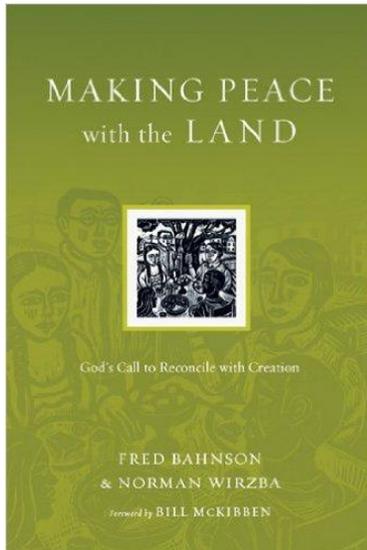


## *A Study Series for our Age*



### **Seven Study Sessions for Congregational Groups**

Whenever we slow down and take time to learn from Scripture how to examine our lives “before God”, we have an opportunity to reflect deeply. We may find ourselves changing direction, rediscovering what God means by reconciliation, and renewing or refreshing the ways we live our lives.

Reading the book, [Making Peace with the Land](#), by Norman Wirzba and Fred Bahnson, and discussing it with others, opens up all kinds of fresh “reflecting” on what reconciliation in Christ might mean for us in the 21st Century. The book is short, and lends itself to group study. As we gain new insights, we may also find the courage and encouragement to act on them.

We invite you to join Norman Wirzba and Fred Bahnson as they take us on a journey to rediscover God’s love for all of Creation, and possible ways to respond to God’s “down-to-earth” presence in our lives. Their recent book: [Making Peace with the Land \(God’s Call to Reconcile with Creation\)](#) is available as an e-book, and as a paperback (166 pages). Check out Intervarsity Press, [email@ivpress.com](mailto:email@ivpress.com). The study guide at the end of the book is helpful for individual reflection and for group discussion.

What follows here is a book study guide for participants in congregational studies, confirmation classes, young adult workshops, and ecumenical group studies. This guide is structured as a seven - week series, but may be adapted to any other time line: for example, it could work as a 14 week series (with two sessions spent on each chapter) or as an intense weekend workshop. The series supports group study by providing several-page outlines for each “week”, with notes, highlighted Scripture readings, questions, and hymn suggestions.

Interested clergy and congregational councils are encouraged to check out the material on line. Hard copies may be made as needed of the Study Series. All outlines for this series are made available through the [BC Synod website](#). Other places to look for this study series are: *Spirit of the Land* website, and various ELCiC, Anglican Church of Canada and United Church of Canada websites.

In Christ,  
Faith and Society Committee, BC Synod ELCiC  
September 2015

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**WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY SERIES**

Based on the book, ***MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION*** (Bahnson/Wirzba)

*Book Study: A Time to Re-flect, Re-pent, Re-concile, Re-new*

When we take the time for reflecting on our life—that is, our inner and outer life—“before God”, using the Scriptures as a mirror to examine ourselves, we open ourselves to the unexpected.

A surprising result of our reflections before God is that we turn back to God by changing our ways in our relationships to God, ourselves, our neighbours, and all of God’s creation. We reflect on which of our actions and which of our life-styles are hurting others, are damaging our sense of community, are destroying parts of God’s nature. Once we identify what in our lives is going against the Creator of all, we have to change direction. There’s a word for this “turning back to God” in Christian vocabulary: “to repent.”

A crucial part of our repentance is that we take on-- accept and assert-- the “ministry of *reconciliation*” that we have received as ambassadors of Christ. (In 2 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul affirms that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself,” and that “the message of reconciliation has been entrusted to us.”) Since Christ reconciled all of creation with himself, our ministry is not only to reconcile ourselves with the people close to us, those in our families, churches and communities, but also to be reconciled to nature—to the land, air, and water, and with all the living things sustained by them. We are called to “make peace with the land,” rather than exploiting and abusing it.

Reconciliation is making peace. As we make peace with people, community and the land, we are in the positive “process of *renewal*.” We look at the world with new eyes. We act in healing and renewing ways. We find concrete ways of re-building community and of re-connecting with the land on which, ultimately, we all depend for our lives.

Our particular study focus, based on the book by Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba, “Making Peace with the Land”, will be on our relationship with God’s creation. Our reflections during much of the church year often are framed as only “inward-facing work”. Often, in our “outward-facing lives” we are distracted by the accepted culture, politics and economics of our dominant society, while we neglect or ignore the aspects of Christ-oriented repentance and reconciliation that invite and challenge us, both inwardly and outwardly, to “make peace with the land”.

*Resources for the Study Series:*

1. *For Participants:*

Each of the seven weekly study sessions will include a participant “hand-out” with the following:

- Selected passages from Scripture
- Quotes and paraphrases from the book, *Making Peace with the Land*.
- Three or four questions to guide personal reflection and group discussion (largely based on the questions suggested by the authors of *Making Peace with the Land*).

2. *For Leaders:*

There is a leader’s hand-out, with suggested hymns to choose from, and some ideas regarding possible methods of structuring the sessions.

3. *Recommended Resource Book, (available as e-reader or paperback):*

*Making Peace with the Land - God’s Call to Reconcile with Creation* by Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba. 2012. InterVarsity Press, ([email@ivpress.com](mailto:email@ivpress.com)) ISBN 978 0 8308 3457 0

Note: This book is short. (166 pages). The series will follow the chapters in order, one per week. It is recommended that the leaders have the book handy as reference during the study sessions. The book is recommended to all participants. *But it will be possible to participate in the conversations for anyone who attends a session, even if they haven’t had a chance to read the chapter on which it is based. The weekly hand-outs contain biblical texts, excerpts, paraphrases and questions for reflection.*

**Highlights for Group Discussion**

**Prologue, “For God so loved the Soil”: pages 15-18**

**Study Guide relating to the chapter: page 167**

Reminder: All page references are to *Making Peace with the Land*, by Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba.

**Biblical references, related quotes, and paraphrases from pages 15-18:**

Genesis 2:8

“And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden.”

Genesis 1:11-13, 24

God enlists, then engages the soil so that the earth puts forth all kinds of vegetation and fruit and “brings forth living creatures of every kind”.

Genesis 2 (especially Genesis 2:9,19)

Here God fashions the first human being by taking the dust of the ground into his hands, holding it so close that it can share in the divine breath and inspiring it with the freshness of life....God draws near to the earth and then animates it *from within*.

### John 3:16

We are right to believe that God loves you and me. But in these earliest pages of Scripture, we discover that God’s first love is the soil. God’s love for us, described definitively in John 3:16 (“...for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...”) only makes sense in terms of God’s love for the earth that sustains us.

### Genesis 6:6-7

Only as we grasp God’s love for the earth can we begin to feel God’s regret (when human disobedience, arrogance and violence had so seriously degraded and destroyed creation’s order and beauty that God resolved to wipe it out with a deluge of rain and mud.)

“And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them”.

The garden of delight (Eden means “delight”) became a nightmare of drowning and death. The nightmare is not over. God promised to never again destroy the world, but we humans just might.

Examples: Individually and collectively we can make a list of the exploitation and destruction of parts of nature that we are aware of. (Mt. Polley tailings pond rupture in BC, might be a start, as we add other examples from anywhere in the world...)

God’s is a different vision, of a reconciled rather than an exploitative relationship with the earth.

### Genesis 2:15

God “took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it”.

This is a summons to join in the hard, divine work that, by nurturing soil, nurtures human life. God’s gardening work is the most fundamental and indispensable expression of the divine love that creates, sustains and reconciles the world.

### **Questions for reflection and discussion:**

1. What images come to mind for you when you hear the word “Creation”?
2. Do you find it helpful to think of God as Gardener?  
What other stories or images from Scripture come to mind as you read this account of Genesis?

### **Challenging Thought for Week One:**

- We recognize our capacity to destroy human-to-human relationships, and the need to reconcile.
- We often do not reflect on our capacity to destroy our relationship to the planet.
- What new questions and challenges does this awareness raise for you?
- Are there practical, day-to-day, ways in which we can personally increase our awareness of our dependence on the Earth?

## Closing Prayer and Hymn

For Next Week:

- If you have access to *Making Peace with the Land*, it is recommended to read Chapter 1, “Reconciliation with the Land”, pages 19-40. (Norman Wirzba)
- Reflect: Study Guide, pages 168, 169.
- If you don’t have a chance to read the chapter, feel free to attend the session anyway.
- There will again be a hand-out with some highlights of Scripture and quotes or paraphrases from the chapter.
- Also, consider inviting a friend.

