land**

The "return to place" that is happening within the North American environmental milieu is cross-fertilizing with a nascent global, and especially North American, ecological reformation. Such cross-fertilization of ethical values is contributing towards changes in practices toward the land. My research strongly supports this position. But what does it mean to say that the land is beginning to anchor values and practices within religious agrarian networks? How might people of faith respond to Wendell

Berry's claim that, "To farm is to be placed absolutely" (2005: 46)? What are long-term goals of land-based religious agrarian movements? Many of these goals are shared and articulated by permaculture, bioregional, and environmental agrarian movements. I have and will continue to cover permaculture and environmental agrarian attitudes towards the land, so here instead I will briefly explore the role land should play in perceived healthy human cultures as articulated from a bioregional perspective, and then move on to investigating the views of land shared by my research subjects.

In a nutshell, bioregionalism can be summed up as the cultural, religious/spiritual, social, and economic reinhabitation of delineated ecological bioregions that occur upon the earth.<sup>2</sup> Part of this re-localization includes developing a lasting local food infrastructure. Aspects of bioregionalism can be found in the emerging food movement: for example, Slow Food, locavorism, and the "hundred-mile diet," all of which support sourcing local foods and the creation of a vibrant, regional food culture dependent upon regional land and farmscapes for sustainably sourced and crafted food. Such a "countercuisine *network*" (2008: 115; my italics) is best defined by the concept of *terroir*, which is a storied French term that relates to food grown in a particular soil and that thus takes on attributes (especially flavors, tastes, and smells) of that soil. This concept has gained remarkable traction in United States food circles over the last fifteen years and contains within it a distinctive "set of values, practices, and aspirations" (xv).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth treatment of bioregionalism, see LeVasseur (2010e?).

<sup>3</sup> As an anecdote, Knoll Farms, where my wife and I were employed in 2001, is a progressive biodynamic farm in Brentwood, CA. They were one of the California's earliest certified organic farms and after the Federal Government became involved with regulating the organic food industry, the Knolls opted to forego certification and instead in 2001 changed the name of their farm to Tairwa'-Knoll Farms (<http://www.knollorganics.com/>).

In regards to her exploration of terroir and North American countercuisine food networks, author Amy Trubek writes that, “According to this alternative model [n]etworks of people—farmers, chefs, and others—combine a quest for economic livelihood with the goal of a sustainable food system. But for these people the quest is also sensory: they want to create food of high quality. They are pursuing a business, a mission, *and* a craft” (2008: 142). Such a pursuit marries well with stated ideals of environmental agrarianism and bioregionalism and is thus dependent upon the *terroir* of place. However, this countercuisine network is not without its critics. Most of those who are interested in such reinhabitation of foodscapes tend to be Caucasian, affluent, and well educated. This “baggage” of countercuisine networks became evident to Canadians Josee Johnston and Shyon Baumann, who found in their ethnography of the North American food counterculture that this foodscape movement contains within it both “ideologies of distinction and democracy” (2010: xvi).<sup>4</sup>

Similar critiques extend to the bioregional movement, in that most bioregionalists and bioregional philosophies have historically been generated from within educated, Caucasian enclaves.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, many charge that bioregionalism is an ideal of luxury, in that if someone is poor, marginalized, and living in a toxic landscape, staying put and building up a vibrant culture is often not a possibility, nor a desire. In one

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<sup>4</sup> They further point out that, “general critiques of the broader American foodscape—on grounds of health, sustainability, equity, and corporate dominance—remind us that the rarified world of foodies is a relatively exclusive, and segregated terrain. This exclusivity has a discursive dimension: despite the embrace of ‘multicultural’ cuisine within an expanding gourmet foodscape, dominant foodie culture in the United States continues to feature a particular demographic—namely, white and relatively affluent—as the normative ideal” (2010: 15-6). Such tensions were evident at Koinonia, where white members--for various environmental, religious, and political reasons--embraced permaculture lifestyles and black members viewed this as a form of modern-day sharecropping.

<sup>5</sup> For an insightful article that speaks about a “*rooted cosmopolitanism*” (2005: 92; author’s italics) and that offers six critiques of bioregionalism in general, see Meredith (2005). For further criticisms of bioregionalism, see Taylor (2000).

respect, the call for New Monastics to move to the margins of empire can be seen as a faith-based corrective to the perceived elitism of the foodie and bioregional movements. Therefore, Koinonia's use of permaculture to become a demonstration plot for sustainable agriculture is part of this larger struggle to both democratize, and make practical, living locally on the land (although, as noted, tensions exist within Koinonia about this part of their vision). Members of Hazon are also involved in democratizing alternative, localized food production, as they contribute CSA shares to soup kitchens and help install sustainable backyard garden plots at centers for at-risk youth (see chapter six on justice).

Bioregionalism is also noteworthy in its approach to building a place-based culture because of its emphasis on creating and then socially structuring place-based values. As Dan Flores writes, "Human cultures alter their places to shape them in accordance with their ideological visions, and in turn cultures are shaped by the power of their places" (1999: 52).<sup>6</sup> Sustainable farming practices, especially those based on environmental agrarian ethics and ideals, provide perfect opportunities for building and sustaining place-based, local cultures. Sustainable farming practitioners tend to be conversant in local varieties of soils, flora, fauna, weather patterns, waterways, insects, and plant diseases, and equally tend to build local networks of information sharing with

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<sup>6</sup> He also writes, "it seems to me that the particularism of distinctive *places* fashioned by human culture's peculiar and fascinating interpenetration with all the vagaries of topography, climate, and evolving ecology that define landscapes—and the continuing existence of such *places* despite the homogenizing forces of the modern world ought to cause us to realize that one of the most insightful ways for us to think about the human past is in the form of what might be called *bioregional* histories...From the time humans located regularly-visited hunting camps and early river valley farming settlements, human places have been super-imposed on environmental settings. They still are" (1999: 44; author's italics). The field of religion and nature will be served by longitudinal studies of how such bioregional histories are both impacting and being impacted by religious values. Religious agrarian communities provide one entryway into such a long-term study of human values/practices and how these relate to bioregional landscapes and identities.

other farmers. Such knowledge builds over time and is shared at farmers' markets, with customers who are CSA members, and with working relationships with local retail stores that feature local artisan and sustainable food products. Those members of American religions who have faith-based as well as secular environmental concerns are actively searching out working relations with such farmers, as supporting sustainable agriculture practitioners becomes a way to put into practice religious and secular concerns for local landscapes and farmland. This is seen in my research, especially with Atlanta-based Hazon members of Congregation Shearith Israel and their desire to support Riverview Farm in rural northwest Georgia (the farm that supplies the Congregation with their CSA produce). The bioregional ideal and concern has even been taken up by Nigel Savage, who in an interview stated, "I think the most complicated environmental issue for us has to do with place. I actually think it has to do with bio-regionalism" (2008: 19). We see then that concern for the local can be and is expressed in an amalgamation of environmental agrarian, permaculture, and bioregional ethics that mix with religious views of the land to create a lived, religious agrarian practice of caring for local (farm) land.

### **Taking a Stand in, on, and of the Land**

One task of this dissertation is to explore the development of agrarianism within the United States to show how it, and especially environmental agrarianism, is influencing and shaping contemporary religious agrarianism. One articulate exploration of agrarianism and what agrarianism means for farming and politics is found in John Crowe Ransom's introduction to *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, which is considered by some to "still [be] the best summary of agrarian principles versus the principles of industrialism" (Berry 2005: 43). This book, written

collectively by The Twelve Southerners, has been hailed as a classic of literature and a bemoaned critique of America's proclivity to urbanize and march away from "traditional" agrarian values. It is also considered to be in "the family of works exploring what we might call *locational values*" (Heilman 1982: 102; my emphasis). However, The Twelve Southerners were rightly criticized for patriarchal tendencies, such that their appeal to Southern locational values applied to sections of America on a broad scale contained within it seeds of its own cultural demise. Although an important and popular expression of American agrarianism, the patriarchal undertones of the Twelve Southerners made it hard for subsequent agrarians to take their vision wholeheartedly. This resulted in an important move made by Wendell Berry in the development of American environmental agrarianism, where "[u]nlike the Agrarians, Berry did not look to history or ethnicity for the validation of values or for identity. Rather, he found healing in attachment to place...unlike the Agrarians, he was an ecologist" (Murphy 2001: 270-1).

In essence, Berry's "split" from the agrarian past is made possible by the insights of evolutionary and ecological science. Therefore, religious agrarianism is a mix of agrarian history, ecological agrarianism, and the ongoing ecological reformation. Often, religious agrarianism is based within a religious tradition (see Hazon within the larger Jewish tradition/s, and Koinonia within the larger Christian and Protestant tradition/s), while also incorporating insights from ecology, soil science, and modern-day critiques of neoliberal economics and the industrialization of food systems. The latter critique is one of the original agrarian arguments of the Twelve Southerners and other agrarians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

What is new and unique about religious agrarianism is indeed this mixing of beliefs, teachings, ethics, and practices in regards to the environment with the ecological agrarianism delineated by Berry. Indeed, for my research subjects, religion itself has something to say about the “local.” And the values and teachings religion gives to my research subjects about the local translates into practices that are geared towards embodying a deeper relationship with local farmlands, local farmers, and others within local sustainable food networks.

Ransom opines in his opening for the *Twelve Southerners* that the forward-looking promises and slogans of industry and politics carries a subliminal message: “Do not allow yourself to feel homesick; form no such powerful attachments [to tradition and to place] that you will feel a pain in cutting them loose; prepare your spirit to be always on the move” (1962: 6). The spirit conveyed in this passage is that Western life has not yet seen fit to ask Berry’s three questions about a local place; rather, the “tyranny of mobility” has allowed those in our country to pack up their bags at the slightest whim so that a place can claim no fidelity to a person, and vice versa. As discussed, agrarians, bioregionalists, and place-based cultures all find common fault with such a worldview. According to Ransom, the result of this deracinated tyranny is that, “the latter-day societies have been seized—none quite so violently as our American one—with the strange idea that the human destiny is not to secure an honorable peace with nature, but to wage an unrelenting war on nature” (7). For Ransom, and thus traditional agrarians, the antidote to this war is, “to be moderate in our expectations of nature, and respectful; and out of so simple a thing as respect for the physical earth and its teeming life comes a primary joy, which is an inexhaustible source of arts and religions and

philosophies” (9). Here we see that most of the sustainable farming advocates, environmental agrarians, environmental ethicists, and religious environmentalists that I have been citing throughout hold a view in common: cultivating a respect for the earth and its ecosystems, including a dual recognition that ecosystems have limits and our survival is largely bound up in this recognition. Of import is that this value of respect should then dictate practices; not just any practice, but practices of sustainable farming rooted in a local place. From such practice and such respect for the “teeming life” of the physical earth comes art, philosophy, and, most important for the purposes of my argument, religion. Let us now turn to the values and practices of my research subjects to see how these religious agrarians are putting their religious values about local place into practice, and in the process creating lived networks founded upon religious agrarian ideals and insights.

### **Jewish Values and Practices about the Land**

Jews of America are urban, we’re not rural. So there are a lot of Christian monastic communities who are farmers, but there is no Jewish analogue. We didn’t start going back to the land until the ‘70s. Who has ever heard of a Jewish farmer? It’s almost unheard of.---Beatrice Tischler, interview with author

My interviews and field work with Jewish participants of Hazon evidence a strong ecological agrarian understanding of the importance of the local in creating an alternative to the globalized industrial agri-food system. Such understandings of the local are also grafted onto specific Jewish teachings and histories, leading to the creation of an emergent Jewish religious agrarianism that is taking root in various North American (and Israeli) Jewish communities. As Tischler notes above, this emergent religious agrarianism dates back to the 1970s, and is becoming more pronounced and visible under the networking and advocacy of Hazon.

## **Fresh and Local**

Many of my research subjects wanted to support local agriculture—whether sustainable or conventional, although across the board the preference was local and sustainable over local and conventional (see chapter on Health)—because they believed that local agricultural products were superior in taste, flavor, and freshness. As Isaac Segal explained, he joined the Tuv Ha’Aretz CSA pick-up at CSI because of his desire for “better quality” produce that has more flavor. While being appreciative of Riverview Farms organic farming practices, he is more interested in “just the taste. The taste of getting fresh stuff versus the stuff that’s been sitting in a cold warehouse for a year before you buy it.” Isaac also grows some of his own produce in the backyard of his house and wants to provide his daughter with fresh food during the summer months.

Another Tuv Ha’Aretz participant at CSI is Beatrice Tischler, quoted above. Like Isaac, she prefers organic over conventional if given the choice, but like Isaac, joined because her family “love[s] any kind of fresh fruits and vegetables.” She also shares that she distinguishes a “taste difference” between organic and conventionally farmed foods and that she prefers the former; this is another reason she joined the CSA and also is the “number one customer” at the Whole Foods across the street from her house.

A third Tuv Ha’Aretz participant at CSI is Naomi Eisenberg. Naomi also happens to be on the board of CSI and was a participant in the job search that brought Rabbi Hillel to the synagogue. Naomi also helped steer the creation of Tuv Ha’Aretz by supporting the initial work and vision of Dorothy Goldstein and she is still a committee member for the CSA partnership. For Naomi, “as much as we were excited about having the fresh, organic food...it was really nice to say we’re going to do our part to

help the small farmer and support them.” A driving concern for Naomi is Americans losing their jobs, especially small family farmers. As such, she is pleased to be able to support Riverview Farm, and enjoys visiting their farm and seeing the work they do; this includes an interest in buying the grass-fed beef Riverview raises, if the cows could be made kosher by finding a local sochet and processing plant.

The reason for joining Tuv Ha’Aretz supplied by these three CSA members reflects a desire to consume locally grown produce grown in a sustainable way. All three feel that such produce tastes better and all three expressed the joy they receive when they get their weekly share and bring its bounty back to their kitchen so they can begin cooking and sharing. Such views reflect one of the guiding ideals of Hazon’s Tuv Ha’Aretz program, in that “Tuv Ha’Aretz CSAs put the purchasing power of Jewish families behind local, sustainable farms. They deepen a connection to where our food comes from, and do so within a context of Jewish community and learning” (2009: 133). Part of the context of Jewish community and learning is the weekly pick up—one of the pick-ups at CSI that I observed included the showing of the film *Fresh*, which was followed by an animated and articulate discussion about the film.<sup>7</sup> Seven CSA members stayed for this discussion (six females and one male) and all seemed to know of the work of Michael Pollan and Joel Salatin, two of the leading figures in America’s

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.freshthemovie.com/about/> From the website: “FRESH celebrates the farmers, thinkers and business people across America who are re-inventing our food system. Each has witnessed the rapid transformation of our agriculture into an industrial model, and confronted the consequences: food contamination, environmental pollution, depletion of natural resources, and morbid obesity. Forging healthier, sustainable alternatives, they offer a practical vision for a future of our food and our planet. Among several main characters, FRESH features urban farmer and activist, Will Allen, the recipient of MacArthur’s 2008 Genius Award; sustainable farmer and entrepreneur, Joel Salatin, made famous by Michael Pollan’s book, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*; and supermarket owner, David Ball, challenging our Wal-Mart dominated economy.” This film is symptomatic of the types of imagery and narratives being propagated by the sustainable food movement, with which religious agrarians are networking and being influenced by, as seen in my experience at the Tuv Ha’Aretz pick up at CSI (accessed May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011).

alternative agriculture circles. While the movie spoke of many locator concerns, and these concerns were well received and echoed by the CSA members, religious concerns were not addressed in the movie. This is where the “religious” aspect of religious agrarianism comes into play—these Jews were watching this movie, and agreed with and knew about many of its messages—not only for their own locator, foodie, and sustainable agriculture concerns, but also because of their Jewishness. It is this ability to have CSA pick ups in a Jewish context and community that makes the Tuv Ha’Aretz unique and compelling to many Jews and Hazon members. The pick up time also becomes a space for sharing recipes, memories of Jewish customs and meals, and talks about food issues. It also builds local community and networks Hazon members with local farms. During the discussion, a few of the Tuv Ha’Aretz participants did mention that the connection they get when they come to pick up their produce from the CSA is a spiritual connection to abundance and to “something bigger.” Whether this something bigger was God, the Jewish community, or the sustainable farming milieu was unclear, but nonetheless, some members have the sense of purpose that comes with joining the CSA and coming to CSI to pick up their produce within a community setting.

### **Local Health**

A few of my research subjects expanded upon this “something bigger,” citing a mixture of concern for local landbases/farming land health and mixing this with a Jewish call to stewardship. For example, Ruth Jacobs is Executive Director of B’nai Israel and just completed training with Hazon during their 2009 food conference on how to start up a CSA. Passionate about sustainable food issues, Jacobs is a perfect exemplar of a

religious agrarian operating within the Jewish tradition. This is seen in the following statement that links her faith tradition with agrarian concerns for local farmers:

[What] is so incredible to me [is] that [for] every time that you eat, [we have] blessings...in Judaism. Whether we say “B’rai bre havetz,” the fruit of the earth, or the fruit of the tree, or “B’rai pre adamah,” the fruit of the ground, there’s this thread that draws whatever is on your plate back to the field and makes you think about it. And so while you might not be a farmer, Judaism dictates that you be aware of how that food was grown. And thus who was growing it, and where it was grown, and how it got from there to your plate. And that to me is really incredible, and I think it is something that people take for granted.

While Jacobs echoes Segal, Eisenberg, and Tischler in that she enjoys fresher and tastier local food, for her there’s more: her tradition, and what this says about concern for local farmers and the health of local farmlands and ecosystems. Jacobs feels driven to begin a Hazon-sponsored CSA partnership because, “we know the environmental benefits of reducing our carbon footprint by eating local food; we know that it’s fresher, we know that it’s tastier. These are all things that we read in the Torah: protecting the earth, caring for the land. So I think it embodies so many of the mitzvot in that way. But I also think that it gives us a real opportunity. We live in a world where we are no longer farmers” and thus starting a CSA partnership is a way Jews can support local agriculture.

Her inspiration and vision is directly rooted in Torah, as well. As she explained, “Just to have a connection to the land” via a Hazon-CSA partnership helps to bring Torah alive. For Jacobs, the Torah is clear about duties of early Jewish farmers to leave paths in their fields, to give the land a Sabbath rest, and to not harvest corners of fields so the poor are able to have access to fresh food. Torah also speaks about crop rotation and how close and how far apart to plant different varieties of seed. Given this aspect of Jewish tradition, Jacobs explains that, “I think it’s an incredible teachable

moment to have a farmer who we have a relationship with and to have a congregation wide work-day at the farm where we're out there in the soil, we're learning from them, we're seeing what they do. And then we can come back and we can study Torah. And we can say 'here's what we saw, here's what we didn't see,' and talk about it." It is in reinterpretations of tradition like this, where environmental agrarian concerns enter into religious retrieval, that Hazon and North American Jews are contributing to the development of religious agrarian practices and narratives.

The saliency of utilizing lived religion and network tropes when analyzing religious agrarianism becomes evident when a position akin to the following is stated: "with the force of what our congregation can do in terms of creating awareness and a support system to explore these issues and for becoming involved, the idealist in me says, 'Yes, absolutely. Religion is the vehicle for it.' I think that any organization, any community based organization, is a vehicle for it. Judaism is a very natural pairing for this." Jacobs's active networks with Hazon and other progressive Jewish organizations who are supporting B'nai's efforts (she received a grant from a major Jewish grant writing body, The Covenant Foundation, that allowed her to attend the food conference; she has also joined the Jewish Food Educators network to help bring Jewish food education to the synagogue, where the Food Director is also going to start using Hazon's food curriculum with their Jewish Day School youth) are leading to faith-based values about sustainable farming being put into action. To this end, B'nai has partnered with a local biodynamic farm, Sandhill Farm, to provide twenty members with a weekly pickup (the owners of Sandhill were participants in the discussion of the movie about soil referenced in chapter one).

The most articulate response to queries about “the local” that I received came from the Jewish farmer and entrepreneur, Farmer D. This is the name he has taken and that appears on his business cards and when he gives presentations on sustainable food issues (short for Darron Jaffe).<sup>8</sup> Farmer D makes his living selling biodynamic composts, plants and seedlings, and by installing backyard gardens with these products at residences or various Jewish synagogues in Georgia.<sup>9</sup> I first heard about Farmer D in hushed, reverent tones during the Food Conference. This is because he was a participant there and is a big name in the Jewish Food Movement, having begun the organic farm at Adamah and as a longtime participant involved with the Center on the Environment and Jewish Life.<sup>10</sup> Farmer D embodies religious agrarianism from within the Jewish faith, as well as lived networks, as he knows the owners of Riverview Farm because both Farmer D and Riverview Farm are active in Georgia Organics, as is Katie Taylor of Koinonia.

