

"This series is on reconciliation, which is at the heart of the Christian faith. One of the early Christians said there are three dimensions to the cross—the vertical, which is about reconciliation with God; the horizontal, which is about reconciliation to other humans; and finally the cross is firmly planted into the earth, which calls us to reconcile with creation. That final dimension is perhaps the most neglected one of all in the piles of books on faith. I am deeply thankful for this addition to the library. We all just got smarter."

SHANE CLAIBORNE, author, activist and recovering sinner,
www.thesimpleway.org

"When Mary turned from the empty tomb and mistook Jesus for a gardener, it was no mistake: Jesus is the new Adam. Thank you, Fred and Norman, for reminding us of our Genesis 2:15 responsibility to tend and protect the Garden, this earth, and calling each of us to the good work of living peaceably with the land."

NANCY SLEETH, cofounder, Blessed Earth,
and author of *Almost Amish*

To all good people in this work,

Fred
MAKING
PEACE WITH
THE LAND



God's Call to Reconcile with Creation

FRED BAHNSON
& NORMAN WIRZBA

Foreword by BILL MCKIBBEN

Resources for Reconciliation

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MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND

knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Just as my fellow church member will bring his blindness to the altar, I will bring mine and you can bring yours. There at the Lord's table, we can pray together the prayer of Bartimaeus in Mark 10:51: "My teacher, let me see."

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Reconciliation Through Christ

NORMAN WIRZBA



*C*edar Grove is a one-stoplight community in the northern part of Orange County, North Carolina. It has a post office, a church and a bait-and-tackle shop down the road. Nestled in the middle of gently rolling terrain, woodlots and beautiful farmland, it does not draw much attention to itself. Farmers have worked this land for generations, sending their children to school and to church. Residents are currently working to revive an abandoned general store by turning it into an arts and crafts center that will showcase area talent and sell locally produced goods. Viewed from the outside, Cedar Grove is peaceful, even a bit idyllic.

Life changed for this community on a summer afternoon in 2004 when Bill King, the owner of a convenience store, was shot in the back of the head. Bill had recently taken over

the store that for years had been a home for crack dealers and drug addicts. He had made the place safe for children to come and eat ice cream, buy candy and drink sodas. He let neighbors buy food on credit when they didn't have the money to pay. His generosity and work ethic were known and admired throughout the community.

Bill's murder was a great shock. Residents wondered if it was racially motivated, since Bill, a white man, was married to Emma, a black woman. The police found a body and an empty cash register, but they were never able to identify a suspect. As far as the people of Cedar Grove knew, the killer was still roaming about the region.

How does a community like Cedar Grove recover from a murder like this? What would reconciliation or peace look like, and what would it require? Exactly who or what needs to be reconciled?

When we probe any community deeply, we can find multiple sources of trouble that, under particular circumstances, might lead to a violent outcome. Most of our lands and communities bear the scars of racial and ethnic oppression, class antagonism, nomadic careerism, neighborhood neglect and greedy ambition. Much of what we claim as personal and communal success depends on the exploitation of soil and water, forests and oceans, chickens and cows—what we have learned to call the earth's "natural resources." In abusing these gifts and sources of life, however, we also end up abusing the human bodies and communities that depend on them. We cannot poison the ground that grows our food without also poisoning its eaters.

Our culture trains us to think that exploitation is "normal," the way things are. That is why we are not surprised or grieved when we learn that the living conditions of many migrant agricultural workers are akin to our slaveholding past, or that poor people living in rural communities—often referred to as "white trash" or "hicks"—lack basic necessities like running water and adequate food. Our land is a place where opulent wealth exists in close proximity to abject poverty. Our country reduces almost everything—from farm fields to lambs to workers—to an economic equation or political advantage. It is a breeding ground for fear, suspicion, abuse and sometimes murder.

