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BEYOND THE SUPERFICIAL

MAKING SENSE OF FOOD IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD



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Our Land of Milk and Honey: Spirituality in the Transformation of Ecological and Heritage Production

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Abstract

Many facets of globalisation are contested on ethical or humanitarian grounds but the defence of local food and agriculture often borders on the spiritual. In particular, the decline or homogenisation of local food and agriculture is often acutely felt because it embodies a spiritual violation of cultural identity and sacredness of the land. The essence of this crisis has been newly characterised in Pope Francis' latest encyclical *Laudato si'*, which captures the spiritual relevance of agriculture by characterising the human response to contemporary ecological decline and culinary shifts. In trying to understand how we arrived at our present state, sociologists of faith, such as the late Jacques Ellul have long described how technology comes to dominate over nature in processes such as agricultural development. In his argument, by incrementally drawing humans away from nature and into technological spheres (by engineering tractors, producing agri-chemicals, and genetically modifying plants), alienation from nature is amplified and the scope of ecological crisis broadens. This phenomenon is not new; indeed, most religious texts and creation myths caution against this alienation through parables and commandments. In light of the new public attention being drawn to the spiritual dimension of the ecological crisis, this chapter explores content from Judeo-Christian texts and Cambodian myths that specifically speaks to this phenomenon. The valorisation of the land found, for example, in the book of Exodus referencing Israel as the 'land flowing with milk and honey', is typical of religious and pseudo-religious narrative that are integrated with political narratives such as nationalism and cultural patrimony. In this chapter, I address how national metanarratives built on these spiritual-historic characterisations play a role in shaping agriculture and food policy and evaluate the spiritual dimension of a few Cambodian initiatives that attempt to moderate the alienation brought about by industrialisation and globalisation.

Key Words: Heritage, national cuisine, spirituality, Pope Francis, globalisation, agriculture, *laudato si'*.

1. Introduction

As a multifaceted phenomenon, globalisation is often contested along numerous practical, ethical and humanitarian grounds; on the issue of food and agriculture, however, the arguments often border on the spiritual. While the various direct responses have ranged from the erection of trade barriers and the