## **WEEK TWO: STUDY SERIES**

Based on the book, ***MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION*** (Bahnsen/Wirzba)

### **Highlights for Group Discussion**

Preparation:

**Chapter One: “Reconciliation with the Land” (Norman Wirzba): pages 19-40 - Study Guide for chapter 1: pages 168, 169**

Highlights from Chapter One:

#### **Biblical references, related quotes, and paraphrases from pages 19-40**

**Contradiction** (belief in Creator, lack of concern for creation).

Norman’s awareness of our human capacity to destroy the land came to him as he drove through a particularly polluted city, (Gary, Indiana) on his way to Yale Divinity School. He noticed that almost everyone he met at Yale professed belief in God as Creator, yet very few had any concern for creation itself.

*Page 20:* “Surely it is a contradiction to profess belief in the Creator while showing disregard or disdain for the works of the Creator’s hands.”

We as a species have often limited the scope of God’s love only to humanity (and sometimes even limited that to certain groups of people), and forgotten God’s love for all creation.

Colossians 1:15-23: (Early church hymn: All things included in reconciliation)

This early church hymn affirms the cosmic, all-inclusive scope of God’s love. The church sang of Jesus that “*all things, in heaven and on earth... are created in him, through him, and for him*”. God’s reconciling and redeeming love is all-encompassing. The hymn includes “**all things**”, when it describes God making peace through the blood of the cross of Jesus.

*Page 23:* “Here (in this early Christian hymn) Christ is not reduced to a moral or spiritual teacher who comes down to earth to deliver a few special teachings that will get some of us to heaven. God’s life with us, God’s dwelling with us, does not happen as an immaterial soul-to-soul or mind-to-mind connection. It is body to body, flesh to flesh. What God accomplishes in Christ is accomplished through blood, the medium of bodily life. God reconciles all the bodies of this world in and by Jesus’ ‘fleshly body through death’ (Colossians 1:22)”. We (humans) thrive only insofar as we are nurtured, warmed, inspired and protected by creation in countless ways.

*Page 24:* “Human life simply makes no sense apart from the life of all creation. We live only because the worms, plants and bees do too. And they live because God loves them.”

**Resisting the Socratic Urge** (Avoiding dualism, rediscovering God incarnate in Jesus, and the resurrection of the body.)

A temptation for Christians is to fall into the dualistic “Socratic” thinking that separated the imperfect, temporary, material “body” from the perfectible, eternal “soul”. This dualism sees little value in the “body” since it is prone to “materiality” (illness, ageing, decay and death), and is the cause of violence, envy and lust in the world. The “soul”, by contrast, can be improved, and prepared for eternal life, either by extensive philosophical training (for Socrates), or by believing the right doctrines or doing the right things (for “Christians”). Norman explains that this is a profoundly anti-Christian way of understanding the world.

*Page 26:* “It denies the goodness and beauty of the material world that God so deeply and forever loves. It denies the incarnation of God in the body of Jesus Christ...It denies the Christian hope in the resurrection of the body. It denies John’s vision of the new heaven and the new earth in which God’s holy city descends to earth because “the home of God is among mortals”. (Rev 21:3)

The Christian view, which accepts God’s love and reconciliation (all things, all bodies included), takes seriously Jesus’ ministry of feeding, healing and touching bodies. All of creation suffers due to the effects of sin. Trusting that Christ has overcome sin and death, his followers take up his ministries of nurturing, feeding and healing.

1 Corinthians 15:13-15 and Acts 17:32: The apostle Paul reminds us of the centrality of the resurrection of the body. He also recognizes that this is a radical affirmation, which will provoke doubt and ridicule.

**Ecological Amnesia** (people separated—physically and existentially— from the land)

For examples of our physical separation from the land, think about and share your own families’ lives over several generations. Where did they live, how close were they to the farms and fields and forests in their day-to-day lives? Did they appreciate where their food and energy came from?

Think of the examples given in the book, regarding mountain top removal for coal extraction in the USA. Norman writes: *Page 31* “In the name of progress or human well-being, we turn against the earth and extract what we want even if it means exhausting, degrading or destroying the sources of life that we and all other creatures need.” A result of living lives apart from the land, we not only view the land abstractly -- as resources -- but we also begin to see other people abstractly, as resources, as fodder for the growing economy. Both people and the land cease to matter “except if they contribute to a business plan”.

Isaiah 65:21, 23: The prophet Isaiah speaks of a glorious new creation, in which our dysfunctional relationships are changed: the bodies of humanity and the land joined in healthy relationships that promote life and joy.

Our existential separation from the land is fairly recent. *Page 35:* In our age, living primarily as consumers, we forget that we are “bodies bound to each other throughout webs of food, water, breath, energy, inspiration, pleasure and delight”.

**A Created Membership of Bodies** (creation is ongoing, interconnected, and its goal is God’ -- and our -- delight)

Psalm 104 stresses that God is constantly present to creatures as their animating breath. Creation is not a once upon a time event that created “nature”, and then let the laws of nature take over. God continues to love all of creation. And all of creation depends on God being the ‘breath within our breath’, constantly ‘renewing the face of the earth’. (Psalm 104:29-30)

Genesis 1:1 – Genesis 2:3: There is a momentum building over the arc of the creation story, each step along the way being a manifestation of God’s love. And on the seventh day, God practices “shabbat”, rest, taking complete delight in what is made. God’s rest means delighting in and loving all that is made by God.

*Page 39*: “The opposite of rest is not work, but restlessness.” “Ours is a restless economy.” We are never satisfied -- not by consumption, nor by work, nor by entertainment. Nothing seems good enough. “This restlessness leads directly to the neglect of the places we are in and the people we are with.” God’s physical, material love is shown to us by others -- people, plants, animals, the soil, the air, the water -- on whom we depend to feed, nurture, heal, inspire, or comfort us.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19: Christ reconciles the whole world to himself. We are given, by God, through Christ, a ministry of reconciliation.

*Page 40*: This is not restricted to “individual, disembodied souls”. Our ministry of reconciliation in Christ “begins with, and continually returns to, reconciliation with the land.”

#### Highlights from Chapter One: **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. Can you think of examples of the contradiction in our lives, as we “sing praises to the Creator”, while not respecting many aspects of creation? (Shopping far from home for the elusive “good deal”, spraying our lawns against dandelions, avoiding uncomfortable information about fracking, etc., etc.).
2. The Christ Hymn from Colossians 1:15-23. What new thinking does it stimulate for you? What else does this reconciliation cover besides our individual sins?
3. How do we often practice ‘dualism’, the separation of the created order, in our lives? What can we do to overcome this “temptation”?
4. Why does God rest on the seventh day? How can Sabbath help us understand what the creation is for?
5. A Challenging Thought: (First of all, this may be a good time for those who wish to share their “challenging thoughts” from Week One.)

### **Challenging Thought for Week Two:**

- What practical ways can we think of to overcome our ecological amnesia?
- Brainstorm in pairs or as a group, if time. Is there a first step you (or your family together) would like to try?
- For example, look at your plate of food at supper, and try to think of every “body” involved in getting it to your plate. List the persons, plants, animals, soils, waters, air, energy—and their places, and quality of life, on this earth—that contributed to what you are about to use for your own health and energy. And use this list in your table grace!

### **Closing Prayer and Hymn**

For Next Week:

- Continue with “Making Peace with the Land”.
- Chapter 2, “Learning to See”, *pages 41 -60*, by Fred Bahnson.
- Reflect on the Study Guide, *pages 169-170*.
- Try to act on your Challenging Thought.
- Again, consider inviting a friend.

### **WEEK THREE: STUDY SERIES**

Based on the book, ***MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION*** (Bahnsen/Wirzba)

#### **Highlights for Group Discussion**

Preparation:

**Chapter Two: “Learning to See” (Fred Bahnsen): pages 41-60 - Study Guide relating to the chapter: pages 169, 170**

Highlights from Chapter Two:

**Biblical references, related quotes, and paraphrases from pages 40-60**

**Blindness.** (lacking that “sight” which recognizes Jesus’ reconciliation with the created order)

A powerfully imagined poem by the Christian poet Scott Cairns helped Fred Bahnsen to “see” the biblical Creation story in a new way. The poet bases his images on Genesis 1:26. “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’. For Fred, the poem jogged his mind to a new appreciation for us as the “image of God”, the “animated earth”. The poem showed Fred in a powerful image that “we come from YHWH and we come from soil.” (We might consider other examples of how imaginative works of art have moved us to “see” important things in new, clearer, ways.)

For Fred, the issue of “learning to see” is vitally important, because our individual and collective lack of imagination, lack of ‘sight’, is what Norman in the first chapter calls “ecological amnesia”.

*Page 42:* For Fred, this is a two-fold blindness: “an inability to see the rest of the created order that Jesus has already reconciled to himself and an inability to see the harm we’re causing it”. Fred is concerned that -- as we hear about the many examples of environmental degradation of food sources, energy sources and the climate -- the church is responding to these stories as “isolated incidents”. The church is not addressing the “underlying malady”, namely our “blindness” to God’s love for the created order, and our own self-centred pride that disregards creation.

