

# The Moral Vision of César Chavez

## Agriculture, Food and the Environment in Catholic Social Teaching

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SCU Fall 2005 -- Casa Room 8;  
ERES password "ag"

### Course description

The fundamental aim of this course is to introduce Catholic theological perspectives on agriculture, the environment, and food, using the vocation, spirituality and moral vision of César Chavez as a portal on the dramatic changes that have taken place in our agrofood system over the past century. For three decades Chavez gave his life to the advocacy of justice for farmworkers in the US. He is revered as a civil rights leader, but his spirituality, moral vision, and thoughts on vocation are less well known. Chavez was profoundly influenced by a Catholic vision of society, and this inspired him to organize Mexican-American farm workers to act on behalf of their dignity. He addressed farm workers' conditions, food safety, and environmental issues, inspiring people around the world to do the same. This class fulfills the second level course for the religious studies requirement in the area of Theology, Ethics, and Spirituality.

This course has three main parts. The first will provide an overview of the modern food and agriculture system (agrofood system), and efforts by moral and religious leaders to address some of its problems. Modern agriculture cannot be understood apart from the system built around it: land, people, biological organisms, and technologies; and the institutions that order them. Rural communities, especially farm workers, suffer disproportionately from the environmental degradation of the modern agrofood system. We will survey the ways in which various people have attempted to use religious and moral values to challenge the social and environmental impacts of these changes.

The second part will examine the vocation, spirituality, and moral vision of César Chavez. It will introduce Catholic social teaching, which is a body of practical wisdom that brings Gospel-based justice to bear on modern ethical problems. Chavez is an outstanding example of someone who internalizes Catholic social teaching, and allows his life to be guided by its moral vision. Chavez dedicated his life to social, economic, political, and environmental well-being of the poorest members of US society, creatively



integrating his Hispanic spirituality, non-violent direct action, and community organizing skills. His is an outstanding example of a Catholic moral vision.

The final section of this class will ask the question: what would Chavez do today? Where would he apply his energies? Would he continue to work on behalf of farmworkers? Would he try to organize slaughterhouse workers? Would he promote various efforts to promote alternative social relations in the agrofood system? Final projects will address these questions.

The design of this class offers upper division Environmental Studies/Science majors the opportunity to learn about the social, ethical and religious institutions shaping our modern agrofood system, building on their knowledge of environmental issues and integrating that with their faith and ethical beliefs.

### **Student learning goals**

1. To learn about the field of “agrofood studies” and to survey the dramatic changes that have taken place in the relationships between the environment, agriculture, food, and culture over the past century.
2. To understand the development, moral vision, and impact of César Chavez’s life.
3. To learn about the relationship between a “moral vision” and ethical engagement with social injustice.
4. To acquire mastery of Catholic social teaching as a coherent body of ethical thought that inspired Chavez’s vocation.
5. To understand the development of Catholic social teachings about agriculture through time.
6. To analyze the ethical implications of the institutions that shaping the environmental and social impacts of the modern agrofood system.
7. To develop the skills of ethical analysis in the investigation of contemporary agrofood systems, with a special emphasis on the reality of migrant farmworkers.
8. To reflect on the meaning of our vocations in light of Chavez’s moral vision.



Course evaluation		Due dates
Tracing your family history to farming	10%	Oct 5
Why does the Catholic Church have an opinion about agriculture?	10%	Oct 20
Why did Schut not include farmworkers?	15%	Oct 25
What Would Cesar Do?	20%	TBA
Popular education tool: "WWCD?"	20%	TBA
Take home final on "Death of Ramon Gonzalez"	15%	TBA
Class participation	10%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

### Special events

#### Environmental Studies Institute Seminar Series, Fridays 12-1, in Casa 8

- September 30: Brenda Torres of the Santa Clara County Audubon Society
- October 28: Jill Harrison on Pesticide Drift and Environmental Justice in the Central Valley

**Required field trip:** On October 28-29 (Friday-Saturday) we will take a field trip to ALBA to visit farmworkers being trained as small organic farmers, and visit with the Diocese of Monterey's Migrant Ministries. Students must attend in this field trip to fulfill the class participation requirement. Food provided.

Dia de los Muertos celebration: Nov 1, details forthcoming.

### Required assignments

I will not accept hand written assignments. Please print them on a computer printer. To save paper, you may print single spaced.

