

sharing meals, of hospitality, and of feeding the hungry in the Old and New Testaments. He points out that following Jesus in our ways of eating today does not mean adopting “the diet of a first-century Mediterranean peasant,” which is neither sensible nor possible for the majority of world Christians. Rather, he presents our food choices as acts of faith and argues that each Christian, no matter in what context they live, “can allow Jesus’ values in his respect for the planet, his advocacy of ‘care for the neighbor,’ and his reliance on sharing food to shape the way we grow or produce, shop, then cook and share our food” (45).

An extensive list of seventy-five practical suggestions near the end of the book provides readers with potential starting points in adopting what Francis calls “a Jesus-shaped diet.” Many of these suggestions will likely be familiar (eat less meat and dairy products, eat local whenever possible, eat seasonal, buy fair trade, compost, grow your own food). As the book was written with a broad audience in mind, and practical steps are very different in different locations, it is understandable that the level of its suggestions remain rather general. Francis is to be commended for doing what many justice-oriented books fail to do—offering his audience practical starting points that can serve as trajectories for additional individual research.

Personally, I was encouraged by Francis’s call to commit to making changes—even if we start small, and perhaps for a limited period of time (like Lent). Such changes can then grow into more permanent features of our lifeway and be followed by other changes. I have been a vegetarian for over half of my life. In reading *What in God’s Name Are You Eating?*, I have decided to more consistently adopt a vegan diet to further reduce my carbon footprint.

Francis is right—those of us who have the ability to choose what we eat enjoy an immense privilege, and if we are to take seriously that Jesus said, “I came that the world might have life—in all its fullness” (John 10:10, author’s paraphrase), we “can do no other than change our ways that the world might have life—and not our leftovers” (32). Although he writes from an explicitly radical Anabaptist vantage, Francis’s short text is an important read for a wide church audience. I hope many do read it, and then eat and drink accordingly.

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Ragan Sutterfield, *Cultivating Reality: How the Soil Might Save Us*, Cascade, Eugene, Oregon, 2013. 121 pp. \$12.80. ISBN: 9781597526562.

Though Ragan Sutterfield never says it in these words, *Cultivating Reality: How the Soil Might Save Us* is about the practical and spiritual implications of eating, whether the food eaten is a nuked Pizza Pop on the run or a leisurely family break-

fast of pasture-raised bacon and free-range eggs from a trusted farmer down the road. What we eat affects the earth and our souls.

Eating is our most significant intersection with the earth. If we take responsibility for this connection, whether as farmers or “proxy” farmers, we can be enriched spiritually. A good measure of a life, Sutterfield contends, is whether our actions build or destroy soil. And so the church needs *agrarianism*—a “habit of mind” rooted in our dependence on dirt (2–3).

When he wrote the book, Sutterfield was involved in a small-scale farm in Arkansas, though he refers to his own experience less often than he might. The book adds to a mini-genre of writing that contrasts the virtues of agrarianism with the evils of “industrial” agriculture. That genre—which includes contributions from Wendell Berry, Amishman David Kline, Gene Logsdon, and Fred Bahnson, as well as Michael Pollan, Barbara Kingsolver, and Henry David Thoreau if you stretch the boundaries—faces a difficult task. Its authors swim against the tide of progress and civilization.

In her 2007 book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Kingsolver refers to a powerful societal “presumption that education is a key to moving away from manual labor and dirt—two undeniable ingredients of farming.”¹ Like Kingsolver, Sutterfield is pushing against not only the weight of education but also the entire trajectory of history, which is headed toward the bright lights. The task at hand is to chip away at what I would call the urbanization of the collective imagination.

Cultivating Reality sets about this task not by prescribing exactly how people should eat or by calling for re-ruralization but by examining worldviews. Sutterfield uses a good portion of his book to trace the anti-agrarian notions of individual greed and utilitarian disregard for environmental health back to thinkers like John Locke, René Descartes, and Francis Bacon. Along the way he makes many and varied stops to discuss fasting, celebration (aim not only for that which is sustainable but that which calls for joyous observance), Genesis (be a servant rather than steward of the land), the Sabbath (not just a day to rest so we can work harder in the week to come), convenience (beware), agrarian farms as a monastic-like foothold in a culture adrift, the fault of liberalism (it’s bent on “coercion”), “shit,” and the gift of dependence.

The latter is the point I will call to mind most often after reading the book. Sutterfield observes that his infant daughter will become more dependent, not less, as she grows up. She will become intertwined in “the expanding network of creatures and people upon which she relies” (19–20). And that is a gift, Sutterfield says.

¹ Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 9.

As an aspiring small-scale farmer myself, I resonated with many of Sutterfield's reflections, especially those on gift, satisfaction, and, particularly, humility. I know that every plant, with the possible exception of nodding thistle, is a gift. I know the bone-tired, soul-quenching satisfaction of manual farm work. I know the humility of battling weeds and shoveling stinky stuff. I know the humility of transplanting a tiny oak seedling, aware that I will have returned to dust by the time it is anywhere near as big as the three giants that anchor the yard we momentarily inhabit.

Soil, Sutterfield says, can offer the church humility; the church is to be "brought low, close to the earth" (112). This humility is a spiritual gift of a practical reality. As Thoreau wrote from his cabin in the woods, "Humility, live darkness, reveals the heavenly lights."² Such darkness is hard to find in cities.

But here I come to a danger that Sutterfield also faces—dichotomization. The city is not all bad and the country not all good. Likewise, the "industrial" farmer is not all bad and the "agrarian" farmer not all good.

The step beyond *Cultivating Reality* is to bring in the reality that cities, which will not go away, depend on land controlled by big farmers. Ultimately the food system cannot change without them and their land. You can't grow potatoes in the pages of a book, only in soil.

Condemnation is too easy. Dichotomization itself partakes of the worldview that Sutterfield identifies as problematic. The big farmers—my neighbors—must be brought into the conversation, not categorically condemned. We're all on this earth together, and we need to make it work.

Sutterfield brings in some of this nuance in his one-page epilogue when he confesses the compromises in his own life, a life which he says is "lost in plastic wrap and gasoline" (115). Then he comes full circle back to his starting point that the church needs agrarianism. Agrarianism, he says (not quite in these words), needs the church, which for Sutterfield is the only context in which to work through the contradictions and compromises of life.

Somewhat ironically—or not—Sutterfield is now training to be an Episcopal priest. In an email, he shared that he thinks churches should raise their own grapes and wheat for communion, and gather holy water from local streams.³ Sutterfield believes this would help us "understand the ecological connections of Christ's body," bringing us back to the dirt upon which our bodies and souls depend.

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² Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (New York: MacMillan, 1918), 331.

³ Ragan Sutterfield, email to author, June 22, 2015.