*Page 44:* Fred quotes several studies at length, that point to “the natural outworking of our own hubris”.

i) From the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment:

“Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fibre, and fuel. This has resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth.”

ii) The 2008 report from the IAASTD resulted from a four year study by the World Bank, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and multiple stakeholders in the private and non-profit sectors. It called for a complete overhaul of the world’s food and farming systems. It

declared unequivocally that industrial farming methods are detrimental to the earth’s ecosystems and are unable to feed a growing world population, and that we must therefore turn to organic, ecologically sound farming practices as soon as possible.

iii) The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association tells us: “2010 tied with 2005 as the warmest year of the global surface temperature record, beginning in 1880. This was the 34th consecutive year with global temperatures above the 20th century average.”

*Page 46:* As he sees this world gone awry, Sunday school teacher, writer and environmentalist Bill McKibben puts it bluntly: “We’re running Genesis backward: de-creating”. Fred challenges us: “In the face of all this depressing de-creating, what does it mean for the church to proclaim the cosmic scope of Christ’s saving work? How can we profess as Lord the one in whom “all things hold together” (Col.1:17) while the work of our hands begets a world in which “things fall apart”?

### **The Language of Soil: a Vocational Journey**

Fred’s passion for mountain climbing became a kind of spiritual discipline for him, but both his studies in theology and his experiences among subsistence farming communities led him to change his focus. Instead of seeing God’s creation only in “nature, out there”, Fred discovered a vocation of participating in Christ-centered ongoing creation by “planting gardens”.

We each have our stories of how, in our own lives, new “in-sights” led to new actions, even, for some of us, to changing vocations. For Fred, he grew to recognize that “feeding people is a holy calling”, from the days of Jeremiah (Jer. 29:5, 7) “plant gardens and eat what they produce”...to Jesus’ last words to Peter (John 21:15-17) “Do you love me? (You know that I love you!) Feed my sheep!”

**Intimacy with the Land** (by losing intimacy with the land, we end up missing out on intimacy with God)

*Pages 52-53:* Fred suggests that the “story” we’ve been telling each other, about our “progress”, may just be a wrong story. When we pat ourselves on the back that we can get on with “higher pursuits”, by paying -- in the Bible is an implicit part of the human community’s relationship to God, whom we are to obey.

Deuteronomy 11:13-15: “If you will only heed God’s every commandment that I am commanding you today -- loving the Lord your God, and serving God with all your heart and all your soul -- then God will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; and God will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill.”

The land is also implicit in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus’ mighty works of healing recorded in the Gospels “flowed from the land into people through the media of soil, water, saliva, bread and fish.” The places of Jesus’ ministry -- mountaintops, olive gardens, lakes, rivers, wilderness -- also point to the mystery of the incarnation. They are not just unimportant scenery.

*Page 54:* “...these places are inseparable from the story itself. They are also part of the incarnation of Christ...Likewise, the soils and watersheds and air are part of our own salvation narrative.”

A provocative thought: Are our ecological woes, climate change, species depletion, polluted water, at root, “an inability to acknowledge or feel God’s presence in the land?” If there were oil, or coal, or natural gas under a place we associate with God’s presence -- think of Mt. Horeb or Mt. Sinai -- would we still drill or frack or remove its top to get at the fuel? Is God any less present in the wilderness of northern Alberta and BC? On the Pacific Coast? In the Gulf of Mexico? In the topsoil being squandered through industrial agricultural practices?

*Page 56:* Fred’s challenge to us: Will we take God’s redemptive plan seriously and acknowledge God’s ongoing presence in the land by living in ways we can “learn to see”? Are we willing to put ourselves close to the actual land, with actual people living on it, and to stay there, “long enough to be changed”?

**The Great Transition** (turning from an “abstract” money economy, towards “land-connectedness” for growing food and deriving energy.) In our historical context, we need to heed the biblical call to humility.

*Page 57:* Fred agrees with Marilynne Robinson that we need a “new, chastened self-distrusting vision of the world.” We need to let go of our trust in our own power and motives while recognizing that we are wholly reliant on God.

As Christians, our most important witness in an “abstract” world is to be “embodied” and “concrete”. Instead of trusting that money can buy us everything we need, we need to get active: to experience and live out our trust in God’s goodness. How? By intensive gardening, solar energy, and the like. We need -- physically, personally -- to dig, to design, and to build systems that enable ecological resilience. This leads to us seeing with new eyes, and loving both God and God’s earth. “One can only see by loving”. (John Muir)

## Highlights from Chapter Two: **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. The Biblical passages and literature quoted in this chapter are powerful reminders that connect us to the soil. We are created as “animated earth” in the “image of God”; loving God in obedience leads to being blessed by food-producing land; Jesus’ lived an earthly life, healing, nourishing in tangible, incarnate ways. Can you think of some of the specific actions and encounters in the Gospels where we are reminded of this “hands-on” and “soil-earth related” aspect of Jesus’ ministry?
2. The health and well-being of the created (“earthy”) world are not a ‘side issue’ for Christians in our historical place and time. As we rediscover “ecology” to be at the heart of our Christian understanding, what changes for us as church? As we see God’s reconciling action and God’s continuing love of the present world, how do we as churches act out our trusting response, and “respons-ibility”?

Can we see our church life putting that “new way of seeing” into practice? How could things be done differently in our week-to-week life as community of faith? (In worship, in fellowship, in relating to community outside the church, in youth work, in stewardship, etc.?) How can we develop “calloused hands” from our work as Christian community in our time and place?

3. Intimacy with the land/intimacy with God. Have you experienced this in some way in your own life? Can you draw on specifics of your own childhood memories? What spiritual deficits in our society do you see connected to our distance from the land?

4. A Challenging Thought: (Again, this might be a good moment to share our “challenging thoughts and actions” from last week -- either with a partner, or with the group. How can we encourage ourselves and others to overcome “ecological amnesia”? Is it a luxury our society can no longer afford?)

### **Challenging Thought for Week Three:**

- How might I, or my family, “embody” the humility described in this chapter?
- What steps can we take to contribute to the great transition from abstract to “incarnate” living?
- Are there specific ways that drawing closer to the land could help me or my family to be more faithful (i.e., more trusting in God’s love, more responsive to this love) in our personal life and work?

### **Closing Prayer and Hymn**

For Next Week:

- Continue reading “Making Peace with the Land”. Chapter 3, “Reconciliation Through Christ”, pages 61-82 (Norman Wirzba)
- Reflect on the study guide, page 170
- Go on a walk or hike, keeping your Challenging Thought in mind.
- Invite a friend on the walk, and, perhaps, to next week’s study.

## **WEEK FOUR: STUDY SERIES**

Based on the book, ***MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION*** (Bahnson/Wirzba)

### **Highlights for Group Discussion**

Preparation:

**Chapter 3, “Reconciliation Through Christ”, (Norman Wirzba), pages 61-82 - Study Guide, page 170**

Highlights from Chapter 3:

#### **Biblical references, related quotes, and paraphrases from pages 61-82**

**Cedar Grove, a “taste of heaven”** (distrust, racism and fear give way to community acts of reconciliation).

Norman describes an implausible occurrence in a small rural town in the USA, where true reconciliation grew out of tragedy. An unexplained murder potentially heightened already existing racial tensions, distrust and fear among neighbours. Norman sees the dysfunctional relationships going on in Cedar Grove as something that is widespread.

*Pages 62-63:* “Most of our lands and communities bear the scars of racial and ethnic oppression, class antagonism, nomadic careerism, neighbourhood 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. ...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.” Norman then proceeds to describe how in Cedar Grove, rather than allow a tragic murder to overwhelm the community with rising tensions and violence, two people began down a path of reconciliation. Others joined in, from all walks of life in their little town. This led eventually to the formation of a widely supported, five-acre community garden, called “Anathoth”.

Jeremiah 29:5, 7: God instructed Jeremiah to buy a field at Anathoth, as a sign of hope in the midst of devastation, fear and violence. God said: “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce... Seek the welfare (=‘shalom’) of the place where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you shall find your welfare”.

*Page 66:* Norman describes the scriptural “shalom” as 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.”

Jeremiah 32:37- 41: ends with God turning to God’s people and the people turning to God. Shalom. Reconciliation. God says, “I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.”

**Reconciliation through Christ.** (In Christ, God’s creating, healing, feeding, reconciling love embraces **everything**.)

Norman contrasts the ways in which we tend to see the purpose of life with the purpose that comes through Jesus, “Emmanuel” (= God with us). Many of us think that life is about individual fulfillment, getting power for ourselves while we can, even if it means diminishing others in the process. Others of us live a life of quiet desperation, numbing ourselves into accepting division, suspicion, cutthroat competition and discord as inevitable in our imperfect “dog-eat-dog” world.

