

## Turning the Tables: People First

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“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.” (Matthew 25:35) This is one of the Beatitudes that Jesus announced. Overcoming hunger, as well as thirst, is a constitutional element of the Reign of God. God’s creation remains a grand mystery. Scientific studies have not been able to answer the questions about the origin of the cosmos, of humans and of life. But humans have basic needs that can never be forgotten. When human beings forget other human beings, the very present God of life, reminds us that we cannot be truly human, much less Christian, when sisters and brothers have hunger or thirst. This is the prophetic tradition of Christ, the Son of God.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Office one billion people on the planet today are hungry. The insult, the injustice is that there is enough food for all of humanity. The problem is solely one of unjust distribution. It is a comfort and a problem: a comfort because we know that hunger is preventable. But it is a problem because it hides the real reasons for hunger: the concentration of land and water in a few hands, and the expulsion of millions of farmers from their livelihoods and production around the world.

Today, in countries like Brazil with its extensive food production, there are two ministries of agriculture: the Ministry of Agribusiness and the Ministry of Small Farmers. The small farmers have little land and little credit, but produce 70% of the food on people’s tables. Agribusiness has much land and much credit, but produces only five commodities for export. Now, associated with the giant food transnational corporations, they have control over seeds and over the whole chain of food production. Control of the food chain of the Earth by transnational corporations is a disaster for hungry people in the world.

We must turn the tables, we must change the game.

Social movements around the world are striving to shed light on the problem. They struggle to change the reality, and promote awareness campaigns about our responsibilities given this tragedy of hunger and thirst. The World Social Forums always say “Another world is possible.” A part of reality that needs changing is agriculture, prioritizing the production of food, not the production of agro fuels. Additionally, there is the struggle for the recognition of the right to food, beyond thinking of it only as “a human need.” We have achieved recognition of the right to water, but still have not achieved the recognition of food as a human right.

But it is not sufficient to get formal recognition; the challenge is to transform the right into a reality. This is a challenge for all humans of good will, including all Christians in the world, particularly those who know that the human being deserves

care and that to be human is a unique and indivisible reality, one that needs to be respected in all its dimensions.

The large commercial interests that dominate modern agriculture cannot be an invincible monster. Many initiatives around the world have had success in defeating hunger and thirst. In the Northeast region of Brazil, an initiative of 700 civil society organizations, with programs for drinking water supply and food production, managed to get water to 350,000 families, about 1,500,000 people. Now, 6,000 families are producing food with the introduction of simple technologies to capture rainwater. At the same time, they continue the struggle for the demarcation of indigenous territories and populations of African descent. And they continue the landless people’s struggle for agrarian reform.

It is possible to change the game around hunger, to turn the table, and for Christians it is an inescapable challenge.