Given his in-depth farming background and high standing within the Jewish Food Movement, I was curious to learn more about Farmer D’s own journey and understanding of sustainable agriculture. As sustainable agriculture is a contested term, especially within the sustainable food movement, and given that Farmer D had

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<sup>8</sup>Farmer D did not want to remain anonymous for this project, so unlike all the other people I interviewed, he did not receive a pseudonym.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.farmerd.com/>

<sup>10</sup> On the Center on the Environment and Jewish Life, see <http://www.coejl.org/~coejlor/about/> According to their website, “COEJL seeks to expand the contemporary understanding of such Jewish values as *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and *tzedek* (justice) to include the protection of both people and other species from environmental degradation. COEJL seeks to extend such traditions as social action and *g’milut hasadim* (performing deeds of loving kindness) to environmental action and advocacy. And *shalom* (peace or wholeness), which is at the very core of Jewish aspirations, is in its full sense harmony in all creation.” Many of these concepts and themes motivate both Jewish environmentalism broadly, and the Jewish strain/s of religious agrarianism I’m arguing for and have encountered in my research subjects. Accessed on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011.

once owned a 100+ acre farm in Wisconsin that he started during college, I began our interview by asking him to define sustainable agriculture. His answer reflects his own commitment to the biodynamic approach to farming begun in the early 1900s by Rudolph Steiner. For Farmer D, sustainable agriculture is one that embraces what he calls a biodynamics approach, which sees the farm as a holistic, living entity. According to Farmer D, biodynamics is “a microcosmic approach to sustainability and it’s a macrocosmic approach to sustainability. It’s about how the farm relates to the outside world, and really how it relates to itself. How the farm feeds itself and provides for itself and the diversity and the balance that comes with biodynamic farms is about as sustainable as it gets.” Farmer D’s experience as a Jewish religious agrarian led him to claim that, “sustainable agriculture in a more generic term to me is more about farming, stewarding the land, using organic methods, regenerating the soil, not taking more than you can give back over the long term and not exploiting the land with chemicals.”

This answer provides evidence of the cross over between religiously motivated sustainable farmers and ecological agrarian views about farming, where these merge to create a concern for the local (seeing the farm as a self-contained organism, influenced by Steiner’s teachings) that is coupled with the basic tenets of organic farming. These tenets are traced back to Sir Albert Howard himself, who wrote in the very first paragraph of his classic treatise, “The maintenance of the fertility of the soil is the first condition of any permanent system of agriculture. In the ordinary processes of crop production fertility is steadily lost: its continuous restoration by means of manuring and soil management is therefore imperative” (1972: 1).

This answer also provides the nexus with religion, as Farmer D subsequently related that, “I find my connection to the earth and to agriculture, my connection to God through my relationship to the land.” Farmer D’s sentiment is echoed in Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13, which states, “See my works, how fine and excellent they are! All that I created, I created for you. Reflect on this, and do not corrupt or desolate my world; for if you do, there will be no one to repair it after you.”<sup>11</sup>

Farmer D shared his overall philosophy about sustainable farming and the importance of the local in a lengthy exchange we had during our interview. This exchange adroitly touches upon many of the religious agrarian themes my research has uncovered. I began by inquiring about the above statement from Farmer D regarding his relationship to the land and how this relationship provides him with a connection to god. I searched for more clarity on what Farmer D meant when he said “the land,” asking him what this phrase meant and how important “the land” is to a healthy society, healthy politics, and healthy religion. Farmer D responded by saying that the land “is critical. If you look back, Gandhi speaks about how the way a society treats its animals is a reflection of the health of that society. I’m reading right now, Wendell Berry, Thoreau, Jane Austen. Modern day agrarians that are trying to reconnect people back to what our true economy is around food.” We see here once again the importance of Berry in the development of religious agrarianism (it should be noted that members of Koinonia also actively read Berry’s work), so that in essence Berry has given contemporary agrarianism a *lingua franca*.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.coejl.org/~coejlor/bloome/index.php](http://www.coejl.org/~coejlor/bloome/index.php) From their website, accessed March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Farmer D continued by stating he is actively involved with Slow Food International. This is because, “When I first got into this, I was really curious about growing my own food. And then I started to realize, ‘Wow, our Western civilization is founded on agriculture. And our agriculture is so industrial it’s effecting the health and the way people live and the way they act and the impact on the environment and the houses we live in and the clothes we wear, and economies and labor. And family farms are going out of business left and right, like an endangered species.’” This epiphany is consistent with the critique of industrial farming put forth by sustainable agriculture advocates. From this epiphany, Farmer D realized that the impacts of industrial farming influence “the social fabric, the whole social layer throughout agriculture, [and this] has a huge ripple effect.”

Farmer D’s motivation to enter into the world of sustainable agriculture was so he could participate in growing his own food. Given his own experience, he realized that, “If people are disconnected from where their food comes from, they’re cut off from the root of where they come from, which we’re starting to get back to because of the economy. When everything is dependent upon fossil fuels and this cornucopia mentality and everything is an abundance and you can eat anything you want at any time of the year for cheap whatever, people don’t have any kind of connection to the earth and to [a] spirituality [of the earth].” We see that besides familiarity with the work of Wendell Berry, Farmer D is also a participant in lived networks with organizations like Slow Food; maintains an articulate critique of industrial food systems that is consistent with critiques put forth by leading sustainable agriculture advocates; evidences a concern for the social importance of

local farming cultures; and, most importantly, he practices and brings to his agrarianism a Jewish component of being “rooted” in the earth via food. This rootedness is made possible by participating in local sustainable agriculture practices, and it signals a concern for local places, local health, and local economies that is rooted in religious agrarian values.

### **Hazon and the Local**

Religious agrarian viewpoints about the importance of the local—local farmland, soil health, community interaction and autonomy, and fresh food—were equally on evidence throughout Hazon’s 2009 Food Conference and are consistently present in a wide variety of monthly emails sent to Hazon members by Hazon staff. For example, on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011, founder Nigel Savage (named in 2008 by the “Forward 50” to be one of the 50 most influential Jewish leaders in the U.S.) included the following statement in Hazon’s monthly email: “It’s not a surprise that a new generation of Jewish people who care about health and sustainability have started to focus on these related cycles [of soil and society]. We learn from Wendell Berry that a society is as healthy as its soil, and a soil that isn’t regenerated will decline and erode.”<sup>12</sup> Notice here both how this is a new development in American Jewish practice, values, and identity (according to Nigel); but also how Nigel directly references Wendell Berry, the father of contemporary ecological agrarianism. Clearly Hazon is in agreement with Berry’s agrarian views about the importance of local soil health for local social health, and as such, this positions Hazon at the leading edge of Jewish religious agrarianism in the U.S. Similar sentiments were expressed during Hazon’s 2009 Food Conference, as well.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.hazon.org/go.php?q=/readingroom/emailArchive/emails/Omer,\\_Shmita,\\_FairFood,\\_Sabbatical.html&tr=y&auid=8434202](http://www.hazon.org/go.php?q=/readingroom/emailArchive/emails/Omer,_Shmita,_FairFood,_Sabbatical.html&tr=y&auid=8434202) Accessed June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011.

At 5:30 pm on Thursday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the Hazon staff welcomed the over 500 participants at its annual Food Conference. One of Hazon's Executives, Mick Fine, welcomed those present by stating, "You are looking at the Jewish food movement...We make up every place on the Jewish spectrum, and some of us aren't even on that spectrum...and we're all part of the Hazon family." Approximately 90% of the conference participants were at their first Hazon conference, and the entirety of the Hazon family were treated to a variety of presentations over the weekend that directly related to the agrarian concern for the local. These included program tracks devoted to "Do-It-Yourself Food," "Food Systems and Sustainability," and "Jewish Tradition and Food: History and Culture." Specific talks ranged from "Food Entrepreneurs: How to Start and Run a Sustainable Business," "Decompose It Yourself: Compost for Commonfolk" (this was given by Farmer D), "Growing the Real Food Revolution on Campus," "Slow Money and Sustainable Food Systems," to "Community Involvement Through Food."

On Saturday the Orthodox Rabbi Steve Greenberg, an Executive Director of Hazon, gave a talk titled "Can America Be the Promised Land?" In this talk, Greenberg pointed out that "Something [was] afoot with the way Jews are engaging with the land" by pointing out that most members of the audience did not live in the same community in which their grandparents did such that "our attachment to a place on this planet is particularly fraught...today." Yet, for many Jews, Israel is the mythical, religious, and political land of attachment, so he asked is it possible to be present to the land of America while looking towards Zion? Greenberg argued that in fact by looking towards Israel, Jews do not pay attention to the earth where they live, and Hazon is helping to

remedy this—thus, something is “afoot” with Jews today. Yet, Greenberg also pointed out that the original exile and homelessness of Jews makes them the original “canaries in the coalmine” for all transient people of the post-modern world of metropolises and peripheries. Thus, the call for Jewish renewal by returning to the Promised Land is a template that is shared by the U.S. agrarian tradition, which according to Greenberg uses the same language: people need soil and land where they can build their own cultural identity such that the land nourishes the people, and vice versa. For Greenberg, Jews have needed this for 2,000 years, and now most American citizens need it, too.

With this presentation Greenberg made the most explicit link between the burgeoning Jewish Food Movement, the Jewish history of diaspora and exile, and U.S. agrarianism that I encountered during my time at the Conference. Greenberg even handed out a flyer that had various quotes from Wendell Berry, as well as quotes from Ellen Davis’s agrarian reading of the Hebrew Bible. Clearly, many within the leadership of Hazon are making explicit links with ecological agrarian philosophy and they are comfortable with sharing the strengths of the agrarian vision with Judaism’s own storied history about human-land relations.

Another well attended talk was titled “The Vegetable Monologues: Jewish Female Farmers.” During this talk, four female Jewish farmers spoke about their experience working on sustainable farms and/or starting businesses that sold organic produce. The talk was well attended with an overflow of people having to sit in the aisles, and it generated quite a bit of dialogue and heartfelt questions between the presenters and audience members. All four of the panelists expressed the desire to

create healthy, local food systems and shared that this desire is what drove their farm practices. One farmer makes goat cheese with her husband on their own farm and pointed out that “the methods of production” matter as they have long-term impacts on food and water systems. Another presenter, Anna Hanau, was the current farm manager at Adamah (the same farm begun by Farmer D) and she and her husband were in the process of starting a kosher grass-fed beef slaughterhouse. She went to Jewish Theological Seminary as an undergraduate and double majored in Biblical and Environmental Studies. After graduating, she met Nigel and declared that, “It had never occurred to me before that there are Jews that find God in the woods and sunbeams,” although she came to realize that “our tradition speaks to this.” Anna has worked for Hazon for three years and has been instrumental in beginning the CSA program. Between her work at Adamah and with Hazon, Anna feels connected to her Jewish roots, stating that, “Our ancestors started in awe in the natural world.” All the presenters shared how their experience as farmers has made them appreciate the beauty of their local ecosystems and farm lands; discussed the very real responsibility to these landscapes that comes with being sustainable farmers working within natural systems; how important it is to support local farmers so these farmers can continue land stewardship practices while making a living wage; and that the Jewish tradition speaks to these concerns. Indeed, these two themes were central to the Conference as a whole.

Hazon’s *Food for Thought* touches on these themes, as well. The authors write that “Jews have two different stories about place: we have lived in nearly every country in the world, but our tradition is focused on the Land of Israel” (2009: 81). This tension

was also one of the key themes that guided Steve Greenberg’s talk at the Conference. The authors continue, stating that most Jews operate under three at-times competing images: the wandering Jew, the pull of Eretz Yisrael, and being part of local and regional food traditions (2009: 83). Therefore, although “the Jewish people entered history as an indigenous people—with a direct relationship to the food native to their land” (2009: 84), the authors nonetheless feel that “Given that much of our food sometimes seems placeless, we think that it’s a positive value to consciously eat locally” (2009: 86).

### **Christian Values and Practices about the Land**

Koinonia members come from a different religious background and live in a different context than the Hazon members in Atlanta, Gainesville, and those at the Food Conference. Therefore, their reasons for being exemplars of religious agrarian concerns for the local will be theologically and culturally different in a religious sense, but from an environmental standpoint, they will be similar and have significant overlap. Furthermore, those working the land at Koinonia are by default intimately engaged with the local, since they are working with and interacting with land that is literally their home and backyard: the buildings that make up the campus of Koinonia are surrounded by the community’s pecan orchards, blueberries, muscadine grapes, pasture fields, organic vegetable garden, and permaculture fields. Simply by walking from a residential building to the communal kitchen, or across the street to the chapel, emplaces visitors, interns, and stewards alike into the middle of Koinonia’s almost 500-acre ecosystem. For those who manage, care for, and run this landscape, concern for the local is always front and center.

## **The Sacrality of Local Creation**

One of the matriarchs of Koinonia (who has since moved to a retirement home to be closer to her children) was Sylvia Castle, the wife of Dave Castle. Castle always greeted visitors with a smile, and her exuberance and humbleness (and commitment to Quaker pacifism) belied her age and slight build. Castle strongly supported the community's vision to embrace permaculture, a turn she saw as part of God's vision for Koinonia. As she stated, "Well, I mean we're all one, with all of creation. So the Kingdom ought to look like 'Yes, we're all connected and caring about-for one another and with one another and that the earth would be bountiful in a way that God intended.'" Given this view of creation, Castle believes the human role is to be stewards, as she "think[s] it's all God's creation and I see it as honoring God, not replacing God [to care for God's creation]." Such a role and theological view motivates Castle to support the community's decision to care for its land in a holistic way, as Koinonia's land is a place to demonstrate the Kingdom of God to visitors so they can see other ways of interacting with the local and of growing food in a sustainable way.

Another community member, Paul Robinson, heard about Koinonia because of his faith-based interest in permaculture and desire to lessen his impact on God's creation (Robinson has since left Koinonia and lives "off the grid" with his girlfriend, in order to lessen his impact even more than was possible at Koinonia). As a "child of God," in his own words, Robinson sees Koinonia as a perfect place to birth a new vision of local human-nature relations. As he described, he is motivated to care about the local because he believes the earth is God's creation, and because God created everything, then species extinction, human suffering, and over consumption are all topics about which he is concerned. Robinson moved to Koinonia because at Koinonia

he is able to act on these religiously motivated concerns “locally and in the context of where I am right now. At least in the community I can act on it right here and be changing my lifestyle and helping to change the lifestyle of *this community* and then I believe that other people will be affected by that lifestyle change.” This latter belief reflects Koinonia’s standing as a “demonstration plot” that is visited by thousands of people each year. Robinson further explained that Koinonia is part of various lived networks, so that the community “has a lot of connection across the country and across the world...Koinonia has a large influence across the world. And [if] many of those people get word that we’re starting to do things differently it might trigger something in their minds.”

This part of our interview captures a Protestant religious agrarian concern for the local. We see that Robinson’s values (his concern) are based upon a theological concept of a holy creation. Furthermore, becoming educated about how this creation is being treated has motivated Robinson to join Koinonia where he can put into practice permaculture principles on a local scale in a living community, with the hope that the demonstration plot of Koinonia’s fields will motivate others involved in lived networks with Koinonia.

Robinson’s roommate at Koinonia is Ben Peters. Peters and Robinson are two of the most committed members of Koinonia in terms of actively pushing other community members to embrace Koinonia’s sustainability vision. They both work on the garden crew, have a compost toilet in their house, and do not run the air conditioner despite 100 degree South Georgia summer weather because this uses electricity from a power grid. Peters came to Koinonia in his early 20s after working on faith-based

justice issues in Philadelphia. His inspirations include Leo Tolstoy, Daniel Quinn, Derrick Jensen, and Jesus' ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

When asked to define organic farming, Peters answered, "I guess in the best sense of the word its growing food in a way that regenerates the landbase on which you're growing it [notice here the similarity with Farmer D's biodynamic approach to sustainable farming]. And the worst way it's a tool used by corporate farmers to make more money for themselves." This answer shows Peters' knowledge of the basic claim of organic farming (and ecological agrarianism), as well as insights into the various debates over the contested meaning of organics and it's perceived takeover by larger corporate interests. When asked about the community's commitment to sustainability and the reason for this commitment, Peters answers, "part of the Kingdom of God is healthy relationships between us and the Earth, which is how I view it," so his support of sustainability is based in a theological understanding of human-earth-divine relations. This understanding has led Peters to move to Koinonia so he can put into practice both his faith and his desire to generate healthy local sustainable food. As he puts it, "It'd be great if like every single thing we eat here would be from the garden [and] maybe even trading with some people" in the area who are growing beans and grains (as protein for vegetarians like Peters). Such a sentiment expresses the agrarian concern for local food/s, local community, and local responsibility. For Peters, these concerns are motivated by and couched within his own Protestant conceptions of the Divine and by membership in Koinonia.

A similar perspective on the Christian religious agrarian belief about the sacrality of the local is seen in Stephanie Paterson, who grew up home schooled in an urban

punk household and found Jesus in her late teens at a punk show for Christians. Since this experience, Paterson has traveled the country and lived at a Catholic Worker House in Los Angeles and has also worked in the organic gardens of an all-girls school in the mountains of California. I met Paterson as she was visiting Koinonia for three weeks to see if she wanted to become a community member (Paterson and Peters subsequently began dating, got married, and relocated to the Catholic Worker house in L.A.). Paterson is creative, vibrant, and full of passionate ideals that are motivated by her love for both God and the earth. She feels people in America “are becoming less and less intimate with the earth. Because of technology and just the way our culture is progressing and that’s really dangerous to me because it seems like when people lived more intimately with the earth they weren’t abusing it.” In this respect, Paterson mirrors both Peters’ and Robinson’s sentiments that smaller scale tribal and community settings centered around sustainable relations with the earth are the ideal form of human community; for them, Koinonia precisely fills that role in their life, and does so in a way that allows them to honor God, God’s creation, and fellowship with other Christians.

This sentiment was captured in a conversation I had with Paterson after we spent a day picking organic blueberries. During our conversation, Paterson revealed that, “working in the garden here I have realized that like that’s a bigger part of who I am than I ever realized.” When asked for clarity, she continued, stating that, “working with permaculture...just working in the garden and seeing the way they’re handling the plants...it’s just everything is so sacred here. They treat the earth like such a sacred thing and I’ve just never really experienced people loving the earth that...that’s a big reason why I’ve decided to stay here. Not just because of the community but because

of the connection with the land that I've found here." Paterson shared that this connection with the local land and fields of Koinonia helped to bring Christianity alive. She explained this feeling by relating that, "when I read [in the Gospels] love your neighbor as yourself, I think we had better take care of each other, we can't sit around while other people are poor. And love God, and to me God is the earth, so I mean, it's my own personal interpretation, but I think it should definitely be a fundamental value of all Christians and all spiritual people... the way I feel out in the garden, I can't imagine how not everybody doesn't feel that way." I inquired if this feeling was always positive and beneficial, given that at the moment it was one hundred degrees and humid and we were working near red ants. Undaunted, Paterson replied, "I'm covered in ant bites...you know, it drives me crazy when people say 'I'm an environmentalist' or 'I care about the environment.' You *are* the environment, come on! This is us, this is who we are, this is what we're meant to be, we're a part of this; we are part of the ecosystem."

Our conversation captured an almost pantheist view of human-earth relations, and one that sees the earth as being divine and that see humans as being part of the earth. The environmental values Paterson developed based on her religious beliefs have led her to want to use permaculture to build a local culture of honoring earth through combined prayer and action. Her religious agrarianism even accepts the ant and mosquito bites that entail to being part of an emplaced, local, farm ecosystem. If operating under an industrial agriculture model, the same ants and mosquitoes would be eradicated by using various toxic chemicals, which would then leech into local soils and waterways. The religious agrarians of Koinonia have a different view of these same insects, and also of the soils and waters found on their campus—for them, these are all

sacred because they are God's creation, and it is their task to care for them by generating healthy, sustainable, local farming practices.

### **Designing Locality**

The generation of religious agrarian practices at Koinonia is based upon the permaculture ideal as originally developed by Mollison and Holmgren and which was originally introduced to the community by Jim Everett. Katie Taylor is a steward of the community who is married to the lead farmer/gardener, Joel Taylor, and together they have two daughters and live on campus near the cafeteria. As stewards, they have pledged to live in the community for the rest of their lives. In their early thirties, they are both active in worship and in helping Koinonia embody its mission statement. Taylor herself is in charge of hospitality and gives tours to the various groups who visit Koinonia through the year. She has also received training in permaculture design and now helps run the permaculture design courses that Koinonia holds one or two times a year, including the training I attended in February of 2010.

When giving tours, Taylor tells visitors that, "Permaculture, the most succinct definition I have for it is, it's a design system for creating sustainable human settlements that work in harmony with nature and work to produce an abundance of everything you need. They talk a lot about inputs and outputs and so the idea is that you eliminate or minimize the inputs, which is something you have to bring in from outside, like fertilizer, seed, [and] fuel, [so you] try to reduce your reliance on those things through seed saving, and soil building with things you have on site rather than going and buying mulch...And then the outputs, what most people would call waste, we try to reconsume as many outputs as possible." In this way, Koinonia is committed to reducing their impact on both local and international levels of trade and commerce (including

especially in food commodities) by creating as sustainable a system as possible on their campus.

In fact, the intentional design aspect of permaculture is what piqued Paul Robinson's interest and is in large part what brought him to Koinonia. For Robinson, permaculture "is about design and being able to realize that we can design our lives and our surroundings so that they're all in harmony and providing for our own needs and being mutually beneficial for each part of the system that we can design. So that methodology that was kind of laid out in permaculture kind of appealed to my engineering background and desires because engineering is design, so that attracted me a lot." Here Robinson references his own undergraduate studies in engineering and how he can apply those skills to permaculture design to make harmonious systems, where humans are an integrated part of a local landscape rather than a species that colonizes most of the available biomass. Robinson located Koinonia on the internet as he was searching for permaculture communities, and it is the Christian identity of Koinonia that convinced him to join.