*Page 71:* Norman reminds us; “It is precisely this sort of divided, broken and bleeding world that Jesus wants to redeem”.

God becomes incarnate in Jesus, so that we, too, can be welcomed into the purpose of the creaturely life. Our own embodied living becomes part of the salvation which radiates God’s love, and expresses God’s glory. In Scripture, we can see again and again that life’s purpose is revealed in Jesus as Saviour and co-Creator.

*Page 70:* “Jesus nurtures, heals, consoles, exorcises, reconciles and celebrates creatures”. Jesus’ actions are all out of a deep love for others, “showing us that **all things are created so that they can experience and participate in the movement of love**”.

Norman also reminds us of Jesus as the divine, creating Word of God. Through the forms of compassion and kindness that Jesus embodied, we can get a sense of how all creatures best fit together, how we relate to all of creation.

It is possible to “exist” in this world, without being fully “alive”, as John’s gospel reminds us. (John 1:4) For the abundant life that God intends for Creation we need to be grafted into Jesus, the vine. (John 15:4-5) Jesus, God’s “Logos”, God’s creating Word, was with God right from the start. (John 1:2; John 15-17; Genesis 1:11) From the beginning, God speaks order and harmony and beauty into the world. “Let us put forth vegetation”, with all kinds of seed-bearing fruit that lets plants perpetuate themselves.

*Page 72:* Norman points out that God’s creativity establishes relationships - of fertility, nutrition and beauty - in which creatures can become fully alive. In 2 Corinthians 5:16, Paul stresses that, grafted into relationship with Christ, his disciples no longer see things from “a human point of view” (which assumes that the world’s reason for being is “to serve individual ambition and promote self-

glorification”). Fullness of life occurs when relationships between people and land, and between people and each other are healthy and whole. (2 Corinthians 5:18)

*Page 74:* Political manoeuvring economic profitability or self-enhancement are no longer the lenses through which Jesus’ disciples see other creatures. Everything has become new. “Every created thing is God’s gift to be protected, nurtured, shared and celebrated”.

**The Ministry of Reconciliation.** (The Cross rejects the “world’s ways” of creating “peace” through violence and abuse. The Cross reveals Jesus’ all-encompassing, reconciling, self-offering love. The reconciliation work that we are called to in the Cross is to engage with others and with creation, “bodily”. As we learn to recognize the wounds we inflict on people and the land, healing and reconciliation can flourish.)

*Pages 75, 76:* Jesus was crucified during the days of the Roman Empire. Norman describes why Jesus was considered a threat to the Roman order, the Roman “Logos”. Rome became powerful by its strictly utilitarian approach: Whatever exists, (forests, farms, wetlands, waterways, distinct cultures, individual communities and people) is to be used to increase the wealth and glory of the Roman elite. Top-down brutality, both human enslavement and ecological degradation, and the constant threat of violence, were the norm— to keep the empire’s so-called “peace” intact. Jesus “stood as a decisive ‘No’ to the lie at the heart of the Pax Romana. ...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.”

These Scripture passages are helpful to read again in this context:

2 Corinthians 5:16: Paul reminds us not to regard anything from “a human point of view”. (i.e., using others for my own ambition or self-glorification, or for the sake of promoting the Roman Empire)

2 Corinthians 5:18-19: Receiving the gift of the new creation in Christ, we participate in Christ’s reconciliation of all things.

Colossians 1:20: The ministry of reconciliation goes through a cross.

Philippians 2:7-8: Christ emptied himself, humbled himself, was obedient to the point of death: self-offering service.

Norman points out that our assigned “ministry of reconciliation” can only happen when we are humble enough to share life with others, to spend time, even “waste time”, with each other. We need to delight in each others’ joys and comfort each other in pain. Sympathy and sensitivity in real time, in practical living, are needed for God’s shalom and Shabbat to occur among us.

Once we see that God’s divine Logos creates the whole world, not just people, we begin to see the ministry of reconciliation also extending to the land. Gardening is hard and daily labour that allows us to be in close proximity to the soil, and lets us learn about the land’s woundedness and trains us to heal and care for it. Gardening is also the form of work that best describes God’s relationship to creation.

Genesis 2: God holds the soil of our lives in his hands, breathing life into it day to day.

Psalms 104: Not a “distant God”.

Psalm 65:12-13: 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”.

Our own ministry of reconciliation can lead us to participate in God’s gardening work, and to unexpected joys.

### Highlights from Chapter 3: **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. When Norman describes the widespread exploitation of resources —abusing “natural resources” and marginalizing “human resources”— he gives specific examples of this dynamic from the United States. Can you individually, with a partner, and as a group, come up with a list of specific examples drawn from your town, the surrounding area, your province, and Canada?

As you share the specifics, how does it feel to name these examples? How firmly entrenched do you see the acceptance of the status quo? In your view, with your experience, is it inevitable that the process of “success” often ends up turning the gifts of creation (land, water, plants, animals and people working in a variety of jobs) into “commodities” to be used and abused at will, in the name of “progress” or “monetary economics”?

2. A “taste of heaven”, “shalom”: where have you experienced it in any community or in a family? How does the biblical concept of “shalom” help us understand reconciliation that includes land?

3. Norman asks, “How do we know if our living...is truly good or rightly lived?” How does our understanding of Jesus, who he was, how he lived among us, help answer that question?

4. “The ministry of reconciliation goes through a cross.” What does that suggest we should expect from this world’s ‘systems’ (economics, politics, media, education, “religions”)? What does the cross teach us about the nature of Christian love?

5. A Challenging Thought: (If anyone would like to share their thinking and acting on last week’s challenging thought, this might be an appropriate time. The challenge was how to transition from abstract theory to direct involvement with land in order to begin a more humble, trusting, faithful way of living.)

### **Challenging Thought for Week Four:**

- Engagement with soil, plant and animal life is part of our relationship with God. As followers of Christ, we recognize that both his incarnation and his cross reveal the Creator’s love for all of creation. Starting “at home”, how do we include our family, children and grandchildren, in our own efforts to become more aware of and more sympathetic to creation?
- Can you think of ways in which you can invite children and teens to join you in your learning process? For example, instead of giving birthday and Christmas gifts that the “entertainment” system dictates, might you consider giving young folk the gift of “experiences” with the land, with soil, animals, plants, and water?

Might you give them the “gifts” of your time as together you do some of the following:

- a) Plan and create a small vegetable garden on your patio;
  - b) Go on several nature hikes;
  - c) Visit farmers’ markets, and/or a farm to get produce;
  - d) Give a few chicks for the children to raise under your supervision;
  - e) Create a “scavenger hunt” to interesting places in the neighbourhood, from hollow trees to a robin’s nest; etc. etc. etc.
- and another time, encourage the children to come up with their own version of nature-oriented scavenger hunts with neighbourhood children!

In the upcoming week, ask around to add to the list, and perhaps try out one or two yourself.

### **Closing Prayer and Hymn**

For Next Week:

- Continue reading “Making Peace with the Land” Chapter 4, “Field, Table, Communion”, *pages 83 - 111*, by Fred Bahnson
- Reflect on the Study Guide, *page 171*
- Try to act on your Challenging Thought
- Consider inviting a friend to the Study Series next week

## **WEEK FIVE: STUDY SERIES**

### **Highlights for Group Discussion**

Based on the book: ***MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION*** (Bahnsen/Wirzba)

Preparation:

**Chapter 4, “Field, Table, Communion”, The Abundant Kingdom vs Mirage, (Fred Bahnsen) pages 83-111 - Study Guide, page 171**

Highlights from Chapter 4:

#### **Biblical references, related quotes, paraphrases**

**The Abundant Mirage** (Our food system gives an illusion of plenty, while causing scarcity and harm)

Fred Bahnsen begins this chapter with a story that reveals how naive and proud we can be when it comes to the basics of working in order to eat. We “modern folk” think we are entitled to food, as consumers of a commodity, rather than as co-workers with what the earth has to offer. Our modern life’s ideals of a “life free of care” are seriously flawed. These ideals lead us to disdain manual labour, to care nothing for the soil, and to forget to care for physical spaces while also living within our ecological limits. Instead, we are encouraged to trust our human technological know-how and a never-ending supply of oil to allow us feed ourselves via a powerful, global “Food System”.

Genesis 2:15: We have fallen away from our “first vocation”, i.e., to accept the Lord God’s placing us in the Garden of Eden for us to “work it and take care of it”.

Ephesians 6:12: Fred points out that the food system looks good: it does purport to be an efficient, convenient, cheap way to provide calories to people year round. But, the closer we look, the more we can see the real costs to this system: in labour practices that don’t respect people, in farming and fishing that deplete soil, erode land or destroy species, in food that gives calories but not health. We recognize the modern food system as very shaky “scaffolding” to support us, which is showing signs of collapse. In fact, it can be understood as one of the demonic forces that Paul in his letter to the Ephesians refers to as “principalities and powers”. Such forces are fallen, and are in need of redemption.