But not always. In Cedar Grove, Valee Taylor, a black man, approached Grace Hackney, a white woman, seeking to find a way to address this murder. Valee was hoping to raise money for a reward to capture the killer. But after further conversation, they both decided that was not the right response. As pastor of Cedar Grove United Methodist church, Grace approached Emma, Bill's wife, asking what the church could do for her. Emma did not have enough money to pay for a funeral, so they decided to hold a vigil instead at the parking lot of the store on the two-week anniversary of the murder.

Over one hundred people came: blacks and whites and Latinos, poor and rich, churchgoers and those who had never been in a church. The community gathered to listen to preachers and to remember Bill. People prayed. People cried. People who had never shaken each other's hands or even said hello to each other hugged. For Valee and Grace it was a special mo-

ment, a divinely inspired moment, that showed them that the segregation of the past was not normal or inevitable.

Scenobia Taylor, Valee's seventy-six-year-old mother, was at the vigil. A fifth-generation African American descendant of sharecroppers and the daughter of one of Orange County's largest landowners, Scenobia had experienced a lot of racial hatred during her life. Crosses had been burned on her front yard and gun shots fired at her and other children during school integration efforts. But at the vigil, Scenobia saw a new, racially reconciled community being born. Not long after the vigil, she received a vision from God that she should give five acres of land to help feed the hungry. As she put it: "My father, he gave land for a school. My grandfather, he gave land for the church, and for people to be buried. And here, Papa, at one time he had a thousand acres. And then here we all have all this land here. And then what do we do with it? We not doin' nothin'. I wanted to do something like you know my grandfather and my father did, you know. And I just pray, and I were praying and I said Lord, please show me, give me a sign or somethin'."

Land was at the heart of her vision for reconciliation.

Meanwhile, Grace had been dreaming with her church about how they could be involved in the feeding of Cedar Grove's rural poor. Again, land was a central issue. It did not seem right that there should be hungry people in an agricultural community that had good land and the skill to grow good food. Scenobia's vision and Grace's dream, along with the conversations of several community members, came to-

gether in the founding of Anathoth Community Garden, a five-acre garden and orchard located just down the road from Bill's store.

The naming of Anathoth Community Garden came from the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was living in a time when his own people had been invaded and sent off to live in Babylonian exile. In the midst of this devastation, fear and violence, God instructed Jeremiah to buy a field at Anathoth as a sign of hope that God would turn devastation into peaceful living. God said a remarkable thing: "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. . . . Seek the welfare [*shalom*] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:5, 7).

Members of the Cedar Grove community took this seriously. With the help of some grants, and under the leadership of Fred, they together turned Scenobia's five acres into a fruitful garden producing thousands of pounds of strawberries, asparagus, tomatoes, greens, blueberries, corn, potatoes and squash. This food is grown with the helping hands of rich and poor, white and black. It is food that is generously shared with shut-ins who have no access to healthy, organically grown produce. It is eaten together at picnic and kitchen tables. Gradually, through hard work and ample conversations, the distance between people is being bridged. Though hardly perfect—tensions and divisions within the community can still be found, and funding and physical energy to keep the garden going are a perennial challenge—Anathoth

is a beacon of what is possible when community members are inspired by God's reconciling ways. On special days, it offers a taste of heaven.

What I mean by a "taste of heaven" happened four years ago on a warm fall night. Over one hundred people of every color and class gathered for a potluck celebration at the garden. Much of the food came fresh from the garden, and so included some of the best salsa and greens I have ever tasted. A late afternoon shower had passed through earlier, leaving a dark sky and a double rainbow in its wake. Children ran around laughing and blowing bubbles. Adults listened and danced to the sounds of a live bluegrass band. It was an evening none of us wanted to end. I asked Fred if he had envisioned a night like this as he prepared the ground and put in the first crop of seeds. "Not in my wildest dreams!" he said.

