



Theological Reflection

# Sow Much Love

“Standing in awe of creation can assist us to perceive the natural world as a bearer of divine grace.”

A Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative, Social Affairs Commission, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, October 4, 2003

It is a miraculous event to plant a seed, nurture it, and watch it burst forward with life. Jesus reflected on this simple but wondrous event in his parable of the mustard seed. “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matthew 13: 31-32). It is a testament to the importance of the seed and the sower that several of Jesus’ parables involve the earth, planting seeds, and nurturing their growth in fertile soil. Jesus was speaking to people whose lives were deeply connected with the land.

In our time, those who are still closely connected to the land, sowing seeds and harvesting food, are finding their way of life threatened. Small family farmers provide food for their families and communities, are the guardians of the soil, and are the key to feeding the hungry in the Global South. Yet they are unable to provide when the soil is depleted or drying up, due to pollution, deforestation, and climate change. They are unable to provide when the Goliaths of industry own both land and seeds, and when profit rules over the common good. **The Gospel calls us to feed the hungry and to experience “the natural world as a bearer of divine grace.” How do these threats to small family farmers and their communities affect our vision of this call?**

One in eight people still suffer from hunger, while there is enough food for all in the world. Our Holy Father is urgently aware of this crisis: “The agricultural sector is the primary [economic] sector with the crucial vocation of cultivating and protecting natural resources in order to feed humanity. In this regard, the continuing disgrace of hunger in the world moves me to share with you the question: *How are we using the Earth’s resources?*” **When there is enough food to feed everyone but millions are starving, how does our faith commitment call us to respond to Pope Francis’ challenging question?**

As part of the campaign to end hunger and ensure the right to food, Pope Francis encourages us to question the status quo. The scale and recurrence of the challenges faced by small family farmers point to political and economic global structures that are guided by profit and power, and not by our values. Catholic Social Teaching provides us with important guiding principles, including the option for the poor, the common good, the integrity of creation, and the dignity of the person. **How do we connect these principles with nurturing small family farming, saving traditional seeds, and empowering women’s access to land?**



Women smallholder farmers in many countries are responsible for not only producing food but also feeding their families and communities. Yet women have consistently less access than men to land, markets, education, credit, and training opportunities. Vandana Shiva, renowned physicist and environmentalist, states: “The violence to nature, which seems intrinsic to the dominant (Western economic) development model is also associated with violence to women who depend on nature for drawing sustenance for themselves, their families, their societies.” **How does our faith call us to invest in women family farmers?**

When we work and pray for an end to hunger, as when we pray the “Our Father,” we are asking for our daily bread in the same way as our sisters and brothers around the world do. If the outcomes are so different, where one part of the world has a surplus while the other faces hunger, the issue to be faced is both spiritual and political. Our prayer involves recognizing our connection to every other person, as well as our relationship to the Earth, while growing in our understanding of the global structures at work. As a Church, we reflect on these connections when it comes to the crisis facing small family farmers. In its Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative from

October 2003, the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops states, “All serious solutions to the ecological crisis demand that human beings change our thinking, relationships, and behaviours in order to recognize the interconnectedness of all creation.” **How do we make the necessary changes, in our thinking, relationships, and behaviours to support small family farmers, both women and men? What does it mean to understand the natural world as a “bearer of divine grace” when we cultivate the earth?**

It is time for us to listen, to learn, and to act with a renewed sense of deep connection with the land and all creation. We must be guided by the call to justice of the Gospels, to hear the cry of the poor and hungry, and to listen to small family farmers working closely with the land around the world. Their knowledge of the land and seed diversity must not be lost. It holds together the generations sustained by their wisdom and practice.

*This reflection may be accompanied by the Theological Reflection on Ecological Justice.*



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