The fossil-fuel based agriculture and food system based upon it create a “mirage” of abundance, while actually depleting the energy of the earth. (Page 87) “It takes 7.3 calories of oil energy to produce 1 calorie of food.”

“From the natural gas used to produce nitrogen fertilizer, to the diesel fuel needed for tractors and

shipping, our food is marinated in oil from farm to fork”. This is “irrevocably unsustainable”, and “cannot endure past the oil age”. On top of that, agriculture produces one third of all green-house gas emissions in the USA -- 18% coming from the livestock industry. *Page 89*

As we recognize the food system for what it is, we are encouraged to find ways that give it less and less power over us.

### **The Abundant Kingdom** (the new way of life that receives food as a gift from God)

Trusting the abundance promised by Jesus, we become freed from the controlling, destructive, power of the food system and also freed from a self-centred worry that there won’t be enough if we don’t increase the power of the food system. We are free to learn to receive food out of the loving hands of our Creator, as we work, and share, and enjoy real life expressions of this abundant Kingdom among us.

We are called to work as we pray: “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”. Our “first vocation” can draw us back to a reconciliation that includes all of creation, all the interconnectedness of this earth that can truly sustain our lives.

*Page 95:* Fred specifically challenges the church to “walk away from the mirage” of the global food system. The church needs to use her “eucharistic imagination to create a new paradigm for agriculture”. Fred asks: What if we (Church) abandon the centralized food economy and instead create new food communities centred on the local practice of growing healthy food together? And what if we then invite the hungry to the feast?

### **The Field: Consider the Lilies, How They Grow.** (Successful models of regenerative agriculture)

Psalm 19:1-4: Just as “the heavens declare the glory of God—to all the earth, to the ends of the world”, so should we let our fields speak the language of praise, instead of the language of industrialization, efficiency control.

Matthew 6:28, 29: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asks us not to worry about our needs, but rather to “consider the lilies of the field, how they grow”. To Fred, this suggests the need to “look at the created order God has established. You will never do better than this. So trust in this order and imitate it. Neither Solomon in all his - Monsanto or Archer Daniels Midland or Cargill and their fertilizers or pesticides or genetically modified seeds - can out-create what God has created.” *Page 96*

Regenerative agriculture sees nature as analog -- an overarching metaphor -- rather than as antagonist or a blue-print model to be copied verbatim. Successful examples include perennial polycultures, permaculture, biodynamic agriculture, agroforestry, no-till farming, rotational grazing, among others. No one of these need dominate. The main idea is to make ourselves students of the ecosystems in which we find ourselves. That way we serve and preserve the fertile soil God entrusted to our care. (Genesis 2:15)

Fred describes an amazing holistic agroforestry program in the Sahel, in Niger, as well as the Cuban

turn to organic farming out of necessity in the early 1990’s, when their access to oil was cut off. Both are examples of successful regenerative agriculture, in vastly different ecosystems. There are many others, suitable to the more moderate climates and ecosystems where many of us live. Fred doesn’t let churches off the hook: he says: *Page 102* “Churches, with their land and resources, can encourage such local examples of God’s abundant fields.”

**The Table: From *Alimento* to *Comida*.** (Seats of honour for the marginalized at the meal)

Fred gives examples of including the marginalized and homeless in the abundant kingdom. When food is prepared with love and care and served to all, then it goes beyond being calories and nutrients (“alimento”). It becomes “soul-food”, or “Comida”. (*Page 106*) “It’s a family together, people talking, warm fresh veggies, sweet potatoes with brown sugar...laughing, crying, prayer, thanksgiving, culture, old histories, yesterday morning histories, little ones learning who we are through food, love, fights, reconciliation, dating, a baby’s first meal, planning...remembering for this hour of life who and whose we are...” (John 10:10): “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”.

**The Communion: Creating Infrastructures of Holiness.** (A prayer for the church to see the Eucharist—the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood -- as going beyond the altar, to include people and land in all creation.)

As church, Fred recommends we stretch our “Eucharistic Imagination” so that the reconciliation and redemption of the sacrament of Holy Communion applies not only to us individually, and not only to some future “heavenly existence.” Instead, as congregations and church-related individuals, we can actively structure our learning and activities to promote a Communion that includes creation’s wilderness, gardens and farms as well as the stranger in our midst, as we are all nourished and redeemed together, in our time and in our place.

*Page 107:* Fred says: “Perhaps we can’t see God’s kingdom among us because the patterns and places of our daily lives prevent such vision. We need places that can restore our sight.”

Can churches become such places?

The examples of little Transition Towns in England that about seven years ago began growing their own food, using alternate energy sources -- to become fossil-fuel and food-system independent -- show us that small, creative steps are indeed possible.

Fred lists some practical “what ifs?” for us to ponder *page 109*: “What if our homes and churches went from being primary sites of consumption to places of production? What if we planted church-supported community gardens, permaculture parishes, transition churches, and apostolic farms that fed entire neighbourhoods? What if seminaries trained every future pastor in the agrarian arts, ecological literacy and sunshine-powered living? What if church lawns stopped being dumping grounds for pesticides, herbicides and petro-fertilizers and started growing zucchinis and tomatoes for the homeless shelter? What if the (leadership) took the church’s money out of the abundant mirage and put it into the much saner, more lasting savings account called soil fertility? What if we created infrastructures of holiness, where God’s kingdom of shalom could flourish on earth as in heaven?”

Fred’s prayer for the church to act out shalom ends with a reference to [Hebrews 11:1](#): Faith—as a “certain trust in things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen” -- that is what allows us to “recognize the seamless flow of nutrients both visible and invisible, profane and holy.” And, with such faith, Fred concludes: “we would be changed.”

#### Highlights from Chapter 4: **Questions for Reflection and Discussion.**

1. Individually or as a group, make two lists. “Abundant Mirage” and “Abundant Kingdom”.

For each heading, list any examples, characteristics, descriptions, “plusses and minuses”, synonyms, personal experiences and daily life interactions with each type of “abundance”. (These kinds of lists will be “incomplete”. You might notice more ideas coming to you over the next while, through daily living, media stories, and biblical or liturgical passages.) What might it look like to “fast” from the abundant mirage?

2. How does Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:24-33), and other Christian responses teach us something about growing food? Substitute “modern agriculture/ food system” for “mammon”: both compete for our trust. Both claim to take care of our needs. Both draw us away from the only trustworthy One.

What other Biblical passages relating to “God’s call to reconcile with Creation” do you find powerful, thought-provoking, and perhaps humbling? Add [Isaiah 41:18,19](#) to the passages you are considering.

Can you think of ways to incorporate “lilies of the field” concepts into our daily lives?

3. Someone in the group can recap the two examples from this chapter in which food is clearly a matter of justice and reconciliation: *pages 102-103* (The Welcome Table) and *pages 104-106* (Casa de Videira/House of the Vine).

a. How do both the five-star meal for the homeless and the full nutrient cycle from waste to compost to new gardens and new food compare to our churches’ usual ways of doing mercy ministry?

b. Reflect, together—perhaps in pairs— on the “What if” questions that Fred asks at the end of the chapter.

4. A Challenging Thought: At this time, the group may wish to share some challenging thoughts and/or actions from last week. Can you create a shared master list of activities that draw our next few generations into a closer relationship with the aliveness and interconnectedness of nature?

#### **Challenging Thought for Week Five:**

- Can you think of one thing you and your household (or congregation) usually buy at a store, but

could PRODUCE instead? What would it take? What would it look like to make this shift prayerfully, as an embrace of God’s abundance?

### **Closing Prayer and Hymn**

For Next Week:

- Continue reading “Making Peace with the Land”
- Chapter 5, “Reconciliation through Eating”, *pages 113-134*, by Norman Wirzba
- Reflect on the study guide, *page 172*
- Try to act on your Lenten Thought for Week Five—or on one of the earlier ones!
- Is there anyone else you may wish to invite to next week’s study session?

## **WEEK SIX: STUDY SERIES**

Based on the book: ***MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION*** (Bahnson/Wirzba)

### **Highlights for Group Discussion**

Preparation:

**Chapter 5, “Reconciliation through Eating”, (Norman Wirzba) pages 113-134 - Study Guide, page 172**

Highlights from Chapter 5:

#### **Biblical references, related quotes, paraphrases**

Eating mattered to Jesus. Eating with sinners and social outcasts is what got him into trouble with the established religious leadership. The kingdom of God is a place where people come from all over to eat. And, in the place where we will live eternally with the God who has chosen to dwell with us, people from all over will gather around the tree of life, to be healed and fed by its fruit. (Luke 15:2; Luke 7:34; Matthew 11:19; Luke 13:29; Revelations 22:1-2)

*Pages 114,115:* “Eating is the daily enactment of our dependence on other people, the land and ultimately God...Jesus cares about eating because it is in the growing, preparing and sharing of food that we bear witness to God’s desire that all creatures taste life fully...God created a world in which every creature lives by eating. ...That Jesus ate with sinners shows us how God relates to us, how we are to relate to each other and how we need to relate to the food itself.”