### **Demonstrating Permaculture on a Local Scale**

This religious agrarian mix of permaculture and Christianity is quickly becoming one of Koinonia's main ministries. As Taylor explains, "I think that permaculture is one of the next big things that we're going to...gift to the world." This is in reference to the other gifts Koinonia has demonstrated: racial fellowship, Habitat for Humanity, Civil Rights campaigning, and peace activism. For Taylor, this gift is important because it is moving sustainable food concerns out of "hippie pagany earth-loving, non-Christian circles" and bringing them into modern Christian consciousness. Taylor argues that such work is important for Koinonia to carry out because people within "the Christian

faith is starting to look for that. People in the Church are getting disillusioned and they're looking for things and connecting them with permaculture, which is...just a way of looking at the world, and it can be applied to anything." Koinonia is now applying permaculture to their local campus and in so doing they are developing Christian religious agrarian values and practices. This work is important for Taylor and others at Koinonia, because "I guess I see it that's what we are, just drawing people together" from various Christian subtraditions and exposing them to permaculture by providing trainings. Such work led Taylor to claim that, "For me, the reason I think I was able to grow a relationship with God, here, versus all the other places in my life [is] because I'm at peace now [and I am part of this larger role we're playing for God.]"

Taylor's religious beliefs marry with the vision of Koinonia, and she feels that Koinonia has a role to play in shaping the future of Christian-earth relations so these become more sustainable and in harmony with God. My interview with Taylor also uncovered her views of nature and how her own understanding of sustainable farming practices influences her lifestyle choices and thus concepts of proper human-nature relationships in a local setting via food choice. When asked what the role nature plays in her religious beliefs, Taylor asserted that nature "just inspires awe in me. The way things work in harmony with each other...It already *is* the right system. And the way that like life and death cycles through it is really big for me." When asked if she sees this system as being God's creation, Taylor emphatically responded by saying, "Oh yes... And so I guess for me, I do feel very called to just be in relationship with nature as well. That, the earth is not something separate from me that I am allowed to use, it's something that I need to work to be in harmony with." Taylor admits that living in

“harmony” with nature is a challenge, and it might not even be possible. However, by living at Koinonia, Taylor is able to grapple with putting into practice her desire to live in harmony with God’s creation. As she explains, “For me there’s still some unanswered questions and some things I don’t quite understand...I was vegetarian and I was for ten years and I’ve started eating meat again. And we raise animals on the farm for meat. And I still sometimes am like, ‘Is that right or wrong?’ I’m not really sure, but this is what I feel like I’m supposed to be doing now so I’m going to go with it.” One reason she is fine with eating the meat of animals raised by Koinonia is because “I know it’s better for the earth and better for those animals in the long run for them to be raised this way.” Taylor also eats their locally raised meat “because it’s better than growing a whole monocrop field of soybeans and spraying chemicals on it or even organic soybeans, like there’s a lot of input and a lot of fuel and a lot of stuff that goes into that. And it’s not the best thing for the soil and it’s not the best thing for people and you know importing produce from Brazil is not a good practice.” We see that Taylor spends a lot of time thinking about her food choices and how these food choices influence various ecosystems. By practicing permaculture and consuming the products grown locally on Koinonia’s campus, Taylor and other members of Koinonia are able to grapple with, develop, and put into practice religious agrarian ideals that challenge the industrial farming model. However, these ideals are part of a larger Christian worldview that sees the land as a sacred creation and that sees Koinonia as having a role to play in spreading this Christian religious agrarian “gospel” to other Christians.

One such Christian who was exposed to Koinonia’s Christian-influenced religious agrarian practice of permaculture is Emily Hoffman, one of the attendees of the

February 2010 permaculture training. Hoffman is a member of one of Koinonia's sister communities, Jubilee Partners and her participation in the training provides another example of a lived network.<sup>13</sup> This is because both Jubilee and Koinonia are New Monastic communities, fellowship together throughout the year, and Jubilee itself was started by a one-time Koinonia member. Both communities are committed to peace and immigrant rights, and the latter is the focal point of Jubilee's ministry. Immigrants from war-ravaged countries are given homes at Jubilee where they are taught English and are given land so they may start their own gardens. Jubilee has a non-certified organic garden on site where Hoffman works, so she decided to attend the permaculture training as a way to learn more about permaculture so that Jubilee can transition to a permaculture design.

When asked about what got her interested in supporting local, sustainable agriculture, Hoffman responded, "I guess for me at some point ten or twelve years ago a light bulb [went off as] I was tending the first garden that I had and was watching the food grow and eating it and just realizing this is good work to do. To grow food to put in one's body, it makes a lot of sense." This is a similar epiphany experienced by Farmer D, showing that the embodied, religion-from-below theoretical approach of lived religion is able to capture the emergence of religious agrarian sensibilities.

When asked if "good work" was to be interpreted biblically, Hoffman stated, "it felt like, obviously since the beginning, Adam and Eve tended to their food. It made sense

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<sup>13</sup> <http://jubileepartners.org/> Accessed June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011. According to the website, "Jubilee Partners is an intentional Christian service community in rural northeast Georgia. Our primary ministry is offering hospitality to refugees who have newly arrived in the U.S. We seek to understand and live by the radical implications of following Jesus Christ. We are deeply concerned about how to be effective peacemakers and how to promote justice and understanding among our neighbors and around the world. We look to the life and teachings of Jesus as our own starting place, but we work to build bridges with people from every kind of background."

because if we're supposed to nourish ourselves with some sort of food we may as well make sure it comes from a good source and tend to it and not be disconnected from it in anyway, so the connection I guess felt like something that God sees as good for us." Similar sentiments are expressed by Paterson and Taylor, so for these religious agrarians participating in sustainable agriculture and the nutritious, fresh "fruits" of that agriculture are activities that are pleasing to God. For Hoffman, this divine connection with food also provides a connection with the land and with the seasons. As she explained, "I guess if you need to put food in your body, why would you not be connected to it." For Hoffman and religious agrarians broadly, this connection is not only a connection with a theocentric creation, but it is a connection that is made readily available by the participation in localized, sustainable agriculture practices.

### **Farming Practices that Benefit the Local**

Members of both the Hazon and Koinonia communities value local landscapes, local farmland, local farmers, local economies, and local produce, which lead to practices of localized sustainable agriculture. At Hazon, the concern for the local incorporates themes such as taste and freshness, creating an agrarian-infused kosher that reflects Jewish diets and ethics in the modern world; an aversion to using what are perceived as dangerous chemicals and poisons on local farmlands; and a desire to support local farmers. At Koinonia and in the lived networks of its members, the concern for the local incorporates themes of self-sufficiency; not using what they perceive to be toxic chemicals on their own farmlands (see next chapter); a desire to live in harmony with God's creation; and their view that they have a calling to "demonstrate" the benefits of permaculture to visiting Christians and non-Christians alike. I will briefly summarize local practices of agrarian farming that both groups

embody (or attempt to embody) before moving my exploration to the religious agrarian theme of “health.”

## **Hazon**

Some of my research subjects in Atlanta do grow some fruit and vegetables and herbs in their back yard. However, most fit the description of being “urban agrarians” (Orr 2001; Donahue 2001). As such, they support local farmers and businesses at farmer’s markets and by being members of CSAs. Farmer D has his own local business that builds organic gardens in backyards and at Jewish community centers and synagogues, and B’nai Israel partners with a local biodynamic farm while entertaining ideas of growing food on their own campus. However, most of the people I researched support sustainable farming practices by entering into a CSA partnership with Riverview Farms, a family owned farm in the northwest foothills of Georgia.<sup>14</sup> I visited Riverview Farms on two separate occasions—once to get a tour directly from the owners, and the other time on a field trip to the farm with members of CSI. The latter visit included a picnic on the farm, followed by a farm tour so that the CSA members could learn more about from where their food came. Quite a few families attended this and some brought children—not a small feat as Riverview is one and a half hours away from the synagogue.

Riverview is bounded by the Coosawattee River and nearby is Carters Lake, an old Cherokee center. The farm is surrounded by pine plantations, meandering creeks, and contains fertile valley soil of the Appalachian foothills, which are visible in the distance. There are hay and alfalfa farms, corn monocrops, cattle farms, small rural

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.grassfedcow.com/>

towns, 4x4 trucks with hunting dogs in back, and a plethora of Baptist churches all in the vicinity, so that Riverview is an oasis of progressive organic farming practices within a sea of rural northwest Georgia politics, farming, and a cultural mix of the two. This part of the state is similar to the rural poverty of Americus—rusty trailers, churches, and abused land seem to go hand in hand with a slower pace of life compared to that of Augusta, Atlanta, and Athens.

Riverview is farmed by Tricia and Ron Daniels, a husband and wife team who live on the property with their young child. Ron Daniels' parents are the actual owners, who used to farm the land by growing monoculture row crops of soy and corn and by raising hogs. Unfortunately, these practices led to a significant amount of debt, so that by the late 1990s Mr. Daniels was in a cycle of ever increasing debt coupled with increasing use of chemicals. In 2000, the younger Daniels, along with Ron Daniels' twin brother, Shannon, moved back to the farm (Tricia and Ron Daniels met at the University of Georgia where they were chemists, with Tricia hailing from Americus and Ron stating that the Agriculture School of UGA was simply a funneling device for Agribusiness interests) and began to transition the farm to organic. They are now certified organic, with Tricia Daniels serving on the board of Georgia Organics. They also have resident interns, as part of their goal is to teach a new generation of farmers about how to run a successful small-organic farm operation. Their father is on board because for the first time in years the farm is financially solvent, and their customer base expands each year.

According to their website, they are “One of the oldest, and largest, certified organic farms in the state, our goal is to work with the environment to enliven the farm

through the mutually supported functions of soil, grasses, and animals as we produce organic vegetables and meats. With detailed attention to soil quality, animal husbandry, grass production, and crop diversity, our methods surpass organic certification requirements. Good for the land, good for the animals, and good for people too.”<sup>15</sup> On their 200 acres, the Daniels grow 150 cows and butcher eight to ten hogs a week for their meat CSA. They utilize a clover-rye-vetch cover crop to build nitrogen and soil humus; grow corn and soybean to feed the hogs; let the cattle free range and feed on grass; store the waste run-off from the hogs in a pond and use it to water the fields two times a year; and grow collards, radishes, turnips, garlic, cilantro, black beans, tomatoes, squash, carrots, strawberries, and a variety of other vegetables. In all, Riverview has fifteen acres in rotation with various vegetables, and the rest goes into growing grains and letting animals pasture, with Shannon Daniels using some of the corn to stone grind on site and sell around the region as organic corn grits and corn meal.

The Rabbi was one of their first CSA members and this early relationship led to Dorothy Goldstein tracking Tricia Daniels down when the original CSA partnership with Tayl Organics ended. “If a farm can’t make money, you can’t farm,” as Daniels points out, so it is vital to their success to have a CSA partnership with CSI. When asked if there were tensions with anyone because religion was part of the CSA partnership, Daniels responded not at all, and further added that, “We don’t go to church. We’re here on our knees everyday. This is church.” Over all, Riverview has 350 CSA

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<sup>15</sup> [www.grassfedcow.com](http://www.grassfedcow.com) Accessed June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011.

accounts, just developed a “veggie mobile” that brings their produce into Atlanta where it is sold out of the truck, and serves two farmers markets in Atlanta.

By participating in a CSA partnership with Riverview, Hazon members create lived networks with local farmers (organic apples and eggs come from other farmers and Riverview adds these into box shares), support the financial stability of a family farm, and indirectly support the organic farming practices and thus preservation of 200 acres of farmland in Georgia. The later link was one of the reasons one CSA member brought her young child to Riverview on the Hazon picnic so that, in her words, her child will not be “an ignorant city kid.” The ability to visit a working, sustainable family farm and to get fresh produce from that farm one day a week throughout the growing season was an important reason this CSI member joined the CSA. In the process she felt she contributed to creating a vibrant, strong, nourishing, and sustainable local food culture.

### **Koinonia**

Koinonia has a long history of farming, the results of which can be visibly read on the landscape. The most prevalent visual aspect of this history are the large pecan groves that dominate parts of the campus. As these provide the main revenue for the community, and because they are farmed conventionally, these groves are now an anomaly compared to the rest of the sustainable farming practices now being instituted by Joel Taylor under the community’s sustainability vision.

It must be noted that Koinonia members, working with researchers from the University of Georgia and Georgia Organics, are attempting to transition a few of their pecan trees to organic production. The biggest problem is that mites enter into the fruit right at birth, so that the nuts never fully develop. Another fungus attacks the leaves of the pecan trees, killing the leaves and thus impacting pecan production. Taken

together, both are major threats to pecan growers industry wide and the only successful defense has been to utilize industrial fungicides and pesticides in order to get pecans to reach maturity.

The rest of Koinonia's farming practices are a paean to permaculture and sustainable farming practices. They have u-pick organic blueberries and muscadine grapes; they use pecan shells, muck out the chicken coops, and use cardboard to build soil; use cover crops to build nitrogen and soil; rotational graze with their small but growing cow herd (along with sheep and goats and hogs) which they are slowly building up to make a meat CSA; provide milk and meat for those in the community from their goats (and meat from pigs, turkeys, geese, and rabbits [who also supply compost]); have bee hives for pollination and honey products; have pear, apple, and other fruit trees; and grow vegetables and fruits in the garden: strawberries, greens, squash, corn, beans, rhubarb, tomatoes, and a variety of other crops, all of which end up in the community kitchen. Lastly, a few community members are committed "dumpster divers," who go to Americus a few days a week to look for discarded food in dumpsters, which they bring back to feed the animals and turn into compost. Community members see this practice as a way to take waste out of landfills and to use local resources to build the soil and animal health of the farm.

The fields adjacent to the buildings on campus are designed along principles of permaculture design, with the goal being a mixed edible forest that has annual food crops within it, while also providing habitat to chicken, geese, ducks, and pigs, who will compost and turn up the soil. Swales have been built in some of these fields to catch and retain groundwater, while a chicken-mobile is moved throughout the fields so that

the chickens fertilize targeted areas. Across from the buildings and adjacent to the main pecan groves is a fenced-in eighty acre pasture that holds sheep, goats, and cows. Koinonia members also engage in “efforts to build a herd of the endangered Pineywood cattle, a breed that is naturalized to our bioregion but are nearly extinct since the introduction of European breeds and excessive crossbreeding. Our hope is that the re-introduction of Pineywoods will nourish our land and help to create a stable ecosystem for other endangered species that were once native to this area.”<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, in efforts to further their move towards local sustainability while being a demonstration plot for God, Joel Taylor and Lisa Jones attended a three-day workshop at a farm in Tennessee devoted to Holistic Resource Management. This workshop was described in one of Koinonia’s monthly email newsletters as, “a systems thinking approach to managing land resources and increasing production, while at the same time building biodiversity and improving the quality of life for those who use it. Holistic Management...provide[s] a wonderful boost of encouragement to our efforts as we continue learning how to heal our land and to grow an abundance of healthy food.”<sup>17</sup> Koinonia added their own emphasis to the final part of this email communication, signaling their continued commitment to stewardship and caring for their local campus. This commitment is thoroughly shaped by the institutional history of the community, including the values put into practice by various members, past and present. However, it is also a commitment that takes seriously the goals and standards of sustainable

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<sup>16</sup> <http://news.lowthiandesign.com/t/ViewEmail/r/16399EE4DA448305/862D169265B7109BF6A1C87C670A6B9F> Accessed June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> <http://news.lowthiandesign.com/t/ViewEmail/r/AD7E18584ABA6B3F/862D169265B7109BF6A1C87C670A6B9F> Accessed June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011; bold in original.

agriculture and environmental agrarianism, yet that does so in a larger Christian context, making Koinonia an exemplar of religious agrarian concerns about locality.

### **The Local: Coda**

In Paul Thompson's most recent book, itself part of the Series on New Agrarianism edited by Norman Wirzba, Thompson asserts that, "A philosophy of agriculture—and, by extension, sustainability—is thus appropriately attentive to dimensions of place or locale, on the one hand, and local or regional history, on the other...belief in and attentiveness to characteristics that make a given place 'special' are hallmarks of agrarian philosophy" (2010: 9). The Jews of Hazon and the Protestants of Koinonia are both working, in unique and similar ways, to build agriculture and sustainability at local levels, bounded within religious and regional histories. They are on the vanguard of developing a domestic religious agrarianism. It is important that this journey does not degenerate into either land fascism or political and/or religious posturing. Rather, the development of a religious agrarianism is an iterative process that requires community, the willingness to learn, and an engagement with politics (see chapter on six). However, this process is clouded by out-migration (whether from Koinonia, synagogues, CSA membership, or religious identity in general); by absentee ownership of lands or the practice of farming methods that are perceived to be inimical to sustainable farming practices (for example, the industrial methods utilized on lands that bound Riverview and Koinonia, respectively); and by the lack of transparency in laws (especially the U.S. Food Bill) and/or the resistance regional laws put in place that limit governmental support of practices that support the health of the local.

Most organic farmers I've met, interviewed, and/or worked with are progressive in terms of their critique of industrial agriculture and what they perceive to be governmental complicity. Yet they are conservative in that they want to farm the right way and want to conserve local lands and the best of local cultures. Indeed, many are critical of industrial progress (but use it as needed---for example, they may buy new tractors and organic certified chemicals and use new labor saving technologies) and therefore would join with the New Monastics in criticizing empire. Furthermore, the religious agrarians I have met "can contemplate and explore, respect and love, an object as substantial as a farm or a native province" (Ransom 1962: 19-20). It is this reification and striving for terroir that links agrarians from Bailey to Ransom to Berry to Jackson, to my research subjects at the Food Conference or at Koinonia or Riverview Farm. All are also united in love, respect, and care for the local, and for my research subjects, this love and respect is also motivated by and grounded within religious worldviews.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCEPTS OF HEALTH

### **From Soil to Bodies, Health Matters**

Religious agrarians, like ecological agrarians, are concerned about health: of the land, of human bodies, of soil and food, and of the larger society. Furthermore, ecological agrarians in their understanding of how these various health concerns are interrelated in part influence religious agrarians. For both, the health of one affects the health of all the rest (Wirzba 2003: x).

The concern for a viable and healthy existence provides the focal point for the content of this chapter. In it, I discuss the aforementioned health concerns, emphasizing what religious agrarians bring to the table that is explicitly different than ecological agrarians: a concept of health that is rooted within religious traditions, for religious agrarians operate within religious worldviews that contain normative narratives about the health of society. By participating in sustainable agriculture that supports locality, health, and justice, religious agrarians are able to put into practice their religiously motivated values.

### **Human Health**

This section explores various claims about the importance of agrarian thought and practice as these relate to concepts of human health. I divide human health into two categories: physical and spiritual, as ecological agrarians and religious agrarians both comment on these two aspects of human health when dealing with the subject. I will weave in an analysis of relevant literature from both agrarian types, while also highlighting my own research data that shows the strong concern for health that motivates the values and practices of religious agrarians.

## **Spiritual Health**

“We eat to nourish not only our physical selves, but also our emotional and spiritual selves.” –Hazon’s *Food For Thought* (2009: 70)

I separate the various rhizomes of health for heuristic reasons, even though agrarians believe they are interrelated. Even within “spiritual” health there is an undercurrent of psychological, emotional, and mental health, which ties into physical health, which ties into social and ecological health, and vice versa. The notion that we are losing the agrarian bond with the earth is a critique not only of the dominant industrial culture and its impact on human-land relations, but also of how industrial life has severed a spiritual bond with the earth. Agrarians believe the human-earth bond is expressed in farming and agrarian communal practices and that this bond tempers the extreme individualism and rampant consumption that lead to today’s social and ecological anomie. They believe, furthermore, that human health, both spiritual and physical, is intimately related to the health of local ecosystems.

Environmental thinkers often assert that human psychological, emotional, and spiritual health is intimately wrapped up with embeddedness in the more-than-human world (Abram 1996; Berry 2006). Some scholars and theorists paint a picture of an imagined Golden Age when all humans lived in perfect harmony with their local environments and therefore enjoyed abundant health. Others criticize such narratives, labeling them as naïve and claiming they offer a simplistic and reductionistic view of the deep human past. Other scholars point instead to a need to balance the material/environmental demands of the city with the country instead of fixating on fictitious understandings of human-earth relations. For example, environmental historian William Cronon argues that instead of pining for an unrealistic eco age, we

need to move beyond a dualism between faulty humans and pristine nature and realize we are embedded creatures in a particular place that has shaped and been shaped by human action. This realization should thus make our actual lived local environments the purview of our focus in matters of environmental and societal health (Cronon 1995).

Most ecological agrarians would side with Cronon's argument while also having sympathies with environmental ethicists and ecopsychologists. Religious agrarians, in contrast, fall all throughout the gamut. For example, Paul Robinson, Ben Peters, and Stephanie Paterson from Koinonia are all significantly influenced by the writings of Daniel Quinn and the ecoanarchist Derrick Jensen. Both of these writers argue for a reduction in human numbers and consumption patterns in favor of a bioregional, neo-animist spiritual relation with local landscapes and both authors have achieved significant followings within the sustainability milieu.

Nonetheless, most religious agrarians would agree with Wes Jackson that, "Only by meeting the land's expectations first can society be sustained" (1987: 75). However, once these needs are addressed and the sincere attempt to meet them is begun, questions arise about human needs and expectations: what is healthy food? What is a healthy dwelling place? What is a healthy society? Religious agrarians believe that human health contains a spiritual and/or religious dimension, and that this dimension includes proper human-nature relations to which the agrarian ideal speaks.

Such a relation takes on specifically Biblical dimensions for Paul Robinson at Koinonia, who when asked if he would posit that there are certain ways humans should be living with God's creation, responded by saying yes. He continued, stating that this view of proper human-God relations impacts both his values and practices, as it should

for all humans, because “I believe that God created His creation and created nature... and in the process told humans [via the Bible] to care for that creation [so we] should obey the commands of God because God seeks to love and that’s what he is: He’s love.” For Robinson, the dictate to live out God’s love implies that “if you’re harming other parts of creation in the process of living, that’s not really loving...And I think depending on the interpretation of that really dictates how you look at your relationship to the rest of Creation. If you’re assuming that humans are set apart from the rest of it [you’re going to treat it differently].”