The stories of Jeremiah's Anathoth field and Cedar Grove's Anathoth Community Garden help us see that peace and reconciliation, the mutual flourishing and convivial communal-ity that Jewish people call *shalom*, is a deep and all-embracing reality. Rather than being simply the absence of violence, reconciliation takes us to a physical place—a plot of land—that puts down roots, produces food, provides stability and hospitality, fosters healthy relationships and inspires joy. *Shalom* presupposes people living securely in the land, which means that land and people *together* are being respected and nurtured. God's reconciling vision results in the safe settlement of people who have been planted by God in the soil and who honor God in all that they do (see Jer 32:37-41).

RECONCILIATION THROUGH CHRIST

That everyone will desire or choose a path to reconciliation should not be assumed. People can decide that life is hard, antagonisms are inevitable and that abuse is the natural accompaniment of a successful pursuit. The American dream, after all, is constantly reminding us of the need to "get ahead." For some to be ahead, others must fall behind and be forgotten.

Community members of Cedar Grove certainly did not need to choose a path of reconciliation. They could have turned the murder case over to law officials and invested in personal security systems. When told that little could be done to apprehend the murder suspect, they could have resigned themselves to a justice system that works harder and better for those who have influence and money. They could have given into the despair of self-pity and helplessness.

But they didn't. Members of this community, many of whom had been formed by the Christian story, understood deep down that life is supposed to be more than what our culture tells us is normal. Choosing between reconciled and suspicious forms of life requires that we ask some hard questions about what life is ultimately for. It requires a particular understanding of life's significance and meaning, an understanding in which reconciliation is not optional but the very fulfillment of all life.

How do we know if our living—the ways we set up our families and communities, run our politics and economies, grow food, use energy, educate our young and order our worship—is truly good or rightly lived? The Colossians hymn

Handwritten notes in the top right corner of page 67, including "2.9.13", "M. G. G. G.", and "M. G. G. G." with a star symbol.

that I introduced in the first chapter speaks precisely to this line of questioning. It presents Jesus Christ as the key to what all life is about and what our living is ultimately for.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20)

Jesus can show us what all life is for, because in him and through him all life comes to be in the first place. Christ is the one through whom all things are created (see 1 Cor 8:6), which means that he knows life's origin and end *from the inside*. Having the first place in everything, he also has authority over all creation (see Mk 4:35-41, in which Jesus calms the storm). With him, the world holds together. Without him, things fall apart into states of alienation, fragmentation and violence.

This is a peculiar way to speak about anyone, even for Christians! Many of us have been taught to look to Jesus as our

Savior. Not nearly as many have been taught to think of him as our Creator. What does this mean? Why does it matter?

It all starts with the affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is the definitive, bodily manifestation of who God is. Jesus was not born merely to tell us a few things *about* God, things that will get us into some faraway heaven. No, Jesus is God. In his flesh the very "fullness" (*pleroma*) of God dwells. Touching his body, connecting to the way he moves through life and ministers to others, we can feel God's heavenly life realized on earth. He himself is the "image" (*eikon*) of the invisible God. Beholding him, we behold God. As the letter to the Hebrews puts it: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:1-3). In the words of the creeds, Jesus is "of one being with the Father" (Nicaea) and "truly God and truly man . . . of one substance with the father . . . and at the same time of one substance with us" (Chalcedon).

How the perfect uniting of Creator and creation could happen in a particular creature is an unfathomable mystery. Its implications, however, are immense and profound. For those who wonder why there is a world at all—as seventeenth-century philosopher G. W. Leibniz famously asked, "Why is there something rather than nothing?"—the beginnings of an answer are to be found by seeing how Jesus nurtures, heals,

consoles, exorcises, reconciles and celebrates creatures. Jesus does all of these things out of a deep love for others, showing us that *all things are created so that they can experience and participate in the movements of love*. The experience and continuation of love is what living is ultimately for. Christ's love liberates and inspires others to experience life in its abundance and fullness. Seeing Jesus' devotion and concern for the world, we can say that the divine creation happens as an act of love and hospitality, in which God makes room for others to be themselves and flourish.