Norman reminds us of the many factors that work against a Christian concern with eating “well”, that is, in a way that such relationships are honoured and nurtured. Food in our current industrialized, commodified world has been reduced to a product which is evaluated for its availability, brand, convenience and price. And, as we learn from recent studies, the inflated amounts of “bad” fats, sodium, artificial flavourings and sugars in much food causes us serious health problems.

Norman contrasts this worry-inducing product or this dangerous enemy called “food” with God’s precious gifts of food and drink as described in Scripture. (Psalm 104:10-15, 24, 27-28)

“You make springs gush forth in the valleys;  
they flow between the hills,

giving drink to every wild animal;  
the wild asses quench their thirst.

By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;  
they sing among the branches.

From your lofty abode you water the mountains;

the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to use,

to bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the human heart,

oil to make the face shine,  
and bread to strengthen the human heart....

O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures...

These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

when you give to them, they gather it up;

when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.”

Believing that God created the world as an act of love, and being faithful to this hospitable God is to participate in and extend the divine hospitality that welcomes, nurtures and delights in the world.

**Food Shame** (we have much to be ashamed about in relation to food)

*Pages 118-119:* “To be ashamed” means that we know we have done something wrong before another. It means that we have not treated others in a way that honours their integrity.

Norman explains why many of us are not ashamed about our eating, although we ought to be. We are not aware of the ways in which cheap and convenient food are destructive of our sources of life. And the food industry doesn’t want us to be informed about this.

Norman gives a chilling description of how the popular chicken nuggets are produced.

*Pages 119-120:* “Very little, if anything, in this process honours or treats these chickens as gifts of God.” Shame, in this example, can occur once we know the wrong being done to the chickens, and, once we concern ourselves with their well-being enough to actually care for them, the shame can give way to celebration.

**Eating Jesus** (The Eucharist - Lord’s Supper - changes us, from being curved in on our self-serving selves to living lives that become aware of and support the needs of others. This meal at the Lord’s Table also changes our understanding of the entire act of eating.)

Norman refers to many passages in the Bible that help us deepen our understanding of the sacrament of the Eucharist (The Great Thanksgiving/ Holy Communion/ the Lord’s Supper). Most importantly, Norman shows how the Eucharist is not something to keep confined to the ritualistic realm. *Page 124:* “The life and ministry of Jesus is not a pious idea. It is an economic revolution that has multiple practical effects, such that (all our) tables become places of eucharistic eating.” The early Christian community not only gladly and generously ate together, they were also known to sell their possessions, give to those who had need and hold things in common. “There was not a needy person among them”!! (Acts 2:46-47; Acts 4:34)

The consequences of having Jesus “abide in us”, be present in us, are many.

Galatians 2:20: ...“It is Christ who lives in me...”

Jesus is invited into our lives. Our thinking, feeling and acting are transformed. Jesus is so near that he can work the salvation in us that he incarnated (made flesh and blood).

Luke 22:19-20: “My body, given for you. Do this in remembrance in me.” “This cup, poured out for you, new covenant in my blood”

John 6:53-56: To eat and drink Jesus is to abide in him, the bread of life.

The sacrifice of Jesus, offering himself to the point of death on a cross, is where God reveals that true and abundant life consists in the complete and costly giving of oneself to another. Grasping, hoarding or profiteering forms of life are corrected by Jesus’ example.

“The Eucharist is the regular time when we learn to put to death all the self-serving impulses that distort and degrade the world around us.” (*page 123*)

Romans 6:3-11: In baptism, and in the Eucharist, we die to sin so that we can be alive to God.

John 12:24-25: Each creature can be a giving member to the whole. At the Lord’s Supper, Jesus nourishes us so that we can nourish the world around us.

Colossians 1:23: Good news is proclaimed to “every creature under heaven” when we become “eucharistic eaters. We become more attentive and hospitable to each other as well as changing the way we go about growing, harvesting, processing, distributing, preparing and then sharing the food we daily eat.

**Eucharistic Eating in Action** (developing an agriculture that nourishes rather than depletes the land, by acting on the level of government policy and in practical farming.)

Norman describes the work of Wes Jackson, of The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. For thirty years, this perennial, polyculture type of farming has grown food without ploughs, poisons and artificial fertilizers. The scientists and farmers at the Land Institute see people, land and community as one; and they have been paying attention to the local ecosystems to learn the best practices. They see nature as “the source and measure” of our membership with the land.

Norman says that even when we are well-meaning in our farming, we can be tempted to impose ourselves on a piece of land, with quick-fix monocultures, using self-imposition instead of a more attentive, open-ended self-offering. “We need to make ourselves students of the places where we live, which will instruct us in the ways of faithful living. That is where self-offering begins.” (*page 128*)

And Norman also shows how on the level of government policy-making, there needs to be a push for long-term thinking, even planning for a “Fifty-year Farm Bill”. (*page 130*) “Consumers need to demand of their elected officials policies that put the health of land and people above the massive profits by a handful of agricultural companies.

“Eucharistic eating” leads us to want to learn how to live gently and gratefully as members of the land and particular ecosystems where we find ourselves, participating in God’s gardening ways.

**Saying Grace** (Thanksgiving before eating reminds us daily of our creaturely dependence, our responsibilities to God, to each other and to the land.)

As a child, Norman was influenced by the short table grace his family always said before meals:

“Bless, dear Father, this meal. May it serve to strengthen us, and to let us praise You.” (In German it’s a rhyme: “Segne, Vater, diese Speise, uns zur Kraft und Dir zum Preise.”)

Instead of saying such table grace, or the Shaker’s silence before meals, as quaint rituals of a more pious, bygone era, Norman encourages us to explore the complexities of all our thanksgiving. We need to know and value what we are thankful for. This becomes difficult, when our food comes from so far away, has gone through so many stages of processing and transportation, and has been part of a huge web of profit-making, that, by the time it reaches our plates, we don’t even try to think of its origins, nor do we have any sense of how to cherish or value it. The industrial fast-food world blocks our sense of humility and appreciation before the meal.

The farmers and gardeners, who grow food themselves, understand the mystery of growing it.

*Page 132:* “Life is a fragile and vulnerable gift we hardly understand, much less control. Although we prepare the ground, plant the seed and then nurture the plant, a good harvest and a delicious meal depend on so many gifts from God that we can hardly enumerate them. Soil decomposition, photosynthesis, hydrological cycles, plant and animal health, pollination, pollinators and animal reproduction; it is easy to take these gifts for granted.” They can also easily be put in jeopardy by what we do as farmers or agricultural systems.

Saying grace is an act of faithfulness before God. It is also a political and economic act. We cannot express gratitude to God for the gifts of food if, in our production and consumption practices, we are degrading those gifts.

It is wise practice to keep silence before the meal, to calm our minds, tame our egos and mindfully receive the gracious gift of food. *Page 134:* Saying grace strengthens the memberships of creation (land, plants, animals, ecosystems, people, communities). “Saying grace is also a reconciling act”. “Being reconciled with each other means being in the presence of each other without shame”. And Norman includes all that sustains us in the “each other”. This authentic way of saying grace comes from a “commitment to make our lives into an offering of time, energy and skill that serves the need and the potential of others”.

#### Highlights from Chapter 5: **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. What does Norman mean by “membership in creation”? Who all is a member? Consider two thoughts highlighted by Norman. “God created a world in which every creature lives by eating”. “Eating mattered to Jesus”. Can you explore how these lines of thought can further our understanding about what it means to be part of the membership of creation?
2. Norman explained that the Eucharist is a place where we regularly “go to die”, that is, we “put to death the self-serving impulses that distort or degrade the world.” Does this change your way of thinking about the Lord’s Supper? What might it mean to take this meal out of “the ritualistic realm” and make it a way of life?

3. Norman makes a distinction between self-offering and self-imposition. Can you think of a time when you engaged in self-imposition, even though you were trying to help or do good?

4. A Challenging Thought: You may wish to share some of the challenging thoughts, or actions, from the past week. Did you come up with something that you or your household or your church community can produce instead of continuing to buy it?

### **Challenging Thought for Week Six.**

- We have talked about “Food Shame”. What sorts of “Land-Food-Agriculture-Ecosystem-related ” things can you name that you are ashamed of before God?
- Can you try your hand at writing a few sentences that you could incorporate into your own personal “confession” before God, admitting the specific shame you feel, asking for forgiveness.
- Might this be something a congregational worship committee might be willing to take on—to write some sentences that could be incorporated into the regular liturgy of Confession and Forgiveness before a Eucharist service?