Here we see an interpretation of God’s commandments in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, coupled with belief in the creation story of Genesis, that gives humans a clear directive in their role on the planet and how they are to relate to the rest of creation. What is significant in Robinson’s view is that God is love, and humans are here to love. Many psychologists and psychotherapists have mentioned the importance of love, acceptance, and nurturance in the healthy development of humans. For Robinson, this love and nurturance comes from God and is to be manifested by humans in their relations with God’s creation. Therefore, the spiritual health and well-being of humans is intimately related with how humans interact with and treat the rest of God’s creation; if we harm that creation, we turn away from God’s love, and we are therefore spiritually impoverished.

This Christ-centered view of spiritual health and its implication for proper and healthy human-land relations was expressed by Patrick Smith, who works in the fields at Koinonia and helps milk their cows and goats and slaughter their chickens. Smith stated that, “I take a high view of Christology and see Him as being the Alpha and the

Omega, and the reason behind Creation, and it's to me like completely absurd to think about any sort of ministry while neglecting the, the first Gift, [meaning that] if we don't live in harmony with Creation, then there's not much hope for anything else." Thus, for Smith, inner spiritual health is impossible to have without a healthy relationship with Creation, and this therefore influences his decision to support sustainable farming practices that further the health of his own spiritual and physical body, as well as that of God.

Similarly, Ruth Jacobs explains how she has recently adopted the Orthodox Jewish practice of ritual hand washing before eating bread:

To do the ritual wash you pour water over your right hand and then your left hand and you raise your hands up and you bless your hands and then without saying anything else or doing anything else you go to the bread. And then I take the bread I just baked with my own hands and you bless the bread. And suddenly there was such a link, to realize that alchemy of bread baking, and that it's drawing from the natural world, and also blessing your hands, blessing what sort of humanity can do, the technology of heat and our hands and craftsmanship. So that also for me was really really powerful, to see that Judaism gives us all of this. There's such a meditation in that, such an awareness of just working with whole foods and whole ingredients and creating nourishment for yourself out of it.

Jacob's ideals of health combine spiritual presence, grounded within the Jewish tradition, with physical nourishment, seen especially in the practice of her baking her own bread. Jewish connections between spiritual practice (and health) and physical health were also made at the Hazon food conference, where three different workshops were devoted to the role fasting can play in a healthy Jewish life.

Altogether, Christians used spiritually evocative terms and saw sustainable farming as a task of stewardship and thus religious health more often than the Jewish people I interviewed. This is reflected in this section—the majority of the passages I quote about spiritual health are from Christians, because they tend to speak in these

terms. This does not mean that agrarian ideals do not factor into Jewish concepts of health, but rather that physical health was more of a motivator than spiritual health. The religious/spiritual component of agrarian ideals for my Jewish research subjects tended to come out in regards to concepts of justice and in the Jewish injunction to do no harm/do not destroy, rather than in an explicit view of God's commandments and creation and how living in harmony with this was spiritually beneficent.

### **Physical Health**

Most of my Jewish and Christian research subjects used similar language when asked about the benefits of organic farming methods compared to industrial/conventional farming methods in regards to human health. Most of these answers also contained considerable overlap with the claims made by supporters for organic agriculture in regards to the perceived physical health benefits organically farmed products have on human bodies. These benefits are seen to be nutritional, neurological, regenerative, and disease-fighting/longevity-inducing.<sup>1</sup>

For agrarians proper, and especially ecological agrarians, the benefits of sustainable agriculture may be spiritual and physical. The physical health component tends to be highlighted, and although the agrarian conception of physical health overlaps with more recent concerns about disease prevention and claims that chemicals are bad for human bodies, the traditional agrarian concern with physical health (where it

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ota.com/organic/benefits/nutrition.html> The Organic Trade Association is a leading lobbyist for organic farming interests. They share that "A [recent] report...provides evidence that organic foods contain, on average, 25 percent higher concentration of 11 nutrients than their conventional counterparts. The report was based on estimated differences in nutrient levels across 236 comparisons of organically and conventionally grown foods. □Source: 'New Evidence Confirms the Nutritional Superiority of Plant-Based Organic Foods,'"

[http://www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/5367\\_Nutrient\\_Content\\_SSR\\_FINAL\\_V2.pdf](http://www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/5367_Nutrient_Content_SSR_FINAL_V2.pdf) Accessed June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

occurs) is more focused on the ameliorative effects that attend to honest manual farm labor. This labor is seen as healthy for body and soul and is believed to lead to wholesome foods that are equally healthy for the body. Furthermore, such labor is emplaced within a larger farm ecosystem, so that, “The enveloping food webs [of a farm and thus a society] will either produce healthy humans or, if we fail to see the connections [between farm, society, and body], diseased humans” (Logsdon 2000: 83).

My research suggests that religious agrarians are indeed very concerned with their physical health and they believe that local organically grown produce is superior to any variety of conventionally grown produce. This concern is a motivating factor for many CSI-Hazon CSA members. For example, Isaac Segal argued that the value of organic compared to conventional food is that, “it’s a health factor. Not quite knowing what’s going on with the stuff and worrying about the impact on health and more specifically the [health of our] kids.” When asked if he is concerned about chemicals, Segal responded, “Yea, pesticides.” When asked where there might be synergies between being a Jew and joining a CSA to get chemical-free organic food, Segal said, “Well, probably two things. I mean there’s obviously the stewardship of the world, we’re supposed to take care of it [see here overlap with some Koinonia members], not trash the place [an assumption that using the chemicals of industrial farming is not healthy for the earth]. And same things with your body [a shared assumption that industrial farming chemicals are bad for human bodies]. Just like you don’t tattoo your body...the stuff you put into your body should be healthy as well.” When pressed on his concept of stewardship and where this belief came from, Segal admitted it does not come from

Torah or a rabbinical teaching, but rather it is a Jewish duty in the sense of it being a mitzvoh.

Another Tuv Ha'Aretz member at CSI, Noah Gottwald, is heavily influenced by the work of Michael Pollan. Pollan's analysis of contemporary food systems inspired Gottwald to search for a CSA and he heard about Hazon-CSI from a Jewish friend who was already a Tuv Ha'Aretz participant. As Gottwald became educated about sustainable agriculture and read more literature about the side effects of industrial agriculture, he became convinced that organic agriculture should be the default method of growing all of our food, "and unless you have to, you shouldn't be using chemical fertilizers and chemical additives and antibiotics and all of these things."

Besides being a member of the CSA, Gottwald is also on the board of the Georgia Conservancy while becoming very passionate about food and environmental issues over the last few years. He also decided to stop eating meat after learning about the effects of a meat-based diet where the "primary motivator [of this decision] was health. You know, reading about the...inhumane treatment of the animals [and how] they're raised and the way that they're kept and the way that they're fed and the way that they're treated with hormones and with drugs was not something I'm interested in putting in my body." Gottwald's experiences show the correlation between educating oneself about the perceived ills of industrial agricultural practices and the desire to switch to supporting sustainable agricultural products, with such desire being influenced by concerns about physical health.

Such concerns about health and the perceived benefits of supporting sustainable and agrarian farming practices motivated many of the 600 Hazon conference

participants as well. One woman in the audience during a discussion about sustainable farming practices stated that, “I’m trying to bring my Judaism into what I do with my hands in the dirt.” She called this a “new Judaism,” and this seemed to be an underlying current of excitement in all of my research subjects, both Christian and Jewish: many of them feel they are part of a new movement within their tradition/s that are paying attention to religious agrarian concerns. Not only are they paying attention, they are actively motivated to put these concerns, and the values that underlie them, into some sort of practice.

Hazon staff constantly reinforced this “new Judaism” during the conference. For example, every day of the conference there were three meals served in the cafeteria (always with kosher options), and each day diners found a new “table talk” sign at the table that had a Jewish perspective on food or some factoid about the benefits of sustainable agriculture. One table talk sign at breakfast dealt with the difference between “natural” as compared to “organic” foods. According to the table talk sign, the US FDA regulates natural foods, whereas the USDA regulates organic food and farmers pay for certification. Given the conflicted sources of information out there and common misunderstandings about what counts as natural vs. organic, the table talk sign read: “So what’s a conscientious shopper to do? Read the label. How many ingredients are listed? More than five? Are any of them hard to pronounce? Remember the words of Rebbe Pollan: ‘If you can’t say it, don’t eat it.’”(Pollan 2009). By these daily signs, the conference organizers communicated ideas about what is healthy vs. harmful food, grounding this perspective in the work of “Rebbe” Pollan.

These concerns about the relation between farming techniques and human health are growing in the at-large North American food culture. While statistically still in the minority, there are nonetheless more people buying organic, sustainable food products nationwide and many do so because of health concerns. These consumers are in large part convinced that organically grown food is healthier for our bodies than industrially farmed food with its attendant chemicals and fertilizers. Many parents opt for organic foods for their newborns and young children and do so because of concerns about their children ingesting chemicals. Meanwhile, others are worried that some industrially farmed food items can be carcinogenic due to the large amounts of pesticides and chemicals used in their production.

Many religious agrarians hold such concerns, including members of CSI's Tuv Ha'Aretz, and Dorothy Goldstein has heard about most of these concerns directly. Goldstein was instrumental in bringing the Hazon partnership to CSI and organizes the CSA pick-up at the synagogue. She is also in charge of signing people up for the CSA. In her experience as the Tuv Ha'Aretz organizer, "I think concerns about health and toxins [are] huge to a lot of people...And a lot of people come to this that you really wouldn't think of because they've done the homework and they realize that they're pregnant or they're nursing or they have young kids or they have some other health issue and they want to go organic...A combination of organic and local and small business supporting, I think it's that sweet spot of all of those components that's very important to people and very important to our membership." Goldstein explains that many Tuv Ha'Aretz members at CSI are motivated to join for personal health reasons. Yet, significantly, she points out that the members are also from all walks of life, are

typically informed about health and food issues, and combine this concern with concerns for supporting small local farmers who they believe grow healthy food in healthy ways.

### **Farm Health**

Agrarian thought is intimately related to concepts of holistic farm health. These concepts have a long standing in sustainable agriculture circles and networks, with an underlying tenet being that the farm is an ecosystem that needs to be properly managed and cared for if it (and the soil, animal, and plant life dependent upon it) is to be healthy. Metrics of ecological agrarian health for a farm include clean water devoid of chemical and manure run-off; healthy and vibrant microbial life in the soil; seasonal and polycultural plant and animal breeding and planting; minimal loss of plant and animal life to pests, diseases, and parasites; a sense of fulfillment and challenge for those farming the land; and offering healthy products to the wider community to consume.

Too many books, articles, and movies speak to these ideals, and to the hard work that is required to meet them. A large part of this dissertation has already cited much of this literature (see especially chapter two), and the last chapter on locality equally explored this issue while also highlighting the practices undertaken to create farm health. So here I will make brief mention of concerns about farm health (and the values that underlie them) before moving on to concerns about the health of society. I do so by utilizing the work of Maria Rodale, whose grandfather is J.I. Rodale, the founder of one of the magazines that has helped develop consciousness about organic foods in the United States, *Organic Farming and Gardening*. Maria Rodale has followed in her grandfather's footsteps and in 2010 released her version of an *Organic Manifesto*.

This book begins with a common narrative about the health benefits of organic vs. industrial agriculture:

The technological mindset that would dump billions of pounds of deadly chemicals onto the soil, and mix the genetic material of different species, and build factory farms where livestock are treated like industrial commodities, and clone animals in order to give them a uniform size, has a deeply arrogant view of the natural world. It regards Nature as something to be conquered and controlled for a short-term profit. The organic movement embodies a different mindset. It takes the long view. It seeks the kind of profit that can last for generations. It regards the natural world with a profound reverence and humility. It aims to work with Nature—and considers the whole notion of controlling Nature to be absurd. At the heart of the organic movement is a belief in the interconnectedness of things (2010: xi).

While she neglects to comment about the perceived salubrious or non-salubrious benefits of large-scale organic agriculture, Rodale nonetheless mentions the underlying values and worldviews behind these two types of agriculture. Her narrative is similar to the agrarian—both religious and ecological—narratives of my research subjects, especially in regards to the concept of health.

For example, Rabbi Greenberg of B'nai Israel in Gainesville, FL explained that in Torah is found “the commandment to let the crops lay fallow every seventh year. That’s a religious commandment, a religious imperative, the results of which we understand was the next year crops would come back stronger, and we now understand the science behind that. But the religious directive exists right there in Genesis and is repeated in Exodus and Deuteronomy, to have respect for the land. And to let the land have a Sabbath just as we human beings need a Sabbath.” This ancient practice does indeed have its modern counterpart in sustainable farming practices, seen when modern farmers let fields lie fallow and they rotate their crops (a practice followed by some industrial farmers). This practice leads to increased health of microbial life in the

soil and thwarts certain blights and root-based diseases that typically develop if the same crops are planted in the same fields year after year.

Rodale also explains her concerns about health in part one of her book, titled “The Great Chemical Experiment.” She writes that, “We are all in the same situation to varying degrees. We are all being poisoned, contaminated, sterilized, and eventually exterminated by the synthetic chemicals we have used for the last 100 years to grow our food and maintain our lawns, to make our lives easier and ‘cleaner’ and our food ‘cheaper” (2010: 4-5). Rodale takes this concern for physical health and links it to farm health, showing that within agrarian circles, the concerns for and beliefs about health in regards to agricultural issues are interrelated.

This concern is echoed by Beatrice Tischler, who shared with me her belief that, “We’re poisoning the land. I lived in Wisconsin for eight years in an agricultural state and you really do, there were times when the rivers and lakes were closed because of nitrate run-off from all the cattle farms.” Thus, Tischler’s own lived experience with her perceived ills of industrial farming have mixed with her Jewish identity and motivate her to support sustainable agriculture. She also explained that this same identity follows the concept of *tikkun olam* (“to heal the world).” This concept means that for Tischler, Jews “have an obligation—we’re also an agricultural people, the Jews--we have a strong obligation to treat the land, to rotate crops and not to deplete it and not to poison it.” Tischler’s belief in this concept means she would be sympathetic to Rodale’s manifesto.

Rodale continues by arguing for the abandonment of chemicals and adoption of organic growing methods. She provides evidence that once organic farming methods are adopted and soil is restored organically, then crop yields become comparable to the

latest chemical yields and are actually higher in years of drought and flood. She also points out that organic fields require only thirty percent of the fossil fuels used in conventional fields when growing corn and soybeans; organic fields need fifteen percent more labor inputs (which supports local economies and thus societal health); the net economic return is equal or higher; and lastly, organically farmed fields store more carbon and nitrogen in soil, which can help offset global warming (2010: 151-2).<sup>2</sup>

Rodale uses the latest comparative statistics in grounding her manifesto, and feels she offers a compelling picture of farm, individual, and societal health.

Such a comprehensive view of the importance of healthy human-land relations is shared by Lisa Jones, Executive Director of Koinonia, who states that, “if you’re caring for the earth, you’re in partnership with the earth, you’re not battling the earth. And it just seemed to me, to pour things toxic on the earth, you’re battling it, [you’re saying] ‘I’m going to dominate you and you’re going to produce more.’...Just knowing that what they did first at Koinonia is that they came and bought a broken down old farm and nurtured it back to the health...made a lot of sense to me.” For many members of the community this history is a guiding inspiration for the health-based religious agrarian practices of Koinonia today. I witnessed another expression of Jones’ desire for the healing of Koinonia when she introduced herself to the participants of the permaculture training I attended, at which point she stated, “You are part of the healing process. The physical and spiritual healing of Koinonia.” This means that for Jones, participation in and sharing of the religious agrarian practice of permaculture is leading to the healing of the land and spirit of Koinonia. We now turn to concepts of societal health from

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<sup>2</sup> For a personal narrative/manifesto/memoir that eschews chemicals entirely, see Fukuoka (2004), itself first published by Rodale Press in 1978.

agrarian perspectives, seeing once again that ecological and religious agrarians speak much of the same language in respect to this component of health.

### **Societal Health**

Agrarian concerns about societal health include concerns about the health of democracy, the ills of industrialization of farm and workforce, opprobrium towards overconsumption and lack of concern for and identity with a local place, and lamentation over the loss of societal respect for good farmers who steward a part of the community. Given these concerns, “civic agriculture...is associated with a relocalizing of production. From the civic perspective, agriculture and food endeavors are seen as engines of local economic development and are integrally related to the social and cultural fabric of the community. Fundamentally, civic agriculture represents a broad-based movement to democratize the agriculture and food system” (Lyson 2007: 19). Thus, concerns for relocalization (vs. industrialization) are by default concerns for democracy, sustainable and local economic development, and community health. Agrarians believe that their vocation is part of a larger panacea to help bring these social health concerns together.

At Koinonia, Katie Taylor passionately addressed these concerns during our interview. She stated, “the way that America thinks about food is so wrong...It’s instant in gratification. And it’s a right that you can only get when you work.” Taylor argues that compared to this “me-first,” unhealthy relationship to food, “I feel like permaculture and organic gardening is going back to part of who we are: we have to take care of [the earth] just like we have to take care of ourselves, we have to be gentle, we have to be stewards.” To be a steward means, “to take only what you need. To not overwork the soil and not to overwork the earth is not to destroy things by taking so much to make a profit.”

Here Taylor is concerned that American's see food as a privilege to be enjoyed if they have the money to buy any food they want, and furthermore, the food they buy tends to be unhealthy for soil, body, and society. Because industrial farming grows things only for profit, and damages the earth and soil, Taylor is concerned that human communities are also being damaged, with the poorest of the poor suffering (see connections here to agrarian concerns for justice and locality). These values and beliefs, based on a larger Christ-centered worldview of fellowship and justice and stewardship, inspire Taylor's support for religious agrarian practices like permaculture design.

Nigel Savage expressed similar sentiments from a Jewish perspective during his opening reception speech at the 2009 Food Conference when he told the audience that, "As a people we have ancient gifts to offer the world--without arrogance--to make a sustainable world. As families and individuals we have roles to be a blessing to the world." In essence, Savage underlines the link of sustainability and health with individual, family, and community. In Savage's vision, the Jewish Food Movement is part of a larger societal movement towards sustainability, with food as the vehicle of transformation. With their willingness to work with and include non-Jews, Hazon is forging lived networks and helping shape the sustainable food movement from a distinctly Jewish platform. Hazon is therefore part of "The community food system movement [which] is challenged by the need to bring together many distinctly different local food system efforts into a definable community food mosaic. This mosaic illustrates the vitality of what is emerging as a social movement as well as a fledgling political agenda" (Maretzki and Tuckermanty 2007: 333). My Christian and Jewish

research subjects are indeed part of a social movement that has political and societal prescriptions, and they actively put their religious values into practice in these two realms.

Wendell Berry expresses similar thoughts about the health of society from an ecological agrarian perspective. In his words, “the best advice may have been given by Hippocrates: ‘As to diseases make a habit of two things—to help, or at least, to do no harm.’...To help, or to try to help, requires only knowledge; one needs to know promising remedies and how to apply them. But to do no harm involves a whole culture, and a culture very different from industrialism. It involves, at the minimum, compassion and humility and caution” (2005: 65). Religious agrarians are helping to build this non-industrial culture, for in their lived networks, lifestyle choices, and interpretation/s of their own tradition/s, religious agrarians act with compassion, humility, and caution. They also have strident critiques of the industrial mindset and its manifestation in policy and farming.

Therefore, many religious agrarians are sympathetic to the critique of CAFO farming and industrial slaughter of animals raised in these environments. They support the work of Eric Schlosser (2005) and his research about those who work on slaughter lines and how these workers (typically immigrant) are emotionally impacted by their work, and how they are shaped by this workplace trauma and thus impact their families and society. They are also typically in agreement, and have in many cases been influenced by, the work of “Rebbe” Pollan and his criticisms of the U.S. Farm Bill (criticisms shared by Wes Jackson and Wendell Berry [2009]) and CAFO farming methods (2007).

Furthermore, they are part of lived networks with Slow Food International and its goals to create healthy societies through the enjoyment of communal meals made with locally sourced, sustainable food eaten at a leisurely pace. A workshop at the Food Conference highlighted this link by explicating about the Jewish concept of hospitality (*hachnasat orchim*). Koinonia has been living out the ideals of Slow Food in their own Clarence Jordan inspired way since the beginning of the community. And of course by supporting farmer's markets and joining CSAs, my research subjects are engaging in lived practices that from their perspective directly contribute to societal health.

According to the leading agrarian writer Gene Logsdon, the contributions that entail to a modern agrarian lifestyle are needed if we are to approach sustainability as a society. In fact, he is so concerned about societal health that he claims, "Sustainable farms are to today's headlong rush toward global destruction what the monasteries were to the Dark Ages: places to preserve human skills and crafts until some semblance of common sense and common purpose returns to the public mind" (2000: xii). By supporting and participating in the agrarian ideals manifested by sustainable agriculture, the religious agrarians I research are contributing common sense and common purpose to society while realizing they live in agricultural networks that are "context[s] of multiple obligations and needs" (Sanford 2011: 300).

### **Animal and Soil Health**

As mentioned above, many of my research subjects are sympathetic with the criticisms of CAFO feedlots and the way farm animals are raised and slaughtered. Koinonia is actively breeding and raising its own animal herds and flocks, which they slaughter, dress, and consume on site. Their animals are free range, grass fed, naturally cared for with minimal use of antibiotics (only when their health is at stake and

all attempts to heal them “naturally” have been used), and receive human companionship throughout the day. Riverview Farms treats their hogs and cows the exact same way. My research subjects who do eat meat all claim to buy free range, organic, antibiotic and nitrate free meats and eggs (the Jews I researched who follow kosher guidelines eat no pork products at all).