The incarnation means that our world does not exist as a random or pointless accident. Jesus showed us that the world exists so that love and life can grow together. As the Colossian hymn teaches us, to say that all things are created *in and through and for* Christ is also to say that God desires that every creature realize a complete life. Why? Because that is precisely what Jesus did in his ministries on earth. When Jesus encountered life's deformation, as he did when he saw hunger, illness, demon possession, discord and death, he showed love so that deformation could be turned to shared delight. When he found creatures on a path toward degradation and destruction, he turned them around so that they could enter paths of joy and shalom. Jesus made manifest in his own body that the life of love is what creation is for. Creation's purpose is definitively revealed in his self-sacrificial love.

We don't have to believe any of this. We can go on thinking that life is about individual fulfillment or getting power for ourselves while we can. We might insist that the path toward

reconciliation is a dead end that only diminishes our prospects for fortune. Or we can become comfortably numb and resign ourselves to quiet desperation, in which we view the murders of people like Bill King as sad but to be expected. But in thinking this way, we also commit ourselves to a world in which division, suspicion, neglect, cutthroat competition and discord will inevitably be the outcome. It is precisely this sort of divided, broken and bleeding world that Jesus wants to redeem.

To understand Jesus properly, we have to appreciate how his living makes possible the transformation of our own. God became incarnate in Jesus Christ to show us and welcome us into what creaturely life is ultimately about and for. This means that salvation is not about being plucked out of creaturely life to some immaterial heaven beyond the world of creation. Salvation is about reconciling this creation so that it can know, taste and intimately experience God's heavenly life that is constantly making its way toward us. Looking to Jesus, we see heaven's earthly life realized.

Scripture makes clear again and again that God is Emmanuel, God with us. This is why God became incarnate in Jesus. This is why God sends the Holy Spirit to live within us as our animating and inspiring breath and to direct us in the ways of heavenly life. This is why Revelation shows us that the grand climax of God's cosmic drama has heaven *descend* to earth, because God's dwelling will forevermore be among mortals (see Rev 21:1-4). The goal is not our souls' escape from this world but the transformation of all creatures in their relationships

with each other. The goal is that our embodied living radiates and becomes the perpetual expression of God's glory.

Another way to think about this is to reflect on John's description of Jesus as the "Word" (*Logos*) in whom we have life (see Jn 1:4). John's multiple references to abundant and true and eternal life indicate that it is possible to exist and not really be alive. As we all know, there are ways of existing that undermine and destroy life. To be fully and truly alive, we need to be grafted onto him like a branch to a vine (see Jn 15:4-5). Only then will our desire and will be in harmony with the Creator's desire for life. Jesus is the creating Word who was with God the Father in the beginning, and what Jesus is about is what God has always been about (see Jn 1:2 and Jn 15-17). Through him—through the forms of compassion and kindness he embodied—we see what creation looks like from God's point of view.

To understand John, we have to go back to the Genesis account of creation, which describes God as *speaking* order and harmony and beauty into the world. God says, for instance, "Let the earth put forth vegetation," and all kinds of plants with seed and fruit come to be (Gen 1:11). The detail about seed is not insignificant, because it is precisely through seed-bearing fruit that plants perpetuate themselves and feed the world. God's *Logos*, the speaking that God does, makes a world that is fertile and nutritious at the same time. It is the character of God's creativity that it establishes relationships—of fertility, nutrition and beauty—in which creatures can become fully alive.

