

"Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

In Matthew, as Peter cried out in desperation to Christ, his voice was muffled, his voice was helpless; but his voice was also heard. Today, the affects of the global food crisis are seeping noticeably into governments, environments, health systems, and people. The people have a voice. And, it also must be heard. (Matthew 8:25b, NIV)

Global food prices have almost doubled in recent years, due in large part to U.S. policies. Now, nearly one billion people worldwide -- including fifty million here in the United States -- are being pulled into an overwhelming current: hunger. Only by addressing each individual aspect of this larger crisis can we begin to see lasting solutions for a nation, for a world, and for a Christ-centered kingdom on earth.

This food crisis is not a crisis concerning the amount of food. In fact, research shows there is more than enough food to feed everyone in the world. Over the last twenty years, world food production has risen steadily at over two percent a year, while the rate of global population growth has dropped to 1.14 percent a year (Grassroots 2).

Instead, the current food crisis is a result of a food system in crisis. Climate change, oil prices, ethanol fuel versus food debates, and food commodities have all contributed to rising hunger. "Public funds for grain subsidies, foreign aid, and international agricultural development over the past half century have created a food system that is highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shock"(Grassroots 3). This system is controlled by global financial powerhouses: agri-businesses, ethanol producers, and policy makers. This system is controlled by money - floods of it.

When a twenty-nine-year-old Haitian mother of five children begs with a stranger on the street... "Take one. You pick. Just feed them," the issue cannot go ignored (Lacey 2). Her plea cannot go unheard; her voice cannot be silenced. It cannot...and it should not.

One billion people...One billion people are hungry...One billion...have we become numb? One billion...that number should make you pause...that number should make you desire reform...that number must not prevail.

The gap between the under developed and developing worlds is closing in as this crisis covers the globe (Lavelle/Graber 1). World-wide, general mass production of goods became tremendously popular during the late 1980s. In agriculture, first world countries were able to focus their technological advancements on cultivating more land, planting more crops, and yielding higher harvests. This caused immediate and substantial drops in food prices on our staple foods: corn, wheat, beans, rice. At first, this was an amazing step forward, and it seemed that if we continued down this road of "bulk-business" everyone would win. Surplus led way to inexpensive grocery bills, but they did not lead to the long-lasting economical results we hoped.

The family farmer was first to be steam-rolled by the pressures to mass produce his crop. If he was unable or unwilling to join this agri-business bandwagon, he was forced to give up his land to someone who would.

Environmentally, this plan also began producing side-affects. The demand to keep up with production pushes farmers, globally, to over-use their land. This exhausts the land of its resources, creating large plots of un-farmable soil. In turn, farmers begin clearing out their land that may be covered in natural resources, namely tree vegetation, to begin planting more of their staple crop. This contributes to the issue of increased CO₂ in the atmosphere, which contributes to trapped green-house gases, which contributes, consequently, to global warming. Some may

argue global warming is a completely different issue, but in this modern day, “real-life” scenario, the two are closely related.

Whether or not global warming can be considered a “real” factor in the food crisis, we have “real” evidence that weather-related catastrophes certainly are. We know about the drought in Australia, the floods in Haiti, Mozambique, even Iowa. We hear, also, of cyclone-devastated Myanmar and Ethiopia. We can blame global warming, we can blame consequences, we can blame God, but blaming does not send relief, does not rebuild homes, and does not feed the hungry.

To feed the hungry, we must transport food to the hungry. Transportation...gas...ethanol. Where does ethanol fit into all of this? It certainly holds a strong position within the energy policies of America, but does it also drastically affect the food crisis we find ourselves in? Should we be using corn for food, or for fuel? Rising oil prices have added tension to every phase of food production: from fertilizer to tractors to transport. World Bank research reported that from June 2002 to June 2008 "bio-fuels and the related consequences of low grain stocks, large land use shifts, speculative activity and export bans" pushed prices up by seventy to seventy-five percent. The study stated that "...large increases in bio-fuels production in the United States and Europe are the main reason behind the steep rise in global food prices"(Mitchell 3). However, according to Driving Ethanol.org, the cost of transportation, not food, represents sixty-five percent of the total expenditure for the largest U.S. emergency food aid program (Ethanol 2).

Trade is also becoming less flexible, which makes for added difficulties in food transportation. According to Sojourners magazine, wealthier countries are not willing to expose

their exports to the risks of market fluctuation. Instead, they use a policy tool poor countries can not afford: massive subsidies (Làppe 17).