### **Closing Prayer and Hymn**

For Next Week: **It will be the final week of this study series.**

- Finish reading the book: Making Peace with the Land, from *pages 133-159*, Chapter 6 “Bread for the Whole Body of Christ”, (Fred Bahnson) and the “Epilogue”.
- Reflect on the Study Guide, *page 173*.
- Give the Challenging Thought some time and reflection.

## **WEEK SEVEN: final session of the STUDY SERIES**

Based on the book: ***MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION*** (Bahnsen/Wirzba)

### **Highlights for Group Discussion**

Preparation:

**Read the final chapter of “Making Peace with the Land” Chapter 6: “Bread for the Whole Body of Christ” (Fred Bahnsen and the Epilogue) pages 133-159 - Study Guide page 173**

Highlights, Chapter 6 and Epilogue:

### **Biblical References, related quotes and paraphrases**

In this final chapter on the theme of God’s call to reconcile with creation, and the need to make peace with the land, Fred describes an agricultural research and learning centre in Florida, which for thirty years has been developing and teaching viable ways to grow food in the most challenging ecosystems on the planet. At heart, ECHO (= Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization) wishes to focus on practical ways to prevent the hunger of poor people the world over. Fred describes some of ECHO’s current small-scale success stories in sustainable farming. One example is “SALT”, Sloping Agricultural Land Technology, which is an improvement over terracing, since it allows for intercropping “perennial polycultures”, with diverse plants that serve many different purposes, from preserving soil and water on the slope to fixing nitrogen in the soil. Some plants even exude a ‘poison’ for insects. Thus, one has long-term good results, with cash crops growing in amongst the profusion of plants that provide fertilizer and insecticides without chemical intervention.

*Page 137:* Fred calls the work of ECHO “agricultural clear-headedness”, which has gained the respect of development organizations around the world. “Here nature is not a series of problems that stand in the way of human agriculture, but a model—a standard—on which to base that agriculture.” He sees ECHO as a place people will turn to when the inevitable troubles of climate change, fossil-fuel depletion and resulting food shortages become inescapable.

### **The Hunger Season**

For many rural poor, the yearly period of food scarcity can last weeks or months. That period of time during which the seasonal local food supply is depleted before the next growing season starts is called the Hunger Season.

Recently BBC America, when airing a piece on the current food crisis, held up ECHO as a model. Since 1981, on 50 acres in Florida, this interdenominational Christian organization has pursued its mission “to network with community leaders in developing countries to seek hunger solutions for families growing food under difficult conditions”, namely, conditions such as deserts, eroded hillsides, and slum rooftops, often in tropical latitudes. ECHO employs 43 staff, of whom 11 are scientists, and has 450 volunteers. Besides research, they provide free consulting for development workers, and have an extensive seed bank. Twelve acres of land, their Global Farm, have become “edible landscapes” which mimic 6 different ecosystems and suitable agricultural practices that are appropriate to each. For example:

Fred learned that two perennials, the shrub Chaya and the tree Moringa, have leaves that are extremely nutrient rich, and, if prepared properly, can tide people in Hot Humid Lowlands over their hunger season.

### **Hunger: A Primer**

Over the past fifty years the biggest attempt to respond to global hunger was the Green Revolution of the 60’s and 70’s. The approach practiced by ECHO is profoundly different. The Green Revolution saw global hunger as caused by the lack of adequate supplies of food. The logical response, therefore, seemed to be to create higher yielding crops, which the Green Revolution proceeded to do -- successfully, in the short term. However, in 1981, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen demonstrated that “starvation resulted not from a lack of food but from its unfair distribution.” One logical response to this insight might be to try to change the “bad politics”. Fred explains that ECHO does not focus on trying to change the “politics” because ECHO’s founders see an even more fundamental issue that needs to be addressed. Even in “stable” political situations, if, due to industrial model agriculture, nobody knows how to grow food, an unsustainable situation is created.

ECHO’s approach of empowering the farmers, making them as “food-independent” as possible - regardless of the conditions or the politics - is a much-needed model to follow in most countries. Wherever it is applied, this approach will increase long-term food security for the whole country. *Pages 143-144*: “The bottom-line solution to poverty is...making marginal land more productive in sustainable ways”.

Matthew 25:32: We have a responsibility to the poor. Jesus’ parable reminds us that in separating the sheep and the goats, it’s the ones who fed their neighbour (not even recognizing that they were doing it for Jesus) who were acting in the right spirit.

### **Solutions: Another Green Revolution or Regenerative Agriculture?**

Ever since the Rockefeller and Ford foundations funded the Green Revolution, in the 60’s and 70’s, it has drastically changed the way agriculture is perceived and practiced. (See *pages 147-148* for details). This chemical-dependent and technologically-imposed global “miracle cure” for hunger has not delivered on its promise in the long run, since it avoided “dealing with the tough social questions” of land reform, and sustainability.

Fred finds it troubling that currently we are hearing of The Gates Foundation attempting a “new green revolution” in Africa, this time with a combination of free-market fixes and genetically modified, drought-tolerant maize. This new version of the “miracle cure” does not take into account the excellent research that is available since 2008, from the IAASTD—the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development. *Page 149*: “Over four hundred scientists and development specialists found that industrial agricultural practices, including genetically modified crops, do not address the complex challenges of local agriculture, and often produce environmental harm.” The IAASTD answer to the complex problems is not a new green revolution but rather “agroecology”. This is what Fred calls “regenerative agriculture”, and what ECHO has been quietly doing for the past thirty years.

## The New Agricultural Frontier?

Fred ends his description of ECHO’s work with an amazing current project in slum neighbourhoods: “Urban Rooftop Gardens”. Read *pages 150 and 151* for a detailed description of how it’s done! Flat urban roofs in city slums are the new agricultural frontier for growing abundant, nutritious food for the poor, with resources that are available to them in the slums themselves. The goal, however -- as explained by Martin, the initiator of the Urban Rooftop Gardens -- is “to see small rural farms become so productive that people leave the slums and return to the countryside. Eliminating hunger and malnutrition is just the first step. There is just so much more to life than not being hungry.”

## From the Hunger Season to the Abundant Table

In Fred’s words, *Page 152*: “Any solutions to hunger, any methods of procuring our daily sustenance, must henceforth begin by recognizing our ecological limits.” God grants us abundance in the seed and the soil, but this abundance can’t be forced, it must be “coaxed.”

The “old stories” which allow us to accept that perpetual hunger is a sad, but unavoidable fact of life - for others, of course, not for us, the well-fed -- are stories that look to pseudo-solutions to be imposed on others and the land. The language of old stories actually diminishes us as human beings. And we are stuck in unhelpful responses of too many “raised hackles” and too much “crippling guilt” which distract us from the work ahead. Fred recommends that we begin telling “new stories”, about how people are already doing things differently to not only avoid hunger but to live well. He reminds us that “physically joining our own lives to such stories can be a hedge against our innate capacity for greed.” We can begin to see the abundant way of living to which Jesus calls us. We are invited to the Lord’s Table, to “shared abundance”.

## Epilogue (pages 155-159): “So we can eat from the Tree of Life”

Our Book Study Series has taken us, “scripturally”, from Genesis to Revelation, each containing an image of the Tree of Life in a garden. The human story in Scripture began in a garden with fruit and seed-bearing trees that were both beautiful and delicious, a garden whose soil was fertile, and supported “living creatures of every kind”. (Genesis 1:29-31; Genesis 2:9) The beautiful Tree of Life, “pleasant to the sight and good for food,” was given to us. However, “We have hardly known this tree, since in fits of hubris we have banished ourselves from its fruit and shade.” *Page 156*

At the beginning (Genesis 3:8), God, the Creator/Gardener was present, walking in the garden. At the end, in Revelations, the place where the eternal Gardener’s desire is fulfilled, a remarkable shift has taken place. (Revelations 22:3-4): The Tree of Life has “the throne of God and the Lamb in it”, suffused with God’s nurturing, creating and delighting presence from every angle. (Revelations 22:5)

The once distant heaven now takes root in earthly soil. “The home of God is among mortals.” (Revelations 21:3)

This is how reconciliation looks. The way that God redeems the world is to make the world more fully itself, just as the way God redeems us makes us more fully ourselves. Fred puts it this way *page 159*: “God the Gardener comes every day, bucket and hoe in hand, to water and weed the soil of our lives...Although we pull away and even try to de-create the world, God continually comes to us, recreating the world anew. Will we ever learn to be thankful for the love that does not let us go? It is

time to take our humble and responsible place within God’s abundant life ...which begins here and now.”