Describing Jesus as the eternal Word is John's way of saying that we can look to him to find our way to a life that is full and abundant (see Jn 10:10). Why? Because his life and ministry embodied the kind of relationships that feed and heal and bring joy. Through his own being in the world, Jesus showed us what relationships in the world should look like. Because Jesus is the divine, creating Word, he is also the one who shows us how all creatures best *fit together* and relate to each other. He is like a cosmic conductor who holds the score that will lead all creatures into a harmonious and symphonic life—if we let him direct us. He wants us to listen to each other and to him, and then by becoming mutually attentive and sympathetic, produce a sound that is both melodic and a joy to hear. Living by this *Logos* means relating to each other in ways that nurture and strengthen relationships between creatures, so that all of us can experience Sabbath delight.

If Jesus is the divine, creating Word unleashing creation into its full potential, then insofar as we are *in Christ* or have the *mind* of Christ, we participate in God's renewing of creation (see Phil 2:5). Paul made the point succinctly: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Cor 5:17). As our Creator, Christ makes possible this new creation, which includes all creatures, and leads them into the fullness of life. With him nothing can remain the same or be engaged in old, familiar ways, because he shows us through his own life what life is meant to be. *Beholding Jesus, we not only see God; we see creation in an entirely new way.*

As disciples of Christ, we are no longer to regard anything from what Paul called "a human point of view" (2 Cor 5:16). This point of view assumes that the world's reason for being is to serve individual ambition and promote self-glorification. Others matter because of what they can do for me. But with Christ, all of this has changed. With Christ, we now see everything and everyone *through* him. He helps us realize that the world achieves fullness of life only when relationships between people and land and between people and each other are healthy and whole (see 2 Cor 5:18). To be *in* Christ means that we can no longer look at any creature in terms of political maneuvering, economic profitability or self-enhancement. If everything has become new because we now behold and engage it *through* him, then literally everything is wrapped within God's creating, healing, feeding and reconciling ways. In Christ every person is a child of God, and every created thing is God's gift to be protected, nurtured, shared and celebrated.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Paul makes clear that the new creation that Christ makes possible is a gift. It is not something we can dream up or achieve through our own effort. We are too anxious and insecure or too arrogant and blind to even anticipate, let alone realize, the love that Christ's new creation presupposes. When we receive this gift of new life, however, we can participate in Christ's reconciliation of all things. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling

the world [*cosmos*] to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor 5:18-19).

What sort of ministry is this? The hymn in Colossians gives an answer few of us are eager to hear. It says that through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things "by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). The ministry of reconciliation goes through a cross. It goes through blood!

To understand the significance of Christ's cross for the ministry of reconciliation, we can start by noting how the cross registered as a political symbol. In the Roman empire, crosses were a very public display and brutal reminder of imperial rule. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus referred to hanging on a cross as "the most wretched of deaths," because it caused a slow, excruciating death resulting from thirst, hunger, exposure and the trauma of multiple beatings. Jesus was put to death on a cross, indicating that he was perceived to be a serious threat to the *logos*, or order, by which the Romans secured their peace and prosperity.

When we think of the Roman empire today, it is easy to forget that it was made rich and vast through its brutality to others. We marvel at the immense public buildings and the engineering feats that transported water (via aqueducts) and grain (via fleets of ships) to Rome from places hundreds of miles away. But to grow the wheat to make the bread that would feed the home populations, small farmers around the Mediterranean were forcibly removed from their lands so that huge

estates, called *latifundia*, could grow the commodities of grain or olive oil consumers back home wanted. Latifundia were the spoils of war made productive on the backs of slaves.

For a time, these latifundia were very productive. Because vast fields were consolidated and pressed into the production of a desired commodity, and because slaves were plentiful, shipload after shipload of grain could make its way to Rome's shores. This productivity, however, came at an exceptionally high human and ecological cost. Invaded peoples were kept "peaceful" by the constant threat and exhibition of brutality. Invaded lands were made productive through deforestation, the draining of wetlands and forms of agriculture that eroded and exhausted soil and choked waterways with silt. These are what we might call ecological forms of brutality. The Roman point of view (*logos*) and approach to land and people alike was strictly utilitarian: whatever exists is to be used to increase the wealth and glory of the Roman elite. Whatever gets in the way or might become a threat—such as a single man from Nazareth—must be eliminated.