The religious agrarians I research are also concerned about how industrial farming treats soils, as seen in some of the previous quotes about “poisoning the land.” For example, when asked about the perceived benefits and values of organic farming methods, Noah Gottwald answers that, “I guess the legal definition of organic and the holistic understanding of organic aren’t necessarily always one and the same thing, but treating the earth right, whether that’s for plant farming and harvesting crops and not, and not having too much pesticides and run off, or with animal farming and treating waste properly and treating the animals properly and not giving them hormones to make them grow faster and not giving them antibiotics so that you can keep more of them in a closer knit area without them getting sick.” Gottwald’s answer is influenced by his own experience of driving past hog farms in North Carolina, where “you don’t have to know about the downstream impacts on the environment to know that that smell is unhealthy and unnatural and can’t be good for the people living around it...And it can’t be good for the water supply that’s getting, getting washed through with it. And it can’t be good for the wildlife that are around it. I mean, everything about it can’t be good. The only thing that it’s good for is the pocketbook.”

Gottwald’s response evidences concern for the land, for animals, and for the perceived impacts that industrial farming has on local wildlife and waterways. What is

significant about this answer is that Gottwald exhibits knowledge about the contested meanings of organics, and his own perspective on the issue has been shaped by lived experience.

Before leaving Koinonia, Ben Peters was on the garden crew and spent his days working in the organic garden and permaculture designed fields of the campus. He worked closely with Joel Taylor in deciding what would be planted, where, and how much, as well as deciding what animals to range where on any given day. His own research into industrial vs. organic farming, coupled with his experience at Koinonia, led him to say that the value of organic agriculture is, “[At its] best [it] is part of a healthy human ecosystem, [and] its main function would be to provide food for humans. Conventional agriculture would be part of the unhealthy system of earth exploitation and its main [function] would be to produce money through the facilitated destruction of earth’s resources. And also to make food.” For Peters, conventional agriculture is largely about profit motive for corporations, where this concern engenders unhealthy farming practices and technologies like “fertilizers or in plowing, [because] excessive plowing might produce short-term increases in yield but it can lead to the desertification of an area.” Peters feels that large-scale organic practices can have the same results so that scale is an issue. He also recognizes that, “some conventional farmers really care about the earth and some organic farmers are doing it just for the money.”

Peters’ views have been shaped by reading literature about sustainable and industrial farming, and also by his experience living at Koinonia and seeing “the pecan trees, and knowing it [is] dangerous to walk after some of the stuff they did. Like with the spraying and stuff.” Here Peters refers to the signs that are erected under the pecan

groves after the trees have been sprayed with industrial chemicals. The signs tell visitors and residents alike to not walk in the fields for twenty-four hours in order to lower their chances of getting sick from the chemicals. This lived experience, coupled with seeing industrially farmed fields and sustainably farmed fields next to one another, has influenced Peters' views about soil health.

Another member of the farm crew at Koinonia, Patrick Smith, received a degree in animal science and worked on a large-scale dairy farm in the Northeast. Since moving to Koinonia with his family, he has been heavily influenced by Jim Everett and enjoys working with the animals and in the fields. When asked about the value of organic farming methods, Smith opined that it is “the sustainability factor, the health factor, eating foods that are more nutritious, that don't have the negative aspects of chemicals being ingested into the body and whatever kind of unforeseen damages they do to the human body. We all feel safer eating foods that are naturally grown without chemicals.” Of central importance to my argument is that Smith is an exemplar of a religious agrarian worldview, in that the above views about health are directly embedded in a Christian worldview. As Smith explains, “I think [health] lines up with a Christian view of stewardship of creation, caring for the soil, supplementing the soil.”

Like Peters, Smith's views have also been shaped by living at and working in the fields of Koinonia, where according to his analysis there is a clear difference in the health of soil and food between the community's sustainably farmed fields and those fields that were in industrial rotation. These beliefs and observations became a typical topic of conversation amongst those working in the fields, and many members expressed excitement at seeing the community embracing more permaculture practices

and at seeing the direct results these practices were having on the health of the community's soils and crops.

Contemporary soil science can be interpreted to support the religious agrarian concern for soil health. For example, Rodale writes that, "What we call 'soil' is a living thing. Just one tablespoon of soil can contain up to 10 billion microbes" (2010: 11). She further adds that, "Right now, soil scientists understand less than 1 percent of all the living things in the soil" (2010: 11). In her analysis,

Agricultural chemicals have statistically and significantly been implicated in causing all sorts of cancers, behavioral problems, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism, Parkinson's disease, reduced intelligence, infertility, miscarriage, diabetes, infant deformities, and low birth weight. And with endocrine disruptions come genital deformities, early puberty, gender 'issues,' and, again, diabetes and cancer. But all this research comes from the few scientists courageous enough to swim against the tide, to resist the easy funding offered by chemical and pharmaceutical companies and the pressure of their peers who rely on that funding (2010: 36-37).

Therefore, for supporters of sustainable agriculture, it makes sense to put into place farming practices that honor and support life in the soil; thus, adding toxic chemicals to the soil depletes this microbial life. Daron "Farmer D" Joffe, who mixes Jewish and biodynamic beliefs, expresses such views about stewardship and concern for soil health:

But down to [the] basics it's about being good stewards of the planet. It's about our obligation to till and to tend with responsibility about generations who are going to follow. Putting chemicals into the food and soil and water, it does not make good sense. I don't care what your political [beliefs are] or where you stand on that side of the fence, it's not caring for creation. It's a responsibility we have as humans—it's about as basic as it gets. And you want to take care of yourself, your family and children, raise them healthy and clean. So I guess I have a belief that healthy clean food can't really be [grown by] conventional, industrial farming techniques. And it also makes sense from an ecological standpoint, and as far as a business, you invest in your soil. You invest in the biology of your soil, and science and soil biology and even the golf course industry now accepts that the biology of the soil is

the most important aspect of weed, pest, and disease management. It all starts with the quality of your plants based on the quality of your soils. The quality of the humans and animal health is based on the quality of the soil.

Joffe's answer provides a snapshot of the agrarian concern for health and the interconnectedness of soil, animal, food, society, and ecosystem. He also passionately points out that it is a moral imperative, both for present and future generations, to properly steward the earth. Although Jewish, his views are very similar to those of Peters and Smith, as all three operate within a religious agrarian worldview that is, in their respective cases, influenced and shaped by their own experience living and working on sustainable farms.

Many of the talks at Hazon's Food Conference shared this interrelated concern with soil, animal, and social health. However, one topic in regard to animal health that dominated the proceedings was the status of the kosher diet. Two topics in particular stood out in this debate, and these were the fidelity of kosher processing plants to kosher law and the debate about a sustainable kosher option.

Those Jews in America that keep kosher were rocked when it came to light that one of the nation's largest kosher processing plants, Agriprocessors, located in Postville, Iowa, was shut down on May 12, 2008 because of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It turns out that Agriprocessors was employing "illegal alien" workers at the plant, so that its status as being a trustworthy source of kosher products (in a ritually slaughtered as well as in a social justice sense) was called into serious disrepute. Parts of Conservative Jewry have responded to this event by developing their own kosher certification that is based on *Heksher Tzedek*, or a certificate of social justice (the new

seal is called “Magen Tzedek;” see next chapter on Justice) in how workers and schochets are treated, and justice in how animals are slaughtered.<sup>3</sup>

To be kosher certified, a kosher inspector called a *mashgichim* (singular: *mashgiach*) must inspect a plant’s equipment and processing methods. Furthermore, a *schochet*, or ritual slaughterer (who must be Orthodox for food to be kosher) must then kill each animal along various kosher laws in order for the animal products to be considered kosher. Most Conservatives and all Orthodox Jews in America follow kosher dietary laws, so the Agriprocessors event was a huge issue for American Jewry because one of the largest suppliers of kosher products was possibly not following kosher law, and was definitely not following legal hiring practices.

So while “Kashrut is a constantly evolving construct” (Fishkoff 2010: 10-11), it is evolving at a more rapid pace due to the Agriprocessors event, as well as the development of the contemporary Jewish Food Movement. Arthur Waskow popularized the concept of “eco-kosher” in the 1970s, and this concern for animal products raised in ecologically conscious ways is meeting with the Jewish farmers, foodies, and activists of Hazon so that a new investigation of what kosher means is under way. While there is a long tradition of vegetarianism in Judaism, there is also a long tradition of kosher slaughter. This tension exists in Hazon as a group, but most of my research subjects

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/12/23/jews-ready-to-roll-out-ne\\_n\\_800492.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/12/23/jews-ready-to-roll-out-ne_n_800492.html) for coverage of this new seal (accessed June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011). See also

<http://www.zeek.net/711kashrut/> for an interview with Rabbi Morris Allen who is spearheading the heksher (hescher) tzedek movement (accessed June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011). Lastly, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/12/magazine/12kosher-t.html?pagewanted=1&th>

for an in-depth framing of “kosher wars” (accessed June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

do eat meat and as mentioned search out organic meat where and when possible.<sup>4</sup>

They also have to find kosher meat, which makes it a harder task, so that the demand for sustainably raised meat that is kosher certified is on the rise within quite a few Jewish communities.

For example, Rabbi Greenberg notes that, “we’ve had relationships with a kosher butcher for many years, and the closest is in Atlanta. And we have a relationship where he brings kosher meat to this community every six weeks, and we made a commitment as a community to support him. And for those people who observe kashrut, he’s our source of kosher meat.” This relationship with a specific schochet made it so the synagogue found it easy to embrace a similar CSA relationship with a farmer in the local community. As he explained, “So we’ve already had these kinds of relationships in the past. This is nothing new for us.”

Meanwhile, Naomi Eisenberg explained that she stopped buying kosher meat because for her kashrut is not only about cleanliness and keeping people healthy, but also about cruelty to animals and to make sure they suffer as little as possible when being killed. As she explains, “If they’re going to be bred to keep us fed and healthy, then they shouldn’t be penalized by that to keep us fed.” PETA helped expose Agriprocessors in 2004 via footage from undercover cameras so that when the story broke, Eisenberg stopped buying kosher meats except for chickens. Today she now buys free range, antibiotic free, hormone free kosher chickens from Whole Foods.

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<sup>4</sup> Hazon’s *Food for Thought* states that, “Within Jewish sources, there are some very vocal proponents of vegetarianism. And there are also many sources in Jewish tradition that clearly permit, and encourage, meat eating, especially for celebration. It seems clear that we and the planet would be better off if most of us ate less meat, but clearly whether you choose to eat any meat is up to you. Either way, we believe—and Jewish tradition teaches—that meat consumption is something we should do thoughtfully, with full awareness” (2009: 104).

Eisenberg's own evolution in regards to her relationship to kosher meats evidences a familiarity with her own tradition and suggests that her observance of kosher laws inspires her to find sustainable raised and humanely slaughtered kosher products. In fact, one of Eisenberg's goals is to find a schochet for the meat raised on Riverview Farms so that this meat can become a part of the CSA offering.

Ruth Jacobs expresses similar distaste about kosher products that are mass produced and artificially flavored. For Jacobs, "I'm endlessly disgusted and grossed out when I see what's kosher so often...it can be so incredibly processed, and so much just junk, just shortenings and other things to create things that otherwise wouldn't be acceptable." This lived experience motivates Jacobs to partner with Hazon and to advocate for healthy kosher products so that, "if we can move this community away from the processed kosher foods and into whole foods and say those are really actually more kosher," then this would be a positive way to encourage healthier Jewish diets.

A reinterpretation of kosher is seen by Jacobs to be consistent with the deep past of the Jewish tradition. As she explains, "You know, the Jewish cycle is so intricately linked to agriculture and food, and so when we live in a world where things are processed, and we can in some ways defy maybe the rules through food technology, I think that our bodies suffer in terms of health, and I think that spiritually something is lost." Given its agricultural past, the Jewish tradition is a vehicle to embrace religious agrarian concerns about health where this embrace can have spiritually beneficent results. In Jacobs' approach, we see links between personal, societal, and ecological health, coupled with a desire to "re-define" what kosher means to include locally raised whole foods. From her position at B'nai Israel, Jacobs is able to put her own religious

agrarian convictions, her lived experience, and her Jewish identity into practice while influencing the lifestyle choices and health of other Jews in her community.

The most damning critique of meat eating and animal agriculture and the impact animal agriculture has on the environment came from Rabbi Hillel. He passionately explained that, “Kosher meat is, well it’s disgusting, it’s gross, it’s Postville, Iowa, it’s large-scale factory industrial production. It’s nothing short of cruel torture of animals their whole life.” In Hillel’s eyes, the schochets who work at these large-scale industrial kosher plants are “not the pious old saintly Jews. These are the money-grubbing mafia kind of Jews who will kill and kill and kill and they make their living in a disgusting horrible way built on the backs of the torture of God’s innocent creatures. So to pretend like they’re the saintly old rabbis of the Talmud, I mean give me a break! That’s not what it is.” Because of the distancing of animal to plate, Hillel recognizes that there is “a disconnect between the deepest Jewish values and the way that we actually live our Jewish life.” He also recognizes that industrial agriculture, and especially kosher meat production, is “a desecration of our values! [As Jews, we should not] change [our] values to accommodate the socio-economic realities of meat production in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Rather, in his words, Jews should “stop eating meat because it’s contrary to [our] values! You stop eating that way and you say, ‘even though our ancestors didn’t know this, and wouldn’t have said it this way, Our tradition compels us, mitzvot, obligations, the Torah compels you to be sustainable in [our] agriculture.’” Furthermore, Hillel explains that Torah

compels [Jews] to take care of farmers and to not put small farms out of business...Who said you’re guaranteed cheap meat and unsustainably cheap food? Where is that written in the Torah? Where is that guarantee? All it says is ‘You can not be cruel to animals.’ You’re being cruel to this

animal. I don't care if that means the meat is going to cost you a hundred times more and I don't care if it means you never get to eat meat again. Those are the ethical and religious imperatives, *not* the availability of cheap kosher meat. That's not an imperative.

This passage is important to my argument for a few reasons. First, it shows Hillel's concern for animal health, while also showing a modern challenge to the perceived corruption of what kosher has become under the dictates of industrial agriculture. It also shows once again that many religious agrarians perceive the issues of health, locality, and justice to be intertwined. In this case, there is concern for the health of animals, but also the concern for justice in supporting local farmers. Lastly, this passage directly points to the issue of values: for Hillel, Jewish values have been compromised by Jewish support of industrial agriculture and its for-profit model. For Hillel, this goes against the teachings of Torah and the commandments of God, which "compel" Jews to be "sustainable in your agriculture." For Hillel, to keep kosher in today's industrialized food world means that *not* eating meat is the only possible way to follow the spirit of kosher; only by not eating meat can a Jew follow the commandment to not be cruel to animals.

I conclude this section on soil and animal health by relating the story of Aitan Mizrahi, a young farmer who is attempting to be sustainable in his farming due to his Jewish values. Like Daron Joffe and other young farmers at the Hazon Food Conference, Aitan is a former fellow of Adamah. He also raises goats, and "Like most of his friends in the new Jewish food movement, he is intrigued by traditional Jewish rituals but observes only those he finds personally meaningful" (Fishkoff 2010: 300). In his words,

I very much identify as a biblical Jew. The beard is symbolic of my Judaism; it reminds me of who my ancestors were and how they would walk

the hills of Judea with their goats and their sheep. They had a deeper relationship to the land, and how that land connected them to the holy spirit of God. I very much feel that my work connects me to HaShem [“the Name”—how some Jews refer to God in casual conversation]. I know how I want to raise my animals, and I believe that how the animal is raised transfers to its meat and milk. If the animal is nervous or stressed, her milk will taste poorly. But when my goats are out in a pasture and are getting good hay and clean water, you can taste that the milk is a lot fresher, a lot cleaner. And I think that translates to the meat as well, on a spiritual level (2010: 300-01).

Such sentiments about the way animals are treated and how this translates into a superior tasting product that is healthier are shared throughout food activist networks and circles, and also increasingly within religious agrarian networks. Although involved in religious agrarianism in different ways, from farmers attending a Hazon Food Conference to participating in a permaculture training at Koinonia, all believe that how we farm influences the health of the body, the spirit, the community, the soil, the animal, and the land. They believe further that there are clear religious reasons to farm for health in sustainable agrarian ways.

### **Planetary Health**

The last health concern of religious agrarians is that of the planet. This includes the health of the global climate and the health of regional and global rivers and supplies of groundwater, for agriculture has a strong influence on both climate and water. For example, up to sixty percent of all the freshwater in the U.S. is used for agricultural purposes, which is precipitating a rapid drawdown of the Oglalla aquifer. Furthermore, many of the industrial chemicals used on farms end up leaching into groundwater and thus the water table in the form of run-off.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the run-off contains animal

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<sup>5</sup> Scientists predicted that the year 2011 will see the largest “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico, due largely to excess nutrient run-off from industrial farms, coupled with excess amounts of flood waters entering the

waste and excrement, or it contains chemicals that stew in manure lagoons on factory farms, which can also leech into groundwater tables. Studies further suggest that agricultural chemicals account for two-thirds of all water pollution. High concentrations of chemicals lead to hypoxia so that marine dead zones have doubled in size every ten years since 1960. This doubling correlates with the increased use of ever-more toxic chemicals used by industrial farmers. On top of this, intensive animal agriculture is a larger contributor to global warming than is transportation, meaning what we farm and how we farm it truly does have an impact on a planetary scale that future generations will have to deal with.<sup>6</sup>

Given these planetary impacts of industrial agriculture, it is no surprise that many of my research subjects are developing a lived, religious agrarian response. For example, Paul Robinson states that, “when I walk into any situation the first things that pop into my mind...the first filter I look at the world through is a Christian and God-centered view point so I’ll notice things that don’t really fit into obeying God’s commands and His instructions on how to live. And then the next thing that pops into my head is how is this damaging the earth and the environment? So immediately when I walk into a room I notice like lights are on, appliances are on, and possibly could be turned off.” Robinson’s clearly inspired Christian and theocentric worldview thus leads him to make lifestyle choices that are in accordance to living within God’s commands and that care for God’s creation. This search eventually lead him to live at Koinonia where he can

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Gulf from the Mississippi. See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/14/gulf-dead-zone-predicted-largest-in-history\\_n\\_877188.html?ref=fb&src=sp](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/14/gulf-dead-zone-predicted-largest-in-history_n_877188.html?ref=fb&src=sp) for more information. Accessed June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of the impacts climate change will have on soil organisms, see Pritchard (2011). This analysis points to the intricately linked, self-reinforcing feedback loops that influence agriculture (a point that drives holistic approaches to farming, including those of religious agrarians).

more closely follow a sustainable lifestyle of fellowship, living out God's green commandments.

Another one of my research subjects is Russell Bain, a self-described Christian mystic who I met during Koinonia's permaculture training. This was Bain's second training at Koinonia, and part of what brought him back was the Christian atmosphere. When asked how being a Christian and following the example of Jesus translates into starting a permaculture business and having passion for the earth, Bain answered,

Because I believe that Jesus was connected in a perfect way with nature, with everything and with God, [so] I believe that when we connect with earth in a perfect way, we can live in a perfect environment. If we allow ourselves to be natural, which would be removing our fears and anxieties, and be connected to nature, we'll be closer to nature. I think the only way we can really be one with nature is to allow nature to be nature. And whenever we are disrupting it, whenever we're not allowing it to be natural, then it disturbs the entire system. Not just the ecosystem, but our entire permaculture system: earth care, people care, fair share, the whole thing. It's why earth is so important. It's part of everything, it's all connected, and if we want to be closer to God, then we have to protect the earth as well.

This viewpoint of nature being part of God's perfect creation was expressed by one of the panelists from the vegetable monologues, who explained her view that God's miracle "exists in the simple presence of plants and fruits and humans on this planet." A similar ecological hermeneutic was present at Hazon during a Friday night Shabbat prayer service led by Rabbi Steve Greenberg. He explained to our small group of six that Shabbat is the only commandment Jews have to do and is punishable by death. According to Greenberg, observing shabbat is about facilitating the six day a week movement of "doing" to a divinely mandated day of simply "being."

In Greenberg's analysis, YVWH, or Adonai, means "is-was-will be=being." He interprets the Sh'ma (Judaism's most popular prayer that reaffirms their monotheistic belief in Yahweh) to mean "love" and argues it is a "profoundly ecological" prayer. This

is because for Greenberg, Jews believe that God is Being, and according to the Sh'ma, Being is One; therefore, all things are of one creator and are interconnected.

Greenberg encouraged us to ponder this deeper meaning of shabbat and the Sh'ma by asking, "We all love our own being. Can we love all other beings the same way?" This question brought in an ethical component that challenged those present to look at their relations from this interconnected perspective of God's love for all of his creation. In Greenberg's theological understanding, the Sh'ma becomes an occasion for Jews to reflect on God's oneness, which is manifested in the interconnectedness of God's creation. In this theocentric understanding, there is an ethical demand to extend the love we feel for ourselves to the rest of the created world, so that living in ways that contribute to the health of the world becomes a vehicle for recognizing the oneness of God.

Moreover, for Greenberg, the Sh'ma prayer, and the Sabbath as reminder, tells Jews that they must love god and do so all the time, so much that they are to bind it to their bodies and doors and to teach this love to their kids. He further pointed out that in Deut 6:5-9 and Deut 11:13-21, it is written that God loves his chosen people and gives Israelites abundance but that the Israelites must be faithful—if they were to stray by worshipping others, or in a modern context by worshipping money or watching too much TV, then rain will not fall and no crops will grow. Thus, God's love and the recognition of God as Being is an ecological teaching that should be remembered (re-member: to re-join with God) every Shabbat. I found this to be a very explicit teaching about the planetary and ecological implications of a Jewish view about God, such that it was obvious that this theological perspective motivates Greenberg's work with Hazon.