U.S. farm subsidies help politically-powerful agribusiness more than they help farmers themselves. About three-fourths of all commodity payments go to the largest ten percent of farmers (Cook 1). Rural community economic development is short-changed, and small-scale, sustainable farms almost ignored.

Agribusinesses are profiting incredibly. Influential trade companies can pay their way into farm legislation. The 2008 Farm Bill enacted a new program that could increase taxpayer-financed payments to farmers by billions of dollars if high commodity prices decline to more typical levels. Conferees wanted to remove that limitation and allow unprecedented and uncapped subsidies at any price. Administration budget officials passed the bill, by bipartisan margins, that increased the commodity prices to a \$307 billion legislation (Morgan 1). According to the Christian Science Monitor, this farm bill “advances the removal of small farms, eroding the spirit and finances of rural communities across the U.S.”(Cook 1).

Americans will be paying these “harvest bills” for farm subsidies that promote the consumption of cheap food, the depletion of soil and air through overuse of pesticides, and destructive farming methods. “...the subsidies for agri-business--sometimes exceeding \$15 billion a year--deepen the very problems these programs seek to remedy. The bill also restricts international emergency food aid, putting millions of people at risk and undermining our ability to save lives” (President 1).

It would be too simple to believe that all problems with our economy can be remedied by reducing the influence of money in politics. Solutions cannot dive into the shallow end of the “money pool.” Solutions must go deeper; solutions must grapple with the roots of this crisis to

prevent return. We must press forward. People-Christian and Atheist, black and white, male and female-must unite in leading a total submersion of a system reform-a mass production of people-loving-people, people-feeding-people.

As Christians, especially, we can do this by increasing humanitarian aid, by confronting the policy barriers and trade actions that impact food prices, and by seeking out the primary causes of food insecurity (Fore 2). These are the “decrees” Christians must respond to. They are not to be proclaimed only in times of crisis, but to be lived everyday in the Christian life. We are to live and breathe, eat and drink, believe and act in a Christ-like model-a model of awareness, of service, of justice, and of compassion for all.

To begin, we must start pressuring legislators to shift support to family-scale sustainable farmers in all aid and trade policy. This would counter our pious devotion to mass production. Subsidies that only promote three or four major agri-businesses need to be lessened. We must end all subsidies we have in place on exports that undercut small farmers globally (Làppe 17).

Ethanol also needs to be addressed. Higher food prices are directly affected by the need of developing countries to feed and fuel their populations (Ethanol 2). This means, world-wide there is an increased demand for commodities and staple food supplies, such as: rice, wheat, oil, and corn. The agro-fuel program is using one-third of the US corn production just for the production of ethanol (Mitchell 3). Once ethanol has been processed, its remaining wastes can be used in feed for livestock. In this light, ethanol is a strong investment we cannot shrug away. However, at the present, separate money and supply allotments for fuel and food are the only way the two enterprises can successfully and effectively work together for a common good. We can no longer combine them. They require independence and support to refocus on their original goals of global betterment.

We must strengthen our food reserves. Through beneficial programs like the McGovern-Dale Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program and the World Food Program, we can promote awareness and health simultaneously. We must anticipate disaster. We must be prepared. Jennifer Parmelee, speaking on behalf of the World Food Program, suggested that instead of providing food to emergency, unstable, disaster locations, we should, instead, provide the money to purchase food. Cash enables us to buy closer to the area in which we want to deliver the food. This would mean lower consumer prices, decreased transportation costs, and almost immediate relief (Lavelle/Graber 4, World Food Program). Potentially, this proposal could open up doors for future financial educating opportunities in developing areas.

And finally, we, the people, need to make real the “Right to Food.” This passionate phrase is now inscribed in twenty-two national constitutions around the world. The right to food is defined by the United Nations as a right to physical and economic access at all times to adequate food and to be free from hunger (Legal 1). The fact that many are hungry in spite of sufficient production capacity means that insufficient measures have been taken to protect and ensure food for all people.

We need to amend this right. We need to enforce this right. We should venture to make it our duty, our responsibility, to insist on reform so all can share in the food that is rightfully theirs. The greatest Christian response to this crisis, to any crisis, would be that of a real response: real demands, real compassion, real actions, real prayers, and real solutions for all God’s children.

“He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.”

(2nd Samuel 22: 17, NIV)

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