Jesus was a threat to the Roman *logos*. He revealed the lie at the heart of the Pax Romana. He may not have been a direct or personal threat to the Roman emperor, but he stood as the decisive "No!" to the exploitation and violence that made Rome great. Jesus' life led to the nurture and healing and reconciling of creatures with each other. His ministry did not ever succeed through violent exploitation.

But Jesus was not only a threat to Rome. He continues to be a threat to all forms of economic and political order that

promote peace and prosperity through abuse. Today he stands with sixty-four-year-old Sister Leonora Brunetto, a Roman Catholic nun, as she faces gunmen who want to kill her for her decades-long ministry of protecting the Amazon forest and its poor, landless workers from ranchers and foresters interested in a quick profit. He stood with Judy Bonds, a coalminer's daughter and peace activist who, despite death threats and personal assaults, spent her life defending the Appalachian Mountains and their people from Massey Energy Company, as it poisoned streams and blew up mountains.

Sister Leonora and Judy Bonds do not see the world according to what Paul called "a human point of view." Their imaginations have been captivated and inspired by the divine *Logos* that loves the world into life. When they look out, they see a glimmer of the new creation that Christ makes possible, a creation in which land and people flourish and in which peace is present. But they also know that their ministry of reconciliation requires that they put their energies, their gifts and even their lives on the line.

This leads us to a second insight as to why the ministry of reconciliation moves through a cross. Christ's cross is not only a symbol of Roman brutality; it is also a symbol of Christ's self-offering love given for the healing of creation. Recall that the Colossians hymn describes creation as "holding together" in Christ. Jesus holds things together—makes possible a symphonic life—because he introduces and embodies the love that creates harmony and conviviality rather than degradation and destruction. We could say that he unleashes a power that

nurtures and enlivens others so that they can become all that God wants them to be. This power takes the form of loving service to others. As Paul puts it, Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil 2:7-8). The cross reminds us that life in God is a life of *self-offering* service.

The service to which Christ invites us is not abstract or general. It begins with and continually returns to attentive regard for particular places and communities. Attention is crucial, because we cannot serve others properly—that is, in ways that benefit them instead of us—until we have taken time to appreciate their potential and their limits, their strengths and their needs. We need to look carefully for where the wounds are, and then learn from the wounded (and others who love them) regarding what will bring healing or relief.

The history of the civil rights struggle is instructive in this regard. The barriers that divided whites and blacks—which were responsible for so much misunderstanding, pain, violence and death—could not be overcome until whites and blacks committed to living side by side. Authentic reconciliation and community are not possible as long as groups of people view each other from a distance. We need to get close enough to see the pain we are causing each other and to listen carefully so that we can make the changes that will end unnecessary pain. Shared living makes possible the sympathy and the sensitivity we need in order to experience God’s shalom and *Shabbat*.

Charles Sherrod, a field secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, understood this when he said, “I have seen men share their bread till the last was gone. I have seen a band of ragged brothers willing to risk death for each other if need be. I have seen the strength of fellowship among those who formally refuse the fellowship of the church. Somehow I think this life must be shared for it to be comprehended; we do have something to offer but there is probably much to receive. This is an experiment in truth to find truth.”

Reconciliation does not result from a top-down, mechanical or abstract process. It is a ministry and a gift that grows through bodily touch and practical life together. It is founded on a *Logos* that is real. It makes itself incarnate in relationships in which people spend enough time—even “waste time”—with each other so that they can delight in each others’ joys and comfort each other in their pain.

