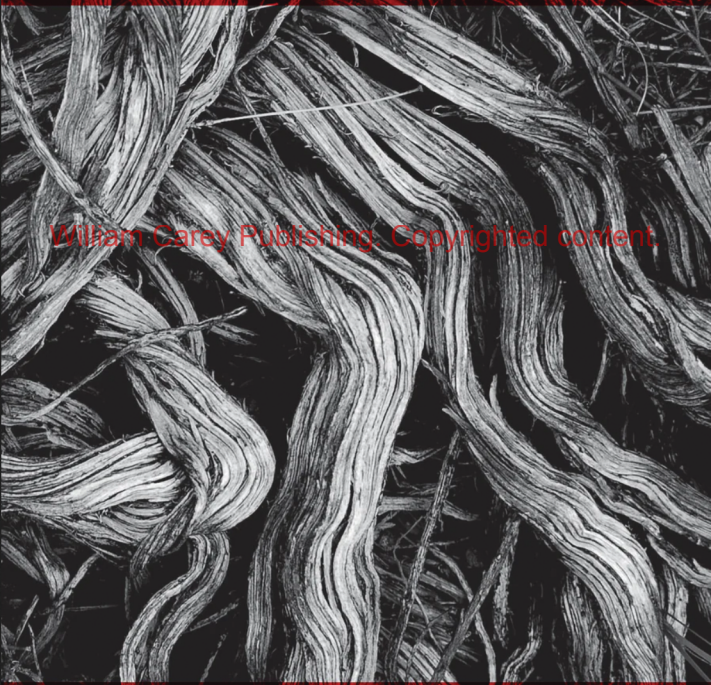
BIBLICAL HOLISM AND AGRICULTURE

Cultivating Our Roots



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Building Consensus for Biblical Holism in Agriculture

David J. Evans and Keith P. Wright

Dating back to the first Lausanne conference in 1974, there has been a growing movement within Evangelical Christianity to minister to the needs of the whole person—spiritual, physical, emotional and social. Various names and/or definitions for this marriage between evangelism and social action have been postulated by several evangelical scholars and activists including Tetsunao Yamamori [symbiotic ministry] (1976, 1987, 1993), and Ron Sider [good news and good works] (1999). In the 1990s, this concept evolved further into what is now referred to commonly as "Biblical Holism." In this more recent iteration, it is important to note that concern is not only directed toward the spiritual, physical, social, and emotional well-being of people, but also toward the non-human part of God's creation. Thus, when one speaks of Biblical Holism, one is usually referring to a triangular relationship between God and humans, God and non-human creation, and humans and non-human creation (Steward, 1994).

A fuller definition of Biblical Holism is God's work, through Jesus Christ, to redeem and restore all things that were created good but became damaged and broken as a result of human sin (see e.g., Colossians 1:20). Expanding upon the key relationships above, Darrow Miller (1999) identifies six key primary and secondary relationships that comprise Biblical Holism:

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Primary Relationships (vertical):

- God with humanity (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 3:6-7; Rom. 5:10)
- God with non-human creation (Gen. 1:1)

Secondary Relationships (horizontal):

- Humans with their individual selves (Gen. 1:26-27; Jer. 17:9; 1 Jn. 1:9)
- Humans with humanity (Gen. 2:18; Gen. 4:8-9; Phil. 2:3-4)
- Humans with the rest of creation [nature] (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:15 & 19-20; 3:17-19; Rom. 8:18-23), and
- Humans with the metaphysical world [especially knowledge, ethics, purpose, and economics] (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 1:16)

Building on this definition, Biblical Holism as it applies to agriculture is essentially the healing and restoration of humanity's relationship to God, people and the rest of creation (animals, plants, land, water, air) and, secondarily, the healing and restoration of humanity's relationship to knowledge, ethics, purpose and economics, as those areas relate to agriculture.