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How does ECHO embody a Christian witness in the midst of our world’s present food crisis? Farming as spreading the Good News—have you ever thought of it that way?
2. Does a concern for the poor need to exclude a concern for the earth, and vice versa? How does ECHO bring the two together and show that making peace with creation means justice for all creatures? Can you think of other examples of such witness to a holistic “shalom”?
3. In these final pages of the book, we are challenged to consider two kinds of issues: the big-picture around advocacy and systemic changes, as well as our day-to-day way of life. Reflect on both.

Think of the biggest barriers to thinking about these challenges in our present society, in our church community, in our own families. How might those barriers be eroded; how can we address the challenges presented in this book?

We seek peace—to be reconciled, and renewed—in our thoughts, words and actions. Can we let go of “hubris” and “mirages” and learn more humble, thankful responses to the love that our creator God shows us in abundance? Can we take even tiny steps in discovering how to “make peace with the land” and to respond to “God’s call to reconcile with Creation”? Can we allow ourselves to be energized in new ways by the final words in our weekly worship services, to “go in peace, serve the Lord”?

4. A Challenging Thought: Take a moment to share some of last week’s challenging thoughts and actions. Was it difficult to identify our collective or individual guilt or shame regarding our relation to food, its sources, its production, its transportation, the soil, the seeds, the workers, etc. etc?

**Challenging Thoughts** for living, “worshipfully”, out of God’s abundant Creation.

- Fred advocates for a kind of “asset-based” development that focuses not on the problem—namely hunger -- but on God’s and nature’s particular abundance. Where do you see that abundance in your community? How might you become a student of its ways and means?
- Can a new listening to familiar Scripture help you along that process? Can some small steps of new action help you in gaining a fresh understanding of this abundance?
- Do Good Friday and Easter morning take on new meanings for you, as you bring all of creation—not just us humans—into the context of worship? Jesus’ death and resurrection: might you begin to celebrate them as saving grace that reconciles **all** of Creation to the Creator?

### Closing Prayer and Hymn

(See Psalms 65 and 104 for some additional ways to put into words the praise and thanksgiving of this final closing devotion)

A Note about this Study Series:

1. This study series was developed for congregational groups, interdenominational groups, Youth Groups, or for individual use.
2. This series can be gently adapted to be used by interested groups any time of year. A Lenten version of this study was made available in early January, 2015.
3. The hymns suggested in the resource material are drawn from hymnals used by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada.
4. The study series can be accessed on the BC Synod website.
5. The study follows closely the book: *Making Peace with the Land; God’s call to Reconcile with Creation*, by Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba.

This book is available in paperback and as an e-book.

The study series seeks to highlight some of the main points in each chapter, for the sake of group study, but it is recommended that, if at all possible, participants read the book itself.

Respectfully submitted by Brita Park, Oliver, BC. (With thanks to Dittmar Mundel for editing help, to James Berger for formatting help and to BC Synod’s Faith and Society Committee for “instigating” this project in the first place and for making it widely accessible.)

## **STUDY SERIES SUPPLEMENT:**

### *MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION*

#### **Ideas and Strategies for Group Discussions**

Please note: There are myriad ways to structure a study group meeting. What follows is just a sample.

Groups using this series will range from teenagers to “golden-agers”, from city-based congregations to rural congregations, from tiny gatherings to large meetings. The following suggestions are for “picking, choosing, modifying or ignoring” by the study leaders, to suit their particular participants.

#### 1. Think/Pair/Share

Before asking people in the group to share with the large group their thoughts on a particular question/issue being raised, this little strategy can allow for a deepening of understanding, an encouragement to speak , and a more “receptively listening ear” for other people’s contributions.

- a) THINK: On a piece of paper, jot down your own ideas, thoughts on this question.
- b) PAIR: With the person beside you, quietly exchange your thoughts, clarify them for each other, and discuss other ideas that may arise for you both.
- c) SHARE: When the whole group reconvenes, one of you will present your ideas on behalf of both of you.

The time needed for this activity will of course vary greatly. It may help to give folks a sense of the time allocated, for example:

- a) “Take two minutes to jot down your ideas on this”,
- b) “Work as a pair for five minutes to exchange and discuss”,
- c) “Now we’ll go around the circle and one of each pair will share with all of us what you came up with”

#### 2. Reading aloud

When there are several Biblical Passages to be read aloud, one might consider a few things:

- a) Which translation is most appropriate for the study? Is there an available Bible in that particular translation?
- b) Will the leader read, or delegate the reading to volunteers in the group?
- c) Ask volunteer readers ahead of time, either the week before, or near the very beginning of a session, while everyone is still arriving and settling in.

#### 3. Sub-groups for specific tasks

Sometimes, it may be appropriate to separate group members into smaller sub-groups, each with a particular focus.

Each group may be assigned one particular passage or section from the highlights sheet to read and discuss as a small group (3 or 4 max.) This works best if there are separate rooms available, or a large enough area to separate out the groups’ tables. Again: a time-line suggestion: e.g.: “Take 15 minutes to discuss the main thoughts in this passage”, and a few “guiding questions”, e.g.: “Why is this important?” or “What examples do you know of this occurring?” etc.

When the large group gathers, and all the highlighted material is discussed together, participants will engage more freely and knowledgeably, at least about the section they had discussed in their small group.

#### 4. Challenging Thoughts and Actions “basket”

At the end of each week’s study, there is a challenge, called the “Challenging Thought”.

There are several ways to follow up on this challenge.

- a) Each week prior to the new “Challenging Thought” at the end of the Discussion Questions, one can go around the group and ask if anyone wants to share their “Challenge Journey” from the past week.
- b) “Basket of Challenging Thoughts and Actions”: Everyone is given a small slip of paper on which to write one or two of their “Challenging Thoughts” or “Challenging Actions” from the past week, anonymously. They fold the slip, and put it into the basket.

The basket full of slips is passed around the circle, and everyone takes out a slip and reads what it says. Your ‘directions’, prior to them writing the notes on the slips of paper might be something like this: “Write one thing YOU DID this past week that in some way reflects a new awareness of our need to reconcile with Creation/the Earth/the Land.”

**STUDY SERIES SUPPLEMENT:***MAKING PEACE WITH THE LAND: GOD’S CALL TO RECONCILE WITH CREATION***Hymns**

The Hymns listed can be found in some or all of the following hymnals:

VU=Voices United (United Church of Canada)  
 ELW= Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELCiC)  
 CP=Common Praise (Anglican Church of Canada)  
 Songs=Songs for a Gospel People (Ecumenical)

Please note: This list is in no way “prescriptive”. It just may be helpful in planning the Study sessions. The themes that are highlighted are “Creation” and “Reconciliation”.

The words of these hymns can be understood in fresh ways during any one of the Church Seasons. For Example, when our Lenten thinking and repenting — both individually and as a community—includes “all things” created by our loving Creator, familiar hymns and liturgy for this season take on new meaning. The same could happen, through a different liturgical or worship “lens” during the Easter Season, or Pentecost Season, or Summer Workshops, or Thanksgiving Workshops, or Advent Season.

We become free to acknowledge our individual and collective “sins of environmental neglect” or “ecological amnesia”, to re-knit our relationship to Creation, and to “praise and give thanks” to the Creator in new ways. Even old songs can help us “sing to the Lord a new song!”

All Creatures of our God	ELW 835 / CP 355 / VU 217
Spirit of Gentleness	ELW 396 / VU 375 / Songs 108
For the Healing of the Nations	CP 576 / VU 678 / Songs 23
Make Me a Channel of your Peace	VU 684 / Songs 2
Worship the Lord: Worship and Work must be One	VU 401 / Songs 116
Bless Now, O God, the Journey	ELW 326
Creator of the Earth and Skies	CP 173
Seed that in Earth is Dying	ELW 330
Tree of Life (Haugen)	ELW 334 / CP 179 / VU 121
Stay With Me (Taize)	ELW 348
We Have Come at Christ’s own Bidding (vs. 3)	VU 104

O, God, How We have Wandered	VU 112
Sunday’s Psalms, Wednesday’s Ashes (vs.3)	VU 107
Rise up, O Saints of God (“creation cries in pain, stretch forth your hand of healing”..)	ELW 669 / CP 586 / Songs 47
We Plough the Fields and Scatter (“all good gifts around us...”)	ELW 681 / CP 258 / VU 520
Lord Jesus, of You I Will Sing	Songs 20
I am the Light of the World	VU 87 / Songs 24
Light Dawns on a Weary World	ELW 726
Great is Thy Faithfulness	ELW 733 / VU 288 / Songs 95
All Things Bright and Beautiful	CP 415-416 / VU 291
Rise, O Sun of Righteousness	ELW 657
For the Fruit of All Creation	ELW 679/ CP 259/ VU 227/ Songs 58
We Praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator	ELW 870 / CP 342 / VU 218 / Songs 59
Alleluia, alleluia, Give Thanks	Songs 34
Morning Has Broken	ELW 556 / CP 3 / VU 409 / Songs 103