1. Conduct a brief oral history research with family members to find out how far back farmers or farmworkers can be found in your family. Find out what kinds of farming they did, what kinds of crops were grown, under what conditions, and how the crops were marketed. Explain how your family members exited farming, if they already have. Due October 5: 1000 words and worth 10% of the grade.
2. Why does the Catholic Church has a vision for agriculture? 750 words. Due Oct 20<sup>th</sup>, and worth 10% of the grade.
3. This paper asks you to answer three questions:
  - a. Why do you think Shut has no reading about farmworkers?
  - b. If he asked you to develop an outline for what should be included, what would you include?
  - c. Justify your proposal on ethical and religious grounds. 1500 words, about 500 words each. 15% of grade. Due October 25.
4. What would Cesar do? This paper asks you to speculate on what Cesar Chávez would do today. Based on his moral vision and your knowledge of all the topics we discussed in the class, select one and describe what resources Catholic social

teaching and the moral vision of Cesar Chávez offer to efforts promoting justice and sustainability in the agrofood system.

5. This assignment asks you to develop a popular education tool discussing the moral vision of Cesar Chavez. You may write this in Spanish, if you so desire. Some possibilities: a) write an essay to be included in a revised version of Shut's book, or b) develop a lesson plan for a high school religion and ethics class. Your assignment should address the moral and religious issues at the intersection of agriculture, the environment, and farmworkers.
6. A take home final essay on the "Death of Ramon Gonzalez." 15%

### **Required Texts**

*The Bible.*

Dalton, Frederick John. 2003. *The Moral Vision of Cesar Chávez*. Maryknoll: Orbis Press.

Massaro, Thomas SJ. 2000. *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*. New York: Sheed & Ward.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2004. *For I Was Hungry and You Gave me to Eat: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers*. Washington, DC: USCC.

Schlosser, Eric. 2001. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Wright, Angus. 1990. *The Death of Ramon González*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Web based readings: See Appendix 1.

### **Plagiarism Policy**

All students will perform their assignments honestly and assignments will be original work. Any plagiarism will result in immediate and appropriate disciplinary action not limited to failing the course and possible expulsion from the University. (See "Student Handbook.") If you do not understand this policy please consult the instructor.

### **Disability Accommodation Policy:**

To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in The Drahmman Center in Benson, room 214, (408) 554-4111; TTY (408) 554-5445. Students must provide documentation of a disability to Disability Resources prior to receiving accommodations.

**Course outline and reading assignments** (B=Bible; W=Web-based reading; E= ERES reader)

Reading for subsequent class meeting	Week	Topics
Introductions: the course and each other:	1A 9.20	Catholic social teaching, agriculture, food and the environment Introduction to the modern agricultural dilemma: production vs. protection; the reality of farmworkers
Schut, 10-43 W: NCRLC, For I Was Hungry Summary Dalton, Introduction	1B 9.22	Defining the modern agrofood system, and agrofood studies What is agricultural development: technology and capital
Massaro, 1 & 2 W: NCCB, Economic Justice for All, Intro (1-28) and "Food and Agriculture" (218-250)	2A 9.27	Introduction to Catholic social teaching: practical wisdom Going public with faith Introducing moral claims on agriculture as an activity
Schut, 51-111. Wright, Introduction and 1	2B 9.29	Spiritualities of food, agriculture and Creation Where have all the farmers gone?
B: Genesis 1-3: creation, "dominion" and stewardship Massaro, 3 & 4	3A 10.4	Catholic norms for agriculture, food and the environment Environmental impacts of the modern agrofood system: soil, water, air, genetic diversity
Schut 112-142 Wright, 2 W: NCCB, For I Was Hungry	3B 10.6	Sustainable agriculture Economic concentration in the agrofood system "For I Was Hungry"
Dalton, 1 & 2 W: CRB, Farmworkers in California Massaro, 5	4A 10.11	The life of Cesar Chávez The reality of farmworkers in California Catholic social teaching: values and moral vision
	4B 10.13	
Dalton, 3 W: Martin and Taylor, For California farmworkers W: Allen et al. Alternative Food Initiatives	5A	Braceros and the history of farmworkers Solidarity with farmworker struggles
W: Furillo, Toiling Under Abuse Dalton, 4	5B	Farm Labor Contractors
Dalton, 5 Wright 3, 4 Schlosser, SKIM 1	6	Eucharist, hunger, and care for creation
Dalton 6 Wright 5, 6	7	Who is vulnerable in the agrofood system? Rural communities, farm workers, low income communities

Massaro, 7 Schlosser, Introduction		Catholic social teaching as a framework for solutions
Wright 7, 8 Schlosser, SKIM 2-4	8	Pesticides and farmworkers Economic concentration (again)
Schut, 221-240 Wright 9, 10 Schlosser, 6, 7, 8	9	Some solutions? Extending sustainability throughout the food system
Schlosser, 10, epilogue, afterword	10	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (Mad Cow disease) as normal accident