Similar views about interconnectedness are legion within agrarian writing. For example, Gary Holthaus shares that, “Soil, water, air, and light. These are the things without which neither agriculture nor a society of any kind can begin or continue. Talk about self-interest! Our care for them is the outward and visible sign of our care for ourselves, and one indicator that we have a future on this planet” (2009: 6-7). Furthermore, “Farmers are a species in an environmental, economic, social, psychological, and spiritual ecosystem that includes all the species from soil microorganisms, creatures small and large, and plants to neighbors, nearby towns, institutions like schools and churches and merchants, and large urban areas, as well as wilderness, geological formations, and light from distant stars. The water we depend on for agriculture and sustenance is related to it all, too, never quite contained, even in the quiet sloughs and backwaters of our major streams” (2009: 174-5). Thus, “a cosmos where mono-anything is doomed to failure” (2009: 176).

Most religious agrarians share this expansive view of health, from the microbial to the personal to the societal to the planetary. Their understanding of health tends to be nuanced and is built upon lived experience, personal research, and religious teachings. They also believe that health is threatened, even destroyed, by industrial society and agriculture. This “civilization,” as Ben Peters argues, “is killing the planet, so it’s killing us.” The problem with industrial culture, Peters adds, is that it is not based on “natural patterns.” In contrast to the destructive practices and values of industrial agriculture, Peters points to Jesus’ example of harmony with creation, a model for sustainable agriculture.

Rabbi Greenberg offers a similar analysis from a Jewish perspective, stating that, “I think buying locally, feeling a connection with the land, growing locally, recycling, treating the environment with care [is what] I understand us to be commanded to do.” Lisa Jones believes, “we as humans are called to be in partnership with the Creator to re-create the garden. And we have done the opposite...I think we’re on the brink of either making a decision to go ahead and be a partner and re-create the garden or go ahead and finish the, the job and kill this planet.” As Executive Director of Koinonia, Jones is actively working with the rest of the community to live as sustainably as possible, as such a religious agrarian lifestyle helps to re-create the garden and to partner with God. Thus, whether from the commandments of Torah or the Rabbinic tradition, or whether from Protestant readings of the Bible, religious agrarians are committed to bringing about the health of soils, animals, human spiritual and physical bodies, communities, and planetary ecologies. They are equally committed to issues of justice, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7  
JUSTICE FOR ALL: FROM SOIL TO WORKER, FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COMMUNITY

**A Concern for Justice**

Agriculture is in the foundation of the political, economic, and social structure...If agriculture cannot be democratic, then there is no democracy.

—Liberty Hyde Bailey (2009: 103)

A concern for justice mobilizes many sustainable food activists and inspires the motivation for many of their practices. This holds for ecological agrarians, and even more so for religious agrarians. For the latter, such an emphasis on justice stems from identity formation brought about by being part of traditions that have long-standing critiques of the manipulation of power, greed, hubris, and blatant acts of injustice. Many of the people I interviewed have read religious scripture, such as the Hebrew Prophets, where critiques of power are central. Many have also been raised by religious parents or attended and participated in religious services where an emphasis was placed on the value of treating other humans in just ways. Many of them also desire to extend such compassionate and ethical care towards non-human life forms and towards what is perceived to be a sacred, holy, or divine creation. In this chapter I examine the importance of justice in religious agrarian thought and the ways that agrarian practices and lifestyles embody concerns for equality, fairness, and empathy towards those most vulnerable to abuses of power.

**Politics and Food**

Many agrarians believe that “Food is political,” because “To change the food system requires organizing” (Lappe 2010: 242). Their commitment to social justice motivates many sustainable food activists to engage in political actions and organizing, in addition to their farming activities. The simple act of creating self-regulated organic

certifying agencies in the early days of the nascent organic movement was itself a political statement, as well as being a critique of the perceived injustices of the industrial food paradigm and its attendant practices. Such critiques and political mobilizing have been present in sustainable food circles for decades and these concerns are still front-and-center. Along with intrinsic concerns for justice from within religious traditions, religious agrarians also adopt justice-based critiques of the industrial food system advanced by ecological agrarians as they articulate their concerns and ideals for just food and farming.

For many farmers the world over, “The business of farming is, at the end of the day, constrained by the playing-field of the market” (Patel 2007: 7). Such constraints can and do lead to tragedy: loss of farms and livelihoods, loss of regional culture and social capital, and increasingly, the loss of lives due to suicide, as many farmers the world over take their lives out of shame and frustration because they are unable to repay farming-related debts.

Meanwhile, those sympathetic with the industrial farming system, while lamenting such “externalities,” argue that because farming is a business, then those who succeed are better able to handle the dictates of market capitalism. For these supporters, the market eventually will lead to efficiency in food production and in the development of technologies that save labor and lead to greater productivity.

We see here again a war over narrative tropes, with religious agrarians siding with the analysis that, “Large corporations are very reluctant to cede their control over the food system” (Patel 2007: 11). While the division between sustainable and industrial farming is one of metaphor, narrative, and ideas, it is equally one with material

repercussions, including political ramifications in legal codes, agricultural policy, and international commerce (and in the flesh and blood bodies of farmers the world over).

Religious agrarians seek ways to farm that honor creation, health, and locality, but that does so in a way that is just for all involved while also providing for a living wage for all involved. They view justice as a bottom-up concern, beginning with soil organisms, farm animals, farm laborers, farmers, farm communities, and consumers of local, sustainable foods. From this perspective, agribusiness corporations are seen as the boogey-man, creating an uneven, toxic, unjust playing field that harms everything that is seen to be good about sustainable farming and agrarian lifeways.<sup>1</sup>

Given these beliefs, many religious agrarians are motivated to model, support, and practice sustainable alternatives. In this way, “Social movements [such as CSAs and farmer’s markets] provide tangible support and help to communities in need. But they also provide hope, and the promise of change” (Patel 2007: 34). Given the severity of modern-day agriculture from the perspective of sustainable agriculture supporters—the loss of genetic diversity and topsoil, the poisoning of waters, twin epidemics of obesity and malnutrition/starvation, and the corruption of democracy by agribusiness interests, to name some of the more common claims—for those in the sustainable agriculture milieu it is imperative to develop and embody healthy, just alternatives.

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<sup>1</sup> The sustainable agricultural milieu is similar to the radical environmental milieu in this diagnosis about corporate malfeasance, especially in regards to the machinations of the Monsanto Corporation. They differ in their prescriptions, although the lines blur; for example, many supporters of sustainable agriculture in Europe have taken to active civil disobedience and “monkeywrenching” as they tear up test plots for genetically modified organisms. For more on the analysis of corporations and their perceived role in despoiling the earth and also civil democracy, see Taylor (1995: 115).

As has been explored, religious agrarians share these same concerns, pronouncements, evaluations, and critiques, but ground them within religious worldviews. Altogether, the need for hope and change are also motivators as religious agrarians attempt to put their religious values about justice into practice to show that “another world is possible.” We have seen this in Koinonia’s desire to be a demonstration plot for God, where these religious agrarians practice permaculture and its call for “Earth Care, People Care, Fair Share.” Indeed, the last of this triumvirate is explicitly linked to issues of justice. Such concerns, despite shortcomings in practice, are also found at global levels of sustainable food networks. The result is that tropes, narratives, and concerns for justice are locally embodied in lives of religious agrarians, helping to contribute to processes of microglobalization (Huey 2005; Cetina 2005). At the same time, they are simultaneously spread at global levels via modern day technologies, helping to form international lived networks built upon the shared premises of agrarian concerns.

While there is a long tradition of religious bodies, institutions, and leaders focusing on justice and ethics (Runzo, et al 2003), it is only more recently that there has been an explicit link to environmental issues. These issues range from over-consumption, to issues of carrying capacity and acceptable human population levels, to genetic modification of food, to loss of species diversity, and now to social and environmental justice issues (Chapman, et al 2000; Brunk and Coward 2009). Food is an element that unites all of these concerns, so that by focusing on issues of justice in regards to agricultural practice and policy, religious agrarians are offering a wide-ranging critique of modern industrial farming, technologies that harm the earth, and

neoliberal capitalism. At the same time, they are re-inventing and re-imagining their own traditions to make them relevant to various ethical concerns of today.

This is seen for example in Judaism with the development of *Magen Tzedek*, a new kosher-certifying agency “[f]ounded on the principle that we are what we eat[.] Magen Tzedek is an ethical seal signifying that kosher food has been prepared with care and integrity. Products carrying the Magen Tzedek seal reflect the highest standard on a variety of important issues: employee wages and benefits, health and safety, animal welfare, corporate transparency and environmental impact.”<sup>2</sup> The 2009 Hazon Food Conference even held a session about Magen Tzedek and was advertised in the program book as being a talk about, “the aspirations of a burgeoning international movement for sustainable, responsible consumption [that] promotes increased sensitivity to the vast and complex web of global relationships that bring food to our tables.” This provides clear evidence that religions are changing in regards to contemporary food issues. The process of change involves adapting and inventing new religious agrarian ethics, ideals, and practices that are able to address the changing technologies, policies, and consumer identity and habits of the industrialized food system.

The Jewish concern for justice in regards to religious agrarian concerns shows the process of the renewal and reinterpretation of tradition. For example, this is present in the work of Nigel Savage, who on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011 sent an email to the Hazon list serve with the following passage:

Nowadays shabbat as a concept stands mostly by itself. But in the biblical narrative it's intertwined with a series of other iterations of seven...The

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<sup>2</sup> <http://magentzedek.org/> Accessed June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Torah teaches that rest for a person and rest for the land are connected to each other; to do one, we have to do the other. In both cases, we do not "allow" the land or the person to rest; we require it. The Torah makes the further presumption - implicit in its day, and being slowly relearned explicitly in ours - that shabbat and shmita necessarily involve concern for the most vulnerable within a society; rest for oneself and rest for the land requires concern for the landless, the day laborer, the widow and the orphan. Today we might add the illegal immigrant, the non-unionized, those without health benefits or retirement plans.<sup>3</sup>

Here is an explicit call for concern about how the lowest in society are treated, where in Savage's hermeneutic, both Torah and ancient Israelite celebrations and customs speak to concern for the land and for the poor. Hazon is updating this concern and applying it to the realities of today's industrial food system, and the perceived victims of this system: soils, field workers, slaughter house workers, and those working in the agribusiness industry without the benefits of union representation.

The links between food choices and justice are made explicit in Hazon's *Food for Thought*, as well, with a whole chapter devoted to "Food and Ethics: the implications of our food choices" (2009). In this chapter, the authors share that, "The story of our food does not begin and end on our plate. Food is produced somewhere...Jewish tradition has long made the connection between food and social justice, exhorting us whenever possible to share our table with the hungry...We were once slaves in Egypt; our memory of our experience of injustice is intended to be a constant reminder to do justice in the world" (2009: 93). The memory and consciousness of this experience inspires those in the Jewish Food Movement to embody the concept of *tzedakah*, or justice. By remembering various Torah and Talmudic passages and teachings about justice, Jews today are reminded that, "There is a direct connection between agricultural production,

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.hazon.org/go.php?q=/readingroom/emailArchive/emails/Omer,\\_Shmita,\\_FairFood,\\_Sabbatical.html&tr=y&auid=8434202](http://www.hazon.org/go.php?q=/readingroom/emailArchive/emails/Omer,_Shmita,_FairFood,_Sabbatical.html&tr=y&auid=8434202) Accessed May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011.

social justice and our relationship with God...We no longer live in the agrarian world of the biblical land of Israel; yet the underlying issues remain with us today” (2009: 94).

These issues of justice and food production are indeed relevant to many of my Jewish research subjects. For example, the CSA programs in both Gainesville and Atlanta donate excess food to regional soup kitchens. In this arrangement, rather than wasting the fresh produce, the leaders of both CSAs organize pick-up and drop-off volunteers who bring leftover shares (from people who are out of town or who cannot pick their share up, or who even order an extra share specifically for the food bank) in their cars to soup kitchens.

Furthermore, for Isaac Segal, the concept of justice resonates with his conception of what it is to be a Jew. As he explained, “this is kind of what it means to be a Jew: you lead a good life and you take care of the people and the planet and the animals and the living creatures around you.” This understanding of his Jewish identity made Segal excited to see leftover shares go to soup kitchens (“I definitely like the idea...I really hate fresh food going to waste.”) and also motivated his practice of joining the CSA.

Like Segal, Noah Gottwald also emphasized the strong social justice component of Judaism, stating that, “I know that my Jewish upbringing definitely has a social justice component to it. And my environmental consciousness also has a social justice component to it...I think that there’s an overall consciousness in my Judaism that being good to the environment as well as being good to others...are tenets of Judaism...I would say there’s no question in my mind that Judaism espouses a social justice outlook on life.” For the purposes of my argument, Gottwald explained that this Jewish

concern for justice indeed extends to issues of agriculture. In his words, “I would say that the treatment of not just the animals on a farm, but the workers on the farm, is equally important.” These beliefs and values therefore have motivated Gottwald to adopt religious agrarian practices like joining a CSA.

Meanwhile, Ruth Jacobs explained that she donates excess food she purchases at the local farmer’s market to a local soup kitchen in part because “just like Torah and the corners of our field, some of it needs to go to those who don’t have” fresh food (*Pe’ah*, from Leviticus 19:9-10). Beatrice Tischler echoes both Segal and Jacobs by explaining that the Talmudic prohibition against wasting food, *bal taschit*, inspires her to practice sharing food. As she points out, “Throwing away food is a sin.”

Tischler’s friend Naomi Eisenberg is explicit in her understanding of Judaism and justice. For her, the *tzedakah* aspect of Judaism has influenced her decision to join the CSA. As she explains, “Tikkun Olam means to repair the world, and that’s our job. Our job is to repair the world.” This repairing means that Jews have a choice to care responsibly for the planet and all the life upon it, or to destroy it. If they choose to repair it, then Jews are to act with *tzedakah*, which for Eisenberg, “literally translated I think it means charity, but we take it to mean charity of any kind...Giving to, supporting the farmer is *tzedakah*, and we’re commanded to do that.” Eisenberg is thus inspired to practice supporting sustainable agriculture because of her desire to support local farmers and she sees this as a commandment given by God.

Such a concern for justice is intricately wrapped up in the work of Daron “Farmer D” Joffe, who left the farm he had started in Wisconsin and went to California where he taught farming to youth in a youth prison. Joffe followed this experience by beginning a

nonprofit to set up gardens in low-income communities and he also began planting gardens in schools and boys homes. As he explains, focusing on justice is “kind of a difficult thing to do from a sustainable economic perspective...I run a business. A social and environmentally conscious business. We discount and do as much as we can to support those types of initiatives—food deserts. I’ve been involved in starting farmer’s markets that receive food stamps. I’ve been a mentor to minority farmers. It’s a big part of my passion and my mission.”

He links this work to his religious values. When asked what inspires him to undertake work for justice, despite the challenge it places on his ability to earn a living, he responded by saying, “It’s my Jewish roots, absolutely. It’s engrained in my soul. To practice acts of kindness and to look out for other people...My parents instilled in me a strong awareness through my Jewish roots of being persecuted. We have family who were in the Holocaust, Holocaust survivors, so [I’m] very aware and conscious of persecution.” Here we see once again that the Jewish commitment to justice, coupled with Joffe’s own lived experience of ancestral oppression, inspires him and other Jewish religious agrarians to practice sustainable farming and to do so with a focus on justice issues.

Dorothy Goldstein echoes these concerns and this identity and they influence her approach to organizing the Tuv Ha’Aretz CSA pick-up at CSI in Atlanta. Goldstein explains that, “I enjoy Jewish community and certainly enjoy doing service and social justice work as a Jew; that’s where my identity is formed.” This identity led her to actively build upon the relationship she formed with Hazon while living in New York City by beginning a Tuv Ha’Aretz CSA partnership when she and her family relocated to

Atlanta. In fact, Goldstein, Rabbi Hillel, and the leadership of CSI were awarded a grant from Hazon to become one of the first national-level Tuv Ha'Aretz partnerships.

From a sociological perspective, such religious agrarian practices undertaken with institutional support can create community while also allowing people to deepen their relationship with their religious identity and heritage. They can also allow people to dialogue about the interrelated issues of locality, health, and justice. This has been the experience of Goldstein over the few years she has run the Tuv Ha'Aretz CSA pick-up at CSI. The power-of-numbers available from a religious institution means that for Goldstein, "the Jewish community [is able to] put their purchasing power into local family farms." This ability is "very important to me and I think it's important to people who end up committing for several years and who become engaged with the process and find out about it." The more the Tuv Ha'Aretz participants get involved, then the more of "an incredible sense of community and an intergenerational sense of community" forms because arriving at CSI to get a share of organic produce "brings everyone in contact with people across the age spectrum and brings families together with other families and people in conversation with the Rabbis and each other in informal ways that don't happen at synagogue, they don't happen at religious school, they don't happen in our day to day lives, but they do happen around the pick up table."

Goldstein continues, this time weaving in the specific justice component of the CSI/Hazon CSA partnership, by explaining that CSI has a partnership with the Atlanta Community Food Bank. In this partnership, each week a Tuv Ha'Aretz member volunteers to bring any leftover produce or shares to an emergency food provider. For Goldstein, such an action "incorporates very strong, universal and Jewish values of

providing access—meeting food security needs but also through access to healthy and fresh food, which most emergency food providers don't receive donations of. So those are all opportunities to [work for] social justice through supporting local agriculture and meeting hunger needs; volunteering together; having informal avenues of conversation; participating in some educational programs; and giving the Rabbi a platform to do a lot of both formal and informal teaching about the environment.”

These various components are united under the banner of supporting local, healthy, justly-produced sustainable food, while also being rooted within the larger Jewish tradition. They are also united in the eyes and teachings of CSI's Rabbi Hillel, who notes that on Wednesday nights during the growing season, about fifty Jews come to the synagogue to get organic produce from a local farmer. He points out that not that many Jews come on a Wednesday night for minyan and to pray evening prayers.

The above scenario prompted Hillel to ask, “So which is the more Jewish venture? Which sustains the religious and spiritual life of the Jews of our congregation more? Traditional daily prayers, or tomatoes? Right. I think you could argue tomatoes.” Hillel interpreted this scenario to mean that, “it shows is that these are not ideas and values that are foreign to people's Jewish lenses. To the spiritual way that they see their Jewishness.” In fact, Hillel believes it makes sense “to them that their synagogue would sustain their spiritual life through sustaining ethical farming practices. That that's an ethical imperative which Jews should be supportive of and we should speak about as a Jewish value...and this is a much higher level of kashrut” than a ritually slaughtered animal.

For Hillel, synagogue is a place where Jewish values and teachings are discussed, challenged, and put into practice. He supports Tuv Ha'Aretz because it allows the Jewish members of his synagogue who are CSA members to put into practice their Jewishness. As seen, this Jewishness has a strong ethical component that "sustains...spiritual life." For Hillel, Wednesday CSA pick-ups are a time when Jewish ethics, values, and identity get put into community practice, not only in minyan prayer but also in embodying a higher level of kashrut.

An ability to put values into practice is an important component of personal identity and happiness. Many of the people I interviewed, observed, and worked with for this project all expressed joy, satisfaction, and a sense of meaningfulness as results of their participation in religious agrarian practices. For many, this joy was in part because they believed they were able to put their religious values into practice, while also doing something they believed is positive for the environment and their local community. To paraphrase Aldo Leopold, to receive an ecological education about the interconnectedness of life leads to the realization that we live in a world of wounds. For many, these wounds are felt at an emotional level (Roszak, et al. 1995). Thus, one of the results of developing a worldview that is influenced by environmental and ecological sciences is a concern for the earth (whether this is seen as a divine creation or not) and the desire to act, both personally and politically, for the protection of the environment. The wounds can creep in when a person feels overwhelmed and burns out because most metrics of environmental health are in steady decline and continue to get worse. Therefore, by participating in religious agrarian practices rooted in religious identity and

community, religious agrarians are able to act in productive ways for justice, health, and local environmental health.

In their lament about the failures of the environmental movement broadly speaking, Ted Norhaus and Michael Shellenberger opine that, “One of the problems...is that while public support for the environmental agenda is broad, it is also frightfully shallow. This has implications not just for the challenge of passing legislation but also for the inseparable challenge of building a movement” (2009: 202). They continue by arguing for the need to create an environmental politics that motivates and inspires people to become environmentally active, both in practice and in financial commitment to local and global NGOs. This argument is built upon their analysis of social science literature, which suggests that people are happy and engaged when they are in flow, serve others, interact with others, and live a meaningful life (2009: 204). It is precisely for these reasons that religious agrarians, and the larger ecological reformation occurring within religious traditions globally, are a leading edge in the changing landscape of the environmental movement.

By participating in lived practice (being in the “flow”), by serving others due to concerns about justice, by participating in community, and by being grounded in a cosmology of meaning, religious agrarians are actively challenging the industrial food system and are leading the way towards a new way of putting religious and environmental values into practice. This religiously based practice helps heal both inner and outer wounds that attend to seeing creation being despoiled by human activities like industrial agriculture. This active mix of both challenge and healing applies equally to Jewish and Christian religious agrarians.

We have seen that Judaism contains a strong ethical component. The same holds true for permaculture. During the 2010 PC training at Koinonia, Chuck Marsh shared the core ethical tenets of PC. These are care of the earth, care of humans, care of the community, and respect for the intrinsic value of all living beings. In this worldview, care of the community entails fairly sharing the products of the earth, which ideally should be grown and distributed along the design parameters of permaculture. Therefore, a native value of the permaculture system is to share with those around you.

