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2-24-2016

Social Principles of Good Agriculture

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Recommended Citation

Vos, R. (2016). Social Principles of Good Agriculture. Retrieved from https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/468

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Social Principles of Good Agriculture

Abstract

"If Christians are to live out their lives before the face of God, where should they look for guiding principles in how to conduct agriculture?"

Posting about transformation in the field of agriculture from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/social-principles-of-good-agriculture/>

Keywords

In All Things, Bible, culture, creation, plant diversity

Disciplines

Agriculture | Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Social Principles of Good Agriculture

 [inallthings.org/social-principles-of-good-agriculture/](https://allthings.org/social-principles-of-good-agriculture/)

Ron Vos

Followers of Jesus Christ are not constrained by the culture in which they live. In fact, in many ways they should transcend the culture in which they live (James 4:4, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 12:2). Although often unrecognized, there is a culture associated with how food and fiber is grown and how it is consumed or utilized. By using the term culture, I am referring to a people's whole way of life. This consists of all the ideas, objects, and ways things are done by humans and how humans interact with each other. Another way that culture can also be described is as the ways of living built up by a group of people that is transmitted from one generation to another. It is also interesting to note that the word "culture" can also mean the action or practice of raising plants and animals.

All of these aspects of culture are important as the culture of agriculture is examined. However, today in North America, the word agriculture is often replaced by a relatively new term, "agribusiness." This term is currently widely used in other parts of the world. The implication of the term agribusiness is that there is no longer a culture associated with agriculture, all dealings with agriculture are reduced to economic issues, and economic cost is the only way to assess the success of agriculture.

If Christians are to live out their lives before the face of God, where should they look for guiding principles in how to conduct agriculture? While it is easy and tempting to look to the modern culture in which Christians live for answers, the first place they should look to is the Bible, not the prevailing culture in which they live. Although there are many items in human culture that are noble and worthwhile, there are also many that are not consistent with Scripture under close scrutiny. Since Christians profess that they are followers of the Bible, that is the first place they should go for guidance and insight. However, when using Scripture, one must be careful in how it is interpreted. Instead of just seeking out one or two proof texts to reinforce an already held position by the individual, one should look to the whole of Scripture in an organic, complete manner to look for guiding principles.

The second source that Christians should explore for guiding principles is the rest of creation. If someone wants to find out more about the Creator, one of the best places to seek this out is in creation. Allow me to give an illustration. If I want to find out more about some of the great European painters, the best way for me to do this today is to search out as much of their creations as I possibly can. In order for me to find out more about Rembrandt or Van Gogh, I will need to seek out their paintings. I will also need to study the paintings extensively and find out as much as I can from any of the painters' own written records in addition to what historians have written about them. Rather than just a rapid perusal, finding out more about the painters will involve extensive study and reflection. Similarly, the writings of the famous painters are analogous to God revealing himself in Scripture, and their artworks are analogous to God revealing Himself in creation. It is through both of these that Christians can obtain guidelines on how they are to interact with other humans in the area of agriculture.

The following example illustrates how this relates to agriculture. It is obvious from Scripture that God delights in the diversity of what He made (Job 38-42, Genesis 1, Psalm 19). He delights in things that humans may ignore or think are insignificant. If we examine what He created, we also see rich diversity. One can draw the conclusion from both of these sources that diversity in creation is normative. Consequently, humans then have the responsibility to encourage diversity in agriculture. This then becomes a social principle for agriculture. Policies and practices that promote diversity should be encouraged because this is consistent with what we see in Scripture and creation.

Types of Agriculture

This raises an interesting question. Should all forms of agriculture be endorsed by Christians? In reality, Christians practice all types of agriculture. But to be consistent with Scripture and the revelation in creation, Christians should

endorse certain types of agriculture. If one takes seriously the concept of biblical holism regarding agriculture, then there are many types of agriculture that should be rejected and relatively few types that should be considered by Christians. The type of agriculture that I believe should be promoted by Christians is sustainable agriculture. I believe this type of agriculture is most consistent with a theocentric view of creation.

However, more probing questions need to be raised. As redeemed Christians, what is our role in the area of agriculture? Do evangelicals believe that Christianity is merely a personal experience that applies only to one's private life and has no application to agriculture or how we live before God? Is it the idea that people can follow popular culture during the week and then worship God on Sunday because He set that apart at the beginning of creation? That idea needs to be rejected as incomplete.

The prophet Jeremiah had harsh words addressed to the people of Judah who practiced this type of dualism. Jeremiah 7:9-11 states, "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, 'We are safe' – safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!" declares the Lord." (See also Jeremiah 7:1-8, 12-15, Isaiah 56:7, Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17 Luke 19:46.)

Many Christians think that doing the proper thing on Sunday is extremely important, as if that is all the Lord requires of us. To them, what is done on the other days is less important. Church worship, prayer, and saving souls are of utmost importance. They do not worry about what happens outside of church and leave the world to the devil. Others believe that their faith is only a personal matter between them and God. These ideas are not complete, however. Instead, what is needed is a complete transformation of a prevalent (agri)cultural situation. This requires special discernment for humans, who are created as God's image bearers. We need to return to the practice of the early Christians. Torn Sine describes how Christians of the first century didn't engage in *Roman* culture during the week, then *church* on the weekend. There was no dualistic, compartmentalized faith for them (Sine, 2000). Instead, there was a complete, radical change in how they reacted to contemporary culture.

This article is from an excerpt from the book, [Biblical Holism and Agriculture-Cultivating Our Roots](#) by David J. Evans, Ronald J. Vos, and Keith P. Wright (WCL Books, 2003). Republished with permission from [WCL Books](#).