### Appendix 1: Web-based readings

- Allen, Patricia, Margaret FitzSimmons, Michael Goodman, and Keith Warner. 2003. Alternative Food Initiatives in California: Local Efforts to Address Systemic Issues. *CASFS Research Briefs* (3):[www.ucsc.edu/casfs](http://www.ucsc.edu/casfs).
- California Research Bureau. 1998. Farmworkers in California. BOTH: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/98/07/98007a.pdf> and <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/98/07/98007b.pdf>
- Furillo, Andy. 2001. Toiling Under Abuse. *The Sacramento Bee*. May 20. <http://www.crlaf.org/2001bee.pdf>
- Martin, Philip L. and Edward Taylor. 2000. For California farmworkers, future holds little prospect for change. *California Agriculture* 54:1. <http://californiaagriculture.ucop.edu/0001JF/pdf/calfarm.pdf>
- Martin, Philip, and Bert Mason. 2003. Mandatory mediation changes rules for negotiating farm labor contracts. *California Agriculture* 57:1, 13-18. <http://californiaagriculture.ucop.edu/0301JFM/pdfs/arbitration.pdf>
- NCCB, Economic Justice for All (US Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Economy) <http://www.osjspm.org/cst/eja.htm>
- Harthorn, Barbara Herr. 1998. California farmworkers: Dilemmas in developing interventions for health and medical care concerns. *Human Organization*. Fall 1998. [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3800/is\\_199810/ai\\_n8826422/print](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3800/is_199810/ai_n8826422/print)
- Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace. 1997. Towards a Better Distribution of Land: The Challenge of Agrarian Reform. <http://www.cin.org/docs/agrarian.html>
- Taylor, Edward and Philip L. Martin. 2000. Central Valley evolving into patchwork of poverty and prosperity. *California Agriculture* 54: 1. <http://californiaagriculture.ucop.edu/0001JF/pdf/centrval.pdf>
- Warner, Keith Douglass, OFM. 2001. Fruit of the Earth and Work of Human Hands: Agricultural Stewardship and Sustainable Agriculture from the Perspective of Catholic Social Teaching. <http://www.ncrlc.com/AgStewardship.html>
- Warner, Keith Douglass, OFM. 2001. Are Life Patents Ethical? Conflict Between Catholic Social Teaching and Agricultural Biotechnology's Patent Regime. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 14:301-319.

## Appendix 2: Farmworker Bibliographies

California Endowment's Agricultural Health Worker Initiative,

[http://www.calendow.org/program\\_areas/agricultural\\_worker\\_health\\_reports\\_pub\\_other.stm](http://www.calendow.org/program_areas/agricultural_worker_health_reports_pub_other.stm)

Bibliography of farmworker housing issues, from the California Department of Housing and Community Development:

<http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/farmworker.pdf>

## Appendix 3

Food First, 12 myths about hunger, <http://www.foodfirst.org/pubs/backgrdrs/1998/s98v5n3.html>

Pope John Paul II. 1990. The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility; Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all Creation. In "*And God Saw That It Was Good*", edited by D. Christiansen, SJ and W. Grazer. Washington DC: USCC. Also at:

<http://conservation.catholic.org/ecologicalcrisis.htm>

National Council of Catholic Bishops. 1991. Renewing the Earth, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/bishopsstatement.htm>

## Appendix 4: Agro-environmental, food security, and religious ethics websites:

- Agroecology principles by Miguel Altieri, <http://www.agroecology.org> and <http://www.agroecology.org/principles.htm>
- What is sustainable agriculture?, <http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/concept.htm#Top>
- Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at UC Santa Cruz, [www.ucsc.edu/casfs](http://www.ucsc.edu/casfs)
- California Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, [www.calsawg.org](http://www.calsawg.org)
- National Catholic Rural Life Conference, [www.ncrlc.com](http://www.ncrlc.com)
- Lutheran Rural Ministry Resources, <http://www.elca.org/do/ruralresources.html>
- National Farmers Union, [www.nfu.org](http://www.nfu.org)
- The Humane Society of the United States, <http://www.hsus.org>
- The (UN-affiliated) Food and Agriculture Organization, [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)
- 2004: The International Year of Rice, [www.rice2004.org](http://www.rice2004.org)
- International Society for Ecology and Culture, [www.isec.org.uk](http://www.isec.org.uk)
- Food First: Institute for Food and Development Policy, [www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org)
- Community Food Security Coalition, [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)
- Factory Farm Project, <http://www.factoryfarm.org/resources/photos/>
- Sustainable Table, <http://www.sustainabletable.org/home/>
- The Meatrix, <http://www.themeatrix.com/>