Such sharing and compassionate commitment to justice has been central to the vision and mission of Koinonia going back to its beginning. Modeled after the radical and egalitarian sharing of the early corporate church as described in Acts, Koinonia has always been a place of voluntary poverty and simplicity that has challenged the iniquities of society. Food and fellowship have been central to this challenge from day one, from working across color boundaries in the fields to sharing of food across color boundaries in the community's cafeteria. This spirit and ethos is still central to the hospitality and education of Koinonia, so the fair share tenet of permaculture is easily grafted onto a culture and institution already used to campaigning for issues of justice. As Sylvia Castle explained, "I'm more concerned probably with peace and social justice [issues over environmental issues] although the neat thing about permaculture is it tries to incorporate all [of them] so it [is] more of a holistic thing than just organic gardening."

Koinonia members have protested the School of Americas, campaigned for peace in a post-9/11 world, collaborated on immigrant rights with Jubilee, and created a monastic community on the margin of empire. In all of these activities, justice has been an explicit value. This concern also has led Koinonia to forge networks with business

partners who share the same concerns. It is also represented in individual lifestyles and actions of community members, from Nashua's solidarity with Latino immigrants to Norris's effort to start a food bank for impoverished African Americans within the Americus region.

The concern for justice even motivated Ben Peters to become a community member. Prior to joining Koinonia, Peters had done justice work in Philadelphia but realized life in the city was not spiritually or physically healthy. Rather, he realized that, "I want[ed] to be someplace [where I] could live in a way that didn't require other people to be oppressed or to be suffering. I feel like in the city you use an infrastructure that could be built with unfair labor [and] your whole way of life is based on...extracting stuff from the environment. I know in a rural place it is too but it's, one, it can be not as much, and two, it may [not be as easy] to see so I'm happier." We see again that Peters' lifestyle choices are motivated by values he's developed through lived experience. Whether seeing the chemicals Koinonia uses on its pecan trees or realizing the ecofootprint (and social footprint) of living in cities, Peters understood that his concern for the earth and for justice obligated him to change his lifestyle. This realization prompted him to move to Koinonia so could learn about and implement permaculture farming techniques while also honoring his commitment to live in intentional community, all while striving towards a Christ-centered life.

He explained his own progression in the following words: "I guess my whole life is caring about a certain small group of religious minded people up until [I realized that] people need to be treated fairly no matter what their religion or whatever and it's kind of just expanded to all creatures, you know whether they be animals or plants or rocks or

whatever.” When asked if this motivation to care comes from his faith, Peters responded by saying that, “I guess when I read the Bible, like when I read Jesus in the Gospels, it was a different picture than when I had as a kid, so I went from being very sectarian to being, I felt like what Jesus was saying was that he was calling a certain group of people to come follow his teachings to bring about the kingdom of God, which is a term I believe means a world of right relationships.” When asked if Koinonia provides a place where he can work on right relationships, Peters responded by explaining, “Yes, [because] I wanted to live in a way which didn’t require other people to suffer, or at least try to minimize the ways that I cause people to suffer, so I heard of this place [and] I decided to try it out.” Therefore, the motivation for Peters was his desire to “live in a way that didn’t cause suffering” but this meant that “to do that I had to grow my own food or know people who grew my food so I wouldn’t be reliant on the government to subsidize corn which is causing Mexicans to lose their land because they can buy our corn cheaper because of the subsidies we have and the opening up of trade agreements.”

Like many religious agrarians, Peters’ religious values (his interpretation that Jesus preached an ethics of right relationships) influence his views about the earth and justice and have compelled him to put into practice his ideals. As he explained “I think that when Jesus taught, what Jesus was aiming for was equality and you can’t, I think inequality produces a lot of the world’s problems.” This interpretation of Jesus’ teachings was also held by Clarence Jordan and is one of the reasons all of the permanent members of Koinonia take on vows of voluntary poverty—their room and board is covered by the community, and they earn a little bit extra per year, but ideally

they share what little profit is made from sales of pecan products and work rather to challenge the world's inequalities.

In Peters' analysis, right relationships include our relationships with food: how it is grown, who grows it, and the governmental policies that influence this. By living at Koinonia and putting into practice agrarian and permaculture farming techniques, Peters is able to live in a way that is consistent with his food justice values.

Stephanie Paterson is equally motivated by justice issues and before her visit to Koinonia, she was "really into solidarity with the poor and taking care of the homeless." She also feels that God is the only ruler over anything, as he is the Creator talked about in Genesis, and humans are "enslaving plants and animals and the earth" when we should be living in harmony with God's creation.

When asked about why she it is that she is so concerned about justice and equality and caring for people and the earth, Paterson answered, "I believe that God is in every living thing. God is in the soils and God is in the rocks and in the water and in the sky." This understanding of God inspires Paterson to live a life where she is "taking care of people, first and foremost, like that's the most important thing to me is taking care of people...And being obedient to God. And I've never really felt as intimate with anything as I do with the earth. Like that's just a part of who I am."

Paterson even extends her desire to abide in caring relationships to the earth, for "I don't think like we're on the land or we own the land. I really believe we are the land, we're just as much a part of it as like plants are and animals are." Paterson recognizes these are not mainstream Christian views, but nonetheless she is comfortable and happy to call herself and Christian and she feels she is doing the work of Christ.

Paterson admits that her own understanding of Christ was influenced by her exposure to the religious agrarianism of Koinonia. In fact, she claims that, “I didn’t think it was that important until I came here and now I realize that [to] love your neighbor as yourself and [to] love God--like if we love the earth, [then] we’re loving God. And if we take care of the earth, we’re going to be able to provide enough for our neighbors...if we practice permaculture and organic farming more and more and we begin to live more gently on the earth and more intimately with the earth, we’re going to solve all these problems. You know, we could, we can make it so that no one’s hungry anymore and so that everyone has a place to live.”

Paterson’s strong identity with God and the earth motivate her concern for justice and caring relationships. We also see in her the interrelated religious agrarian concerns for locality, health, and justice, which for Paterson are explicitly linked to her Christian identity and understanding of God. This was reinforced at the end of our conversation, when she volunteered that, “I believe that living more sustainably is our solution to poverty and I think Jesus had a big heart for the poor and that was really what he talked about was taking care of the poor and the downtrodden.”

Another community member shared how ethical business practices are a key component of Koinonia’s business model. These practices include using Fair Trade chocolate from the Divine Chocolate company and using fair trade coffee beans they buy from a local business, Café Campesino. Koinonia is also looking into becoming a certified fair trade business as well, meaning they would be recognized for paying their workers a living wage and offering them health care. Katie Taylor is in charge of

maintaining and deepening these business relations and she explained that using fair trade products is “part of our value system” as a community. As she explained,

We kind of do mutual marketing and I’m actually very interested in those kinds of relationships. I guess I see marketing not so much from a competitive standpoint but from more of a grass roots standpoint. If we’re promoting them and they’re promoting us, and we’re diverting people away from the big corporate, ‘get rich quick’ folks, and more money is going into our pockets, we’re all winning. Everybody [wins,] right down to the people growing the products and making the products. So that’s a big thing for me and my philosophy.

Once again, individual values influence lifestyle choices. In this instance, the values are ones of mutuality and cooperation, and the choices are sharing and a bottom-up economy based on justice and fairness. In this alternative economic model, small business owners and workers who produce sustainable, fair trade products are privileged over the profits of corporations.

These values of sharing and of protesting exploitation of worker and soil also motivate Patrick Smith, who lives with his family on the edge of Koinonia’s property and who walks to work in the fields during the week. One of the practices he is involved with at Koinonia is dumpster diving, which he believes “fits pretty well with the idea of reducing waste.” He points out that, “there’s so much waste in our culture and if we can funnel some resources that are headed to a landfill and feed hogs or feed people or chickens or what have you or turn it into compost even and possibly even recycle some of the containers that this stuff comes in, [then] I think that can be seen as ministry as well. And fits in with permaculture design.” In Smith’s religious agrarian practices, the waste of industrial culture becomes sacraments that can be culled from dumpsters and turned into inputs for Koinonia’s fields and animals. By reclaiming the wastes of “empire,” Koinonia is able to honor the labor of others in that rather than this labor

ending up in a landfill, it becomes an object of eco-ministry that helps the health of Koinonia.

Because of its own storied history and its relationship with Habitat for Humanity, Koinonia receives thousands of visitors each year. Their catalogue and products are also mailed to thousands of others around the country each year. Therefore, Koinonia is able to impact Christian (and non-Christian) food consciousness far outside the boundaries of its few hundred acres.

In the same vein, as the leading voice of the new Jewish food movement, Hazon is able to shape in profound ways the progressive edge of Jewish food choices. Both groups together are part of the “Fair Food Revolution” (Hesterman 2011) and will continue to help shape religious agrarian discourses about and understandings of just, humane food and food choices. By participating in conferences, giving talks, through their websites and publications, and by participating in lived networks, my research subjects are already acting upon the realization that “we need to not only eat local or plant gardens but start engaging as fair food citizens to alter the larger policies and institutional practices that are driving the [food] system in its current direction” (Hesterman 2011: 132).

The history I have been outlining suggests that religious agrarians will only become more visible, organized, and vocal in fair food discussions and policy proposals in the coming years. Given the historical interplay between religion and politics in the United States, and given the religious agrarian worldview, it seems an obvious given that the concern for justice will continue to mobilize and capture attention within religious subcultures in America. Such attention will most likely lead to continued

support for or participation in Fair Trade networks; providing soup kitchens with local, organic produce; and active lobbying at local, state, and national levels for laws that support worker's rights and/or sustainable businesses. Because these activities are value-driven by members of religious institutions, they will most likely become persistent efforts, whether within a subtradition or across ecumenical lines.

The search for justice in food production will also grow in large part because if the industrial food system fails in its promises of feeding the masses healthy foods and appears instead to be brittle and flawed (a very real possibility during this century of ecological limits), then alternative cultural narratives about farming will percolate into mass consciousness. Many of my research subjects are evidence that this percolation of environmental agrarian concerns into popular culture is already underway, as many have read Berry and Pollan and seen *Food, Inc.*

Furthermore, if limits of health and justice are met, then America will most likely undergo an even more profound dialogue about farming and food choices, and religious agrarians will be situated to lead this dialogue, especially within communities and networks of faith. Such a dialogue will most likely recognize that, "Farming offers us a comprehensive view of the larger culture that cuts across every concern we have in creating a sustainable society: poverty, the environment, racism, even finding and cultivating a meaningful life rather than a merely prosperous one. Agriculture is one of those great cultural intersections where environmental concerns and social justice issues, including the economy, come together and play themselves out for good or ill...Agriculture, not the usual economic markers of our prosperity, is the keystone for the whole culture" (Holthaus 2009: 118-119).

These sentiments are already on display in religious agrarian worldviews, with the concern for justice interweaving itself with concerns for health and locality. Such interaction is seen in the following sentiments expressed by Rabbi Hillel as we discussed food issues in his office at CSI:

The land is local! And it's going to have to stay local. You can't move land around. Globalization turns out to be very significantly limited and restricted in its capacity to do certain things. It can do certain things, can't do other things. And the risk that we expose our farmers to, financially, in order for us to have cheap available food [is unacceptable]. Which is just cutting off our own future. You're stealing from yourself to have the cheap and easy food that jeopardizes the future of the farmer, because if he's not there, I can't grow my own food! I literally, my life depends on the farmer growing the food that I eat. I can't do it. Nobody can really sustain their own life. And self-sustaining farming is very complicated! It turns out you can't do it. You've got to have an interconnectedness of farms and people and communities.

It is precisely this interconnectedness that motivates religious agrarians to put their values into practice. For religious agrarians, this interconnectedness occurs in three interrelated sets: the first is an interconnectedness of farms, people, and communities. The second is an interconnectedness of locality, health, and justice. The final interrelated set is the interconnectedness of the Divine/God/Jesus and creation. Here we see that perception and values drive practice and behavior in regards to striving for a religiously-inspired sustainable life. Yet, we also see that lived experience, whether smelling the stink of CAFO feedlots to reading signs that warn about the dangers of just-sprayed industrial farming chemicals, equally motivate religious agrarians to practice sustainable lifeways. For religious agrarians, this iterative process of emplaced and embodied value and meaning making is thoroughly grounded in lived networks, religious identity, and a holistic, theocentric worldview.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION: A HARVEST OF IDEAS

### **A Changing Landscape (of Farmlands and Religious Studies)**

Over the last three chapters I have explored key themes that emerged during my research. The repeated references to, concerns for, and attempts to articulate religiously grounded ideas of locality, health, and justice define religious agrarianism. Furthermore, various lived networks within which religious agrarians participate, help shape, and, in return, are shaped by influence this definition. Consistent with a lived religion methodological approach to studying religion, I have explored the themes of locality, health, and justice. Theology, scripture, and orthodox teachings of the traditions are relevant insofar as they influence people's lived practices and understandings. Yet religious agrarianism is significantly a bottom-up phenomenon, shaped by the values and practices of religiously motivated individuals and groups who point to and cite scripture and orthodox teachings as needed but who are not defined or bound by them. Rather, religious agrarians pick and choose what is most helpful as they articulate an ecological and agricultural sensibility that is already present in their lives, most often from their own prior lived experience.

This lived experience helps shape individual and group approaches to the environment, to agriculture, and thus to religion. Such an iterative process leads to selective interpretation or re-interpretation of teachings, doctrines, and scripture, so that these become doctrines put to use to support an emergent religious agrarian worldview. In this way, religious agrarianism is both a social construct--reacting to the politics, economics, environmental footprint, and cultural workings of both industrial and

sustainable agriculture models--and a lived religion that morphs into lived networks that reinforce its social construction.

In the remainder of this concluding chapter, I offer both comparison and contrast between my research subjects by exploring similarities and differences between how Jewish and Christian religious agrarians conceive of locality, health, and justice. I then return to network theory, environmental philosophy, and religious studies theory to finalize my analysis and argument about religious agrarianism and its emergent role in the religious landscape of the United States.

### **Revisiting the “Religion” in Religious Agrarianism**

Let us briefly revisit, compare, and contrast how religious agrarians use, shape, and re-invent aspects of their traditions in order to validate, justify, and inspire their religious agrarian lifestyles. In this way, we see how the emergence of a religious agrarian worldview is a unique and recent development in North American religious history while it also signals the continued development of green religious sensibilities.

Many analysts assert that religion is central to the worldviews that underlie sustainable agrarianism and the recent emergence of “foodie-ism.” For example, Eric Burkett claims that, “Religion, of course, takes many forms, but its most interesting form to date is food. Many folks, it seems, have embraced food, or food activism, as a new religion.”<sup>1</sup> I do not agree here with Burkett’s argument that food activism is a new religion in large part because the alternative food movement is too broad, lacks a centralized institutional structure, does not enter into talk about the “supernatural,” and lacks defined rituals; however, I do sympathize with his recognition that the modern

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.grassrootsnetroots.org/articles/article\\_20315.cfm](http://www.grassrootsnetroots.org/articles/article_20315.cfm) Accessed Friday, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

foodie landscape (and the sustainability aspect of this landscape) is peopled with many who have a zeal and passion for all things food. This almost “born-again” passion leads such people to crusade for food issues and to enact foodie lifestyles. If anything, however, my research subjects place their food concerns within a larger container: their own faith traditions.

My research also challenges an analysis offered by the leading agrarian writer Gene Logsdon, who asserts that, “Many modern agrarians are wary of institutional religion, like the ancient *pagani* were, and for the same reason. They view it as a product of organized urban power trying to gain control over them—trying to colonize them for its own benefit” (2007: 303-4). Logsdon’s research and experience blinker his gaze from seeing that there is an emergent, modern form of agrarianism: religious agrarianism. Clearly the modern agrarians of my research do not hold antipathy towards religious systems. In fact, most members of Hazon *are* residents of urban centers of power, and they use this position to help local sustainable farmers.

In terms of locality, my urban Jewish research subjects were interested in fresh food and taste. Many come from a culinary background where their parents cooked traditional Jewish meals in the kitchen. Quite a few also grew up with backyard gardens and missed the taste of fresh food that they enjoyed in their childhoods. Therefore, for the majority of my Jewish research subjects, concern about the local meant the ability to enjoy fresh, seasonal food while cooking meals for friends and family and Shabbat dinner. This is not to imply that the only concerns about the local were for fresh, seasonal food. Rather, this in part signals that members of Tuv Ha’Aretz tend to be

urban residents who join the CSA in order to get fresh food in a uniquely Jewish community setting.

When other values and motivations about concerns for the local appeared in my research about Jewish religious agrarians, it was contextualized within a few key Jewish concepts, which may also overlap with values about health and justice. One was *tikkun olam*, or the Jewish mandate to heal the world. Another was *bal taschit*, the ethical mandate to not destroy or waste. Another motivating factor was interpretations of Jewish scripture and teachings that highlight the agricultural past of Jewish people. Some Jewish religious agrarians draw inspiration from the many blessings and seasonal holidays surrounding food that they locate within their tradition and especially in Torah or the Talmud. By participating in sustainable agriculture--whether directly or through a CSA membership--these Jews invest renewed meaning into this ancient part of their religion.

Some Jews are also motivated by the human responsibility, given in Genesis, to be stewards of the earth. They interpret this mandate as a duty to care for local landbases by farming in healthy ways, as seen in the work of Daron "Farmer D" Joffe. Many are also motivated by a desire to support (and even start) local businesses, although this is a more secular concern (unless those started are sustainable farms, eco-camps, or kosher slaughterhouses that serve Jewish clientele).

In comparison, members of Koinonia are much more concerned about the environmental health and ecological well-being of their immediate community. This is in large part because the Christian agrarians of my research lived and worked on the land which provides their food and that they are to steward. This land is outside their

windows and they walk across it everyday on the way to morning prayer at the chapel, to work at their various duties within the community, and when they are taking a leisurely stroll along the peace trail through the pine forest on the edge of their property. Many of them have also participated in permaculture trainings, so bring a permaculture view of intentional design to their vision for what their locality will resemble; this vision is even codified in the operating protocols and guiding parameters of the community.

However, specific Christian beliefs, theologies, and concerns regarding “the local” motivate my research subjects who are involved in Christian agrarianism. These include Creation Care and holding an incarnational worldview, meaning that by seeing the earth as being both the creation of and home to God, there is a Christian obligation to care for the earth. For many in the Creation Care movement, this charge to care for the divine creation is seen as a blessing and a potential vehicle for grace rather than a task to soberly undertake in fear.

Members also view Koinonia as a demonstration plot where God’s ideal of love and compassion are put on display for all to see. Included in this demonstration plot is Koinonia’s attempt to forge and articulate new human-divine relations by permaculture and other agrarian practices. Members also hold a Christ-centered commitment to radical poverty and sharing that is inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus (as well as Clarence Jordan and contemporary New Monastics), who is viewed by the community as being either the Savior or the human being *par excellence*. Lastly, members of Koinonia believe that we are members of and participate in God’s Kingdom, so how we treat that Kingdom matters.

While morning services and noonday mealtime prayers did refer to nature (Joel Taylor, Koinonia's lead farmer, even read a passage from Wendell Berry during a morning prayer at the chapel), most prayers and passages I witnessed during these times of day referenced concerns about peace and reconciliation and about staying true to the vision of Koinonia. Few of my research subjects directly cited passages from scripture, but many believed that they were carrying the vision of Clarence Jordan forward into the twenty-first century.

Many also cited Jesus as their moral and spiritual exemplar, especially in regards to justice. However, after our initial interview and after working many hours together and conversing in the permaculture fields of Koinonia, Paul Robinson approached me with a scrap of paper that contained two passages from the New Testament that influence his view of locality and health and that motivate his actions. These were Colossians 1: 15-17, which states that all things, including all things on earth, were created in Jesus; and Hebrews 1:3, which shares that the Son radiates God's glory. Thus, for Robinson, these passages inspire a life that is dedicated to serving, sustaining, and keeping healthy local ecosystems, as these are created by God and serve as a reminder of the radiance of both Jesus and God. Others were inspired by the Genesis vision of stewardship, while the Sermon on the Mount motivated still others, although this influenced visions of justice more than locality.

In regards to religious agrarian concerns about health, members of Hazon were influenced by the concept of *tikkun olam*, which directly speaks to healing and health. Many of the Jews with whom I spoke see this healing to be an interconnected healing built upon healthy food, healthy local economies, healthy bodies, a healthy Jewish

identity and community, and healthy, sustainable human-earth relations built upon agrarian farming practices. Others actively enacted Jewish rituals that are designed to bring a Jew into presence with their food while also giving thanks to God. They felt that these practices, and the emotions precipitated by them, were heightened because the food being consumed was sustainably grown. Others believed in the concept of hospitality and enjoying “slow food” (concepts shared with Koinonia), which related to the health of bodies and the salubrious effects of sharing sustainably grown food at communal meals. Lastly, some Jews explained that they felt the need to re-examine and re-imagine what it means to be kosher in an age of CAFO foods because how kosher food products are raised and processed directly relate to Jewish concepts of health and justice both.

In comparison, the Christians I studied are concerned about the various aspects of health because they believe we are to care for God’s creation and are not to harm it. Furthermore, they believe they are called to model holistic farming to visitors who visit Koinonia. In this respect, those at Koinonia believe they are following the community’s unique institutional culture of demonstrating new, harmonious ways of being in society, with this harmony now extending to human-earth relations via permaculture. Lastly, both kinds of religious agrarians believe that they are commanded in some way, through revelation, scripture, and/or teaching, to live in harmony with God’s creation.