When we appreciate that the divine *Logos* creates the whole world and not only people, we begin to see that the ministry of reconciliation will also extend to the land. Just as whites and blacks often live separate and segregated lives, so too have people developed forms of life that insulate them from the suffering and degradation of creatures and their homes. Reconciliation cannot happen as long as we see land abstractly or from a distance. We need to get close. We need to develop practical forms of life that bring us into clarifying and sympathetic relationship with soil, plant and animal life. Only then will we see the pain and destruction we are causing. By committing ourselves to a particular section of land and doing the

hard labor such commitment requires, we learn the skills and habits that bring healing and life to it. This love and labor, which takes us deeply into the world, enables us to see the loveliness God creates there.

The proximity and training I have in mind are most clearly revealed in the work of gardening. Gardening is hard and daily labor that sharpens our understanding of the biophysical conditions that make fruit and flowers flourish. It is a form of attention that brings us into a sympathetic and nurturing relationship not only with pleasurable parts of our gardens—tulips and tomatoes, for example—but also with those elements that are less immediately attractive—worms and weeds. There is no substitute for this work if we desire to overcome the division and alienation that degrades the earth.

Gardening is also the form of work that best describes God's relationship to creation. God is not distant. God is the eternal Gardener on his knees, holding the soil of our lives in his hands, breathing life into it day after day (see Gen 2 and Ps 104). God is the eternal Farmer who comes with a bucket and hoe to water and weed his world so that there is a bountiful harvest. In God's reconciled world, "the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy" (Ps 65:12-13). Participating with God in this gardening work helps us discover a joy that many of us would not think possible.

In 1958, Clarence Jordan delivered a sermon explaining why he had not yet left the bruised and battered land that is Koinonia Farm. He said:

Fifteen years ago we went there and bought that old run down eroded piece of land. It was sick. There were gashes in it. It was sore and bleeding. I don't know whether you've ever walked over a piece of ground that could almost cry out to you and say "Heal me, Heal me." I don't know if you feel the closeness to the soil that I do. But when you fill in those old gullies and terrace the fields and you begin to feel the springiness of the sod beneath your feet and you begin to feel that old land come to life and when you walk through a little old pine forest that you set out in little seedlings and now you see them reaching for the sky and you hear the wind through them; when you walk a little further over a bit of ground . . . and you go on over a hill where your children and all the many visitors have held picnics and you walk across a creek that you've bathed [in] the heat of summer, and men say to you "Why don't you sell it and move away?" they might as well ask, "Why don't you sell your mother." Somehow God has made us out of this old soil and we go back to it and we never lose its claim on us. It isn't a simple matter to leave it.

As our Creator, God is always close. In giving us the ministry of reconciliation through Christ, God invites us to become close to each other too, close enough both to see how we are wounding each other and to celebrate each other's triumphs.

Our culture does not encourage us to look for or get close to the wounds we inflict on each other and on the land. Nor

does it equip us to understand how “normal” economic, political and social life creates wounds that need healing. But Christ does. Living with Christ, we are given the *Logos* to see a community like Cedar Grove and a field in southwest Georgia as part of Christ’s new creation. We are inspired to turn land into a community garden that grows healthy food even as it repairs and nurtures the soil. We are compelled to gather around a table with people from all walks of life so that, through our eating, we discover community rather than alienation. With Christ, we create relationships in which the nurture of each other is paramount. In the offering of ourselves to each other, we give glory to God.

4

Field, Table, Communion

The Abundant Kingdom Versus the Abundant Mirage

FRED BAHN SON



One of my favorite stories from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* is the tale of John the Dwarf. One day John the Dwarf said to his elder brother, “I should like to be free of all care, like the angels, who do not work, but ceaselessly offer worship to God.” John then shed his clothes and walked naked out into the desert. A week later he returned, sunburned and famished. John the Dwarf knocked on the door, but rather than opening the door his brother asked, “Who are you?” John said, “It is I, your brother.” But his brother refused to open the door, saying, “John has become an angel and henceforth he is no longer among men.” John the Dwarf begged to be let in but his brother refused, leaving him outside all night. In the morning, his brother opened the door. “You are a