The Need:

There is evidence that a fair amount of effort has been invested to date in the area of Biblical Holism in health and that some Christian health development organizations and practitioners are attempting to conduct health development activities from a Biblical perspective (Fountain, 1989; World Relief, 2000). However, the same level of investment and practice has not been achieved in agricultural development. Although there is a growing movement among evangelicals to follow God's Biblical mandate in caring for His creation (DeWitt, 1994; Roberts and Pretiz, 1998; Goedhart, 2001; Vos, 2001), much thinking and work remains to be done in the wider area of Biblical Holism as it relates to agriculture. There is evidence that some early pioneers in this area such as George Washington Carver succeeded in combining their faith and agricultural vocation, but it is the opinion of these authors that many Christians who are practicing, promoting or teaching agriculture throughout the world today have tended to view their work and vocation as separate from their faith. They conduct their

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"agricultural development" and "evangelism" activities in a non-integrated, parallel fashion. If farmers, gardeners, foresters, ranchers, agricultural missionaries and agricultural development workers desire to live in an integrated manner, "*Coram Deo*," (before the face of God), then they need to discover what the Bible says about being good stewards of the relationships with which God has entrusted them.

Fostering the restoration of relationships between the agriculturalist and God, the agriculturalist and purpose (including vocation and work), the agriculturalist and his/her fellow humans, the agriculturalist and non-human creation, the agriculturalist and ethics, the agriculturalist and economics, and the agriculturalist and knowledge will require concerted thinking, envisioning, discussion, and action. The Word of God must be the starting and ending point for this proposed exercise. For therein is contained the wisdom, knowledge and understanding necessary for God's intended holism to become a reality in agricultural development throughout the world.

Beginning to Meet the Need:

In order to meet this critical need in the area of Biblical Holism and agriculture, Food for the Hungry International (FHI) and Dordt College partnered together to hold an international conference on Biblical Holism and agriculture that brought together a dynamic mix of researchers, writers and agricultural practitioners from around the world to exchange ideas on this topic. The conference was held at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, USA in May 2002. Approximately 105 participants attended the conference—representing farmers, pastors, agricultural researchers, professors, missionaries and relief & development workers from four continents. Dordt College proved to be an excellent venue for the conference in that it is one of only a few Christian Colleges in the USA with an agriculture department. More importantly, Dordt has a strong commitment and desire to promote Biblical Holism in agriculture and all other spheres of life. The conference contained a dynamic mix of plenary presentations, small group workshops and activities, and a commitment to action on the part of the participants. Based on the participant evaluations, it is clear that the vast majority of delegates were greatly energized by the con-

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ference. Perhaps the most critical short-term impact of the gathering was that it informed, encouraged, and challenged Christians who work in agriculture to do so with a renewed focus on building God's Kingdom through their work.

The major results of the conference can be classified into four areas:

1. *Thirteen conference papers*, which are presented in this book;
2. *Set of devotionals* on themes that link biblical holism and agriculture;
3. *Concordance* of Scripture references based on the conference topics;
4. *Network* of holistic agricultural practitioners who desire to share experiences and resources in the promotion and practice of biblical holism and agriculture that is being facilitated through a listserve and website hosted by Food for the Hungry International.

The chapters that follow in this book are the result of many years of theoretical and empirical research. There are essentially seven thematic areas that are covered herein:

- The Agriculturalist and God
- The Agriculturalist and Humanity
- The Agriculturalist and Non-human Creation
- The Agriculturalist and Knowledge
- The Agriculturalist and Purpose (Including Vocation and Work)
- The Agriculturalist and Ethics
- The Agriculturalist and Economics.

The authors of these chapters hail from several continents and their writings provide the reader with sound principles and recommendations for bringing all agricultural thoughts and actions captive to the obedience of Christ. Many stories are told about the interplay between beliefs and agricultural development. All the chapters are deeply imbued with the scriptural meta-theme of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. It is our hope that you may be challenged by what you read in these pages to make a difference for God's kingdom in the area of agriculture and all other spheres of life.

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