Meanwhile, both Christian and Jewish religious agrarian concerns about health are influenced by ecological understandings of soil and physical health. In other words, members of both religions agree and believe that the chemicals used in industrial farming are poisonous to the earth and to human bodies. In this secular reading of

various pro-sustainable agriculture literature, studies, and media, my research subjects are aligned. Moreover, in their analysis of what this means to their religious identity they are also more synonymous than divergent: many view these poisons as being an affront to a Divine creation or an affront directly to God. Both groups also share similar secular critiques of our societal health at-large: Americans consume too much, consumes too much unhealthy food, and do not make an extended effort to support local, small-scale family farms.

Finally, both religious agrarian groups I researched were extremely motivated by concerns about justice. For those at Koinonia, issues of justice have motivated the community since it was founded. This concern is still present today and extends to how all those involved with industrial agriculture are treated (workers, animals, soils) and the concern even motivates their purchasing decisions. It also inspires them to be members of the New Monastic movement. Many point to the teachings and examples of Jesus and Clarence Jordan as their motivation for holding concerns about justice and how justice is a part of diet and food choice. This concern is as strongly echoed by my Jewish research subjects, who almost all claimed that Judaism takes justice to be a central concern; this concern is found in scripture, sermons and teachings, and for many such a message was imparted by family members during formative childhood years.

While at the Food Conference, Rabbi Jacob Fine, Assistant Director of Hillel at the University of Seattle, presented an articulate synthesis of the various Jewish religious agrarian concerns for locality, health, and justice that neatly summarizes much of my own research. This occurred on a Friday morning talk about “Jewish Food Ethics”

where the goal of Fine's talk was to build on Jewish tradition in order to frame a contemporary Jewish food ethic. He began by pointing out that, "We are living in a new age if we're talking about kashrut including labor, environmental issues, and animal rights issues." This is a consistent theme in my research—many religious agrarian Jews recognize that there are new food issues that the tradition must address, and not least is the need to update what it means to keep kosher in today's industrialized food system. The concern to keep kosher motivates Jewish agrarians and is conspicuously absent in Christian agrarian circles, so that this is one of the biggest differences between Christian and Jewish religious agrarians.

The whole process of living a Jewish life guided by Jewish ethics, mitzvot, commandments, and laws is unique to the Jewish agrarian worldview. Jewish agrarians and food activists tended to warp environmental agrarianism into the woof of the much longer, larger, and more meaningful Jewish tradition in which they were raised. For Jewish agrarians, this tradition stretches back to the earliest patriarchs and the agricultural cycles of the earliest Israelites and proceeds through the Rabbinical tradition up to today, where kashrut and Torah must deal with health, justice, and environmental issues brought about by industrial agriculture.

Fine identified ten ingredients that a new Jewish food ethic should include/upon which it should be built. The first ingredient is *tza'ar ba'alei chayim*, or avoiding cruelty to animals, and which relates to all three religious agrarian tropes. The next two ethics are interrelated, and they are *lishmor et ha'adamah*, or the injunction to protect the earth, and *bal taschit*, a concept readily used by other Jews I researched.

The fourth ingredient of a modern Jewish food ethic is *lo ta'ashok sachir ani v'evyan*, or the injunction to not oppress laborers, evidencing a concern for health and justice both. This ethic is related to his fifth and sixth ingredients, *kavod habriyot*, or “providing dignity for all people,” and *ayn mahazikin yidei outei aveirah*, which means “one may not aid and abet a transgressor” by buying products from ag-industry companies.

Number seven was *hillul Hashem*, or desecration of God’s name. This ethic related to abstaining from genetically engineered ingredients and to not taking shortcuts with God’s laws (i.e. not corrupting what it means to be kosher). Number eight was *lifnim mishurant ha-din*, or “going beyond the letter of the law,” so creating a food system that is beyond kashrut, that is beyond just, that is beyond healthy. Lastly there was feeding the hungry based on Torah (gleanings of the field for the poor and donating ten percent of a harvest to the poor) and concepts of *tzeddek*, and the final ethic was *shmirat haguf*, or “protecting one’s health.”

We see here many of the same motivating values, concerns, and teachings from the Jewish tradition that influence and shape Jewish religious agrarianism. Many of these values emerged in my own research and were shared in chapter four’s literature review. These Jewish concepts of justice, the teachings and laws from Torah and the rabbinic tradition, and the agricultural bedrock of the early Jewish identity all contribute to the formation of an emergent Jewish agrarianism in North America of which Hazon is the leading voice. As Fine put it, “This is an exciting moment to be Jewish, and us being here [at the Food Conference] together is one of the reasons. When looking back at Jews and food, this group will stand out.”

Evidence of the interlocking concerns for locality, health, and justice are also becoming increasingly abundant in various Christian settings, and not only at permaculture trainings held at Koinonia. For example, the Lake Junaluska conference and retreat center in North Carolina held a “Caring for Creation” conference in Spring, 2011 (Lake Junaluska is part of the United Methodist Church). This was an ecumenical conference (with an interfaith component) for Christians concerned about the state of Creation. One presentation topic was permaculture, and Zev Friedman—who also was a teacher at the 2010 training at Koinonia—taught this module. This reflects the network links connecting agrarian activists and farmers. Other presentations addressed Sustainable Agriculture, Beyond the Basics in Greening your Church, Faith Principles of Creation Care, Creation Care and Poverty, and Triaging the Train Wreck of Climate Change.<sup>2</sup> These various concerns are becoming more omnipresent across and within Christian denominational lines, supporting my overall argument that the subset of “green” religious agrarian concerns are becoming attractive to particular segments of North American religion. Furthermore, the attractiveness of the values relating to locality, health, and justice that permeate the religious agrarian worldview has specific consequences in the form of concrete sustainable agricultural practices.

### **Place/s, Boundaries, Resilience, and EcoPhenomenology—New Futures for Religion**

As the practice of religion in North America continues to unfold in this century of growing climate destabilization (Hartsgaard 2011), issues of environmental and ecological health and trauma will become a more pronounced focus. This issue will

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.lakejunaluska.com/uploadedFiles/Lake\\_Junaluska/Upcoming\\_Events/Spiritual\\_Enrichment/Caring\\_for\\_Creation/Caring-for-Creation.pdf](http://www.lakejunaluska.com/uploadedFiles/Lake_Junaluska/Upcoming_Events/Spiritual_Enrichment/Caring_for_Creation/Caring-for-Creation.pdf) Accessed Thursday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

come to dominate sermons, hermeneutics of a tradition, exegesis of sacred texts, and will present a challenge to orthodoxy and orthopraxy, as seen in the above talk devoted to “Triaging the Train Wreck of Climate Change.” As humans descend the other side of Peak-Oil and are forced to live within nature’s limits (Hardin 1993), both their values and practices will change. The social constructionist and lived religion approaches to religion I utilize in this dissertation both expect such changes.

My research reveals that this process is already occurring, especially in regards to sustainable agrarian and sustainable food issues, and that this process is greatly enhanced by memberships in lived networks. Values about the local, health, and justice motivate religious agrarians to participate in sustainable agriculture lifeways. These values are directly shaped and influenced by religion, and also by society, politics, participation in lived networks, and environmental science. I have found that segments of North American religion are indeed changing and reconstructing their values and beliefs in order to live out these emergent environmentally centered values, at least in regards to sustainable food production and environmental agrarian mores.

The fusion of religious environmentalist and ecological agrarian concerns within North American religious agrarian communities suggests that these communities will continue to develop religious values and sensibilities that will take seriously the biocapacity of local bioregions. Because the practice of sustainable agriculture engages both accepting the ecological limits of God’s creation while providing a method of farming that can renew soil and society, the biocultural construction of religious agrarianism will continue (Baker and Winkelman 2010). This process and these constructions will signal a continued shift upon the North American religious landscape.

Because of religion's role in American society, this shift will continue to effect American politics, business practices, interfaith interaction, and cleavages and debates within traditions. Religious agrarians are at the forefront of this effort to put ecological agrarianism, sustainable agriculture, and religious teachings into lived practice.

The vanguard theologies, affective emotions towards the earth via green cosmologies, and institutional practices of religious agrarians will influence religious ethics and thus the material environment in various ways. One important influence will be the way people of faith transform their relations to their local environments. Therefore, the key religious agrarian theme of locality will continue to grow in importance in the religious future. This is because of the importance local production of food will have in a post-Peak Oil, climate destabilized future, where growing seasons will shift and the cost of petroleum products for both shipping and fertilizers will become cost prohibitive. So although our current lifeways are dependent upon abundant oil and stabilized weather patterns, the reality is that, "Both culture and ecology vary from place to place, both are complex, interdependent, and dynamic. Consequently, long-term sustainable production solutions must adapt to local conditions—both cultural and ecological—to be successful" (Kirschenmann and Bird 2006: 316). Religious agrarians are positioning themselves to be at the forefront of the role religion might play in local adaptation and long-term sustainable food production solutions in this century of water, oil, and soil shortages and changing weather patterns.

Such an increase in concern for and attention to locality, and how this will shape religion, signals the re-emergence of place. This re-emergence also partly calls into question the possibility (desirability?) of a universal and universalized religion and

religious narrative. Locality means healthy and just regional foods, regional food cultures, regional recipes, regional landscapes, and regional networks. It also means a more locally-oriented religion. This localized religion will be a lived religion and be built upon lived networks, for lived networks are “phenomenological realities” (Vasquez 2011: 299) where “Meaning, orientation, and intentionality...are constitutive of networks themselves. Within and through networks, actors carve out spaces to dwell, itineraries, and everyday routines, drawing from religious symbols and tropes to reflect on and orient their own praxis and to ‘sacralize’ nature and built environments” (2011: 299).

The spaces and everyday routines being carved out by North American religious agrarians via lived networks and the translation of values into practice are to be found in farmer’s markets, CSA arrangements, and sustainable agriculture fields in communities ranging from Koinonia to Adamah farm. Furthermore, the praxis of religious agrarianism rests upon concepts of localism, health, and justice, and results in the sacralization of sustainable farmlands and built environments—from compost piles to folding tables that support a CSA box waiting to be picked up to a pasture of free range cows.

Religious localism also implies a religious environmentalism fused with ecophenomenology set into a landscape that will shape religious production and praxis. Such a “dwelling perspective” (Ingold 2000: 5, 153) will invariably lead to local skills and local adaptation to local environments, something that religious agrarianism already is beginning to put into practice. This is seen, for example, in the following chain of ideas shared by Rabbi Hillel during our conversation at CSI. When asked what it was about the CSA that appealed to some families and made them think, “Hey, that speaks to me

as a Jew, I want to do that,” Hillel responded by saying “I think it’s do-able. It’s an ethical choice which can be made, which has profound impact beyond our own personal life. I think people are looking for choices they can make that have an impact [and] food is right up there with them.” This is because for Hillel, “people have taken in and really assimilated the local food message that the long-term health of the earth depends on having lots of farms all over the place...There’s a newfound appreciation for the people who feed us and that we cannot sustain a model that every year jeopardizes their very existence...When I [as a consumer] should share the risk.”

In fact, for Hillel, to join the CSA means that for him there is no risk and the worse case scenario is that there is a bad harvest of tomatoes. However, Hillel points out that everyone needs farmers to succeed. As he explained, “It’s not ok for the local farmer to go out of business, or my food is gone.”

Hillel also added that how a local farmer treats their soil is a motivator for Jews to join the CSA. As he explained, “A smaller farmer who is specifically dependent on a piece of land may be more likely to take better care of it. But again most economics is short term planning. People generally don’t plan long-term sustainable economies. So it’s an unusual person who will have the long-term vision and mind when the short-term opportunity for profit is there, [which is] why most of the economic model is a short-term prosperity.” This is because the short-term model does not “have a lot of vision. We just don’t have a lot of vision [whereas] Hazon really stands for vision: it’s the vision that the world and its food and its farmers and its eaters could be done and run differently.”

This vision results in a system that is “better for our personal ecology, better for the sustenance of the farmers and their families and the business which we depend on, and certainly much better for environmental reasons in terms of ‘I get the better food, I get good wonderful stuff, the farmer loses the incredible risk that he has to maintain, and spreads that out and spreads the risk and spreads the reward.’” Lastly, for Hillel, “the environmentalism of it is both the extra icing on the cake and it’s the fundamental root of what makes this a good idea.”

Hillel argues for spreading risk and reward across local religious, culinary, economic, and agricultural landscapes. Religious institutions and individuals with vision can contribute to healthy and just local economies of scale and ecologies of health. For Hillel, this is a win-win scenario for all involved, from local farmers to Jews who can put their environmental ethics and concerns about food into action.

In comparison, Rabbi Greenberg of B’nai Israel is a bit more cautious in his analysis of the contemporary state of Jewish environmentalism. While he supports Hazon and the CSA alliance with Sandhill Farm, he does not believe Jews have reached a critical mass with their commitment to environmentalism, whether local, national, or global. As he explained, “when 60 to 70% of Jews [in a given town] have no connection to any kind of organized Jewish life, can I say, ‘Yes it’s a growing movement?’ [i.e. Jewish environmentalism and especially sustainable food issues.] Yes I’m proud of what we’re doing and the commitment we’re making [but] I haven’t seen the 60% that aren’t involved flocking in here because we’re now teaching this.” For Greenberg, the reality is that “as long as the dollar is still king and industry still runs the world,” most people are not going to become environmentally concerned.

Nonetheless, Greenberg is thankful for his active synagogue and thinks the Hazon relationship and CSA partnership with Sandhill will be beneficial. This is because, “for those people who are going to partake in this, for those people who feel connected to the tradition, this enriches and enhances their lives. And to me that’s beautiful, that’s why I’m here. For me that’s the role faith and religion play: to enrich people’s lives.”

While both rabbis have realistic perceptions of environmental problems and solutions, they find hope and excitement in Jewish religious agrarianism. If such participation is indeed enriching for those involved, then there is little reason to believe this source of enrichment is going to go away anytime soon. My research suggests that for urban Jews, friends network with and tell other friends about their experience joining a CSA so that more people join. Membership in a Hazon-sponsored CSA where Tuv Ha’Aretz pick-ups are held in synagogues help generate a rich sense of community that is centered on both food and faith. Such an experience can help offset navigating urban shopping centers where fresh, organic food is either hard to find or is shipped from California. It also allows for a deepening of religious commitment and practice in regards to sustainable agriculture and religious environmentalist values.

Christian agrarians share similar concerns about the importance of locality and the need to support farmers and to generate a just, sustainable economy that privileges the local. For some, this importance is grounded in experiencing the local as being part of a divine creation. Sylvia Castle shared such a sentiment when she explained, “there’s something about the farm that is kind of sacred and therapeutic. I don’t know if you’d have to necessarily farm it, but I think there’s something about growing things, there’s something about the seasons, that you just, you do, you feel closer to the

Creator. And you feel part of that Creation.” Therefore, for Castle walking the permaculture fields of Koinonia allows her to feel part of God’s creation. In her own experience, she claims that this connection with creation “is lost on many, many people in urban settings and the virtual world. And for many in those situations they long for this peace and to become a part of that.” Given this desire, Castle believes that one of Koinonia’s missions is to “sow seeds of transformation” by being a demonstration plot for a Christ-centered religious agrarianism.

Such seed sowing and transformation must be local. It is a physical, spiritual, and therapeutic transformation. Directly participating in Koinonia’s permaculture design, or at least witnessing it by walking the fields, emplaces a person within a localized environment that is a manifestation of the Creator. As Executive Director Lisa Jones states it, “We’ve got to be true to what we’ve been called to be. And [to] be as fair as we can and as loving as we can and...what’s gonna [sic] take root is going to take root.” Koinonia is following a calling to be faithful, sustainable stewards in a loving and just manner. In order to do this, member’s values and practices must “take root” at a local level, directly on their campus and in their immediate ecological surroundings. This call to act is both religious and material. For religious agrarians, these two domains cannot be separated, for “[I]n the extinction of agrarian practices we witness not only the loss of a way of life but the erosion of a cultural sensibility that underst[ands] intimately and concretely the human bond with the earth” (Wirzba 2003: 2)

The intertwining of religion and biological materialism, and the influence of this on lived networks, lifestyle choices, and the social production of religious agrarianism’s dwelling-perspective points to the fact that, “There is no knowing or sensing a place

except by being in that place, and to be in a place is to be in a position to perceive it...Local knowledge is at one with lived experience if it is indeed true that this knowledge is of the localities in which the knowing subject lives. To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in" (Casey 1996: 18).

Religious studies needs to take this insight seriously, for it underlines the importance of locality, in terms of recognizing all humans are embodied beings within a landscape and a culture; and in terms of recognizing all humans need to consume calories. For religious agrarians, there is a more ethical way to obtain and consume calories, and the ethics of this path accept local limits, while they also support the effort to better know a local place. Such a shift in religious sensibilities at ever increasing levels is a major hallmark of the religious environmental present and continued future.

This shift is also built upon the growing recognition that our bodies (and our appetites) serve as an entryway into interacting with our local world; that as "*lived bodies belong to places...places belong to lived bodies* and depend on them...The lived body is the material condition of possibility for the place-world while being itself a member of that same world. It is basic to place and part of place...Bodies and places are connatural terms. They interanimate each other" (1996: 25). The attention to place culminates in culture, for "To be cultural, is to inhabit a place sufficiently intensely to cultivate it—to be responsible for it, to respond to it, to attend to it caringly. Where else but in particular places can culture take root?" (1996: 34).

This brings us back full circle to the very same views and sentiments of ecological agrarians and the life work of Wendell Berry. Religious agrarians help bridge the gap between a place-based religious ethic and a concern for sustainable agriculture.

This phenomenon is missed by literature on religious studies, religion in North America, and in food studies literature that attempt to explain support for sustainable agriculture in ways that discount religious values and identities.

Locally-based religions can help counter the narratives that guide industrial agriculture, such as this claim by Kenneth Adams: “The development of the several families of antibiotics, insecticides, fungicides, and weedicides, and other farm chemicals have simplified the farmers’ never-ending battle against plant and animal diseases, insects, and the other dangers against which he must wage continual warfare” (1976: 88). This narrative has material implications on local soils and farm communities, not to mention the health of physical bodies.

Against this narrative is a religious agrarian cosmology that believes, “The most insistent and formidable concern of agriculture, wherever it is taken seriously, is the distinct individuality of every farm, every field on every farm, every farm family, and every creature on every farm. Farming becomes a high art when farmers know and respect in their work the distinct individuality of their place and the neighborhood of creatures that lives there” (Berry 2005: 45). In this cosmology, God knows the feather on every sparrow and the microbe in every ounce of soil. This cosmology also points to a religion of particularity that is grounded in a place and a culture of place. In the permaculture fields of Koinonia, and in the CSA partnership between CSI and Riverview Farm (facilitated by Hazon), and in similar settings the country over, such an emplaced cosmology of the soil is beginning to take root.

### **Closing Arguments**

Concern about food issues and environmental health is increasingly shaping religion in North America. This is occurring at local, regional, and national levels where

through lived networks, members and institutions of traditions are shaping their respective teachings and practices about locality, health, and justice. This growth is not only occurring within traditions, but across traditions so that interfaith concerns about and involvement in religious agrarianism are furthering the influence and impact of the religious agrarian worldview. This is seen for example in the recent on-line publication and open sharing of GreenFaith's interfaith teaching book, *Repairing Eden: Sustainable, Healthy Food Opportunities for Religious Institutions* (2009).

If my analysis and argument is correct, then the following sensibilities shared by Daron "Farmer D" Joffe—both his interpretation and understanding of his own tradition, and of the iterative shaping of religion and farming—will continue to gain in adherents. When asked why he thought religion is beginning to take seriously and engage with sustainable agriculture concerns, and especially Jewish religion, Joffe responded by saying, "It always should have been on board in my opinion. It's always been in alignment with it. They're complimentary." For Joffe, this alignment is "like an evolution, really. And if you're at all spiritual, you have a connection to religion and your humility and appreciation, farming is, that's farming. That's food and farming. They're so intertwined. I think religion grew out of agriculture in a lot of ways." For Joffe and many others, sustainable agriculture, food, place, and religion combine to create an intertwined religious agrarianism that invests the local, health, and justice with political, social, and spiritual meanings.

Although religious environmentalism is a recent phenomenon, it is increasing in influence because it "embodies a predominately ethics-based environmentalism, a stance which seems to be unique within the broader environmental movement" (Smith

and Pulver 2009: 169). This movement of religion into environmental ethics finds some of its most vibrant expression and most committed engagement in environmental issues regarding sustainable agriculture. In this way, the translation of religious environmentalist values into embodied practice, grounded within the places of sustainable farms and farmer's markets spread throughout the U.S., is becoming an emergent phenomenon in North American religions. As my research shows, a strong emphasis on caring for the earth is indeed already flourishing within lived networks of religious agrarians and their concerns for locality, health, and justice.

Furthermore, if "[t]he collective and ethical dimensions of narrative come together most commonly and perhaps most powerfully in religion" (Peterson 2001: 19), then narrative ethics based upon relationships to place and locality can be realized through religious teachings and practice. This movement is already underway in North American religions, as people of faith are developing narratives and ethics (or are adopting existing ones) around sustainable food production and are couching these in religious frames. The result is a sophisticated interweaving of ecological agrarianism and religious belief and practice as has been explored and investigated in this dissertation.

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Todd LeVasseur entered the University of Florida's Department of Religion in August of 2006 and earned his Ph.D. in "religion and nature" in December of 2011. He earned his Master of Science from the Centre for Human Ecology in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2005, and his Bachelor of Arts in religious studies from the College of Charleston in December of 1997. He has also studied ecovillages, worked on organic farms, and has published chapters in a variety of scholarly books and articles and book reviews in a variety of scholarly Journals.