



THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOIL: A Book Review in THE TABLET, 18 March 2023 RE-SOURCE #1 — February 2 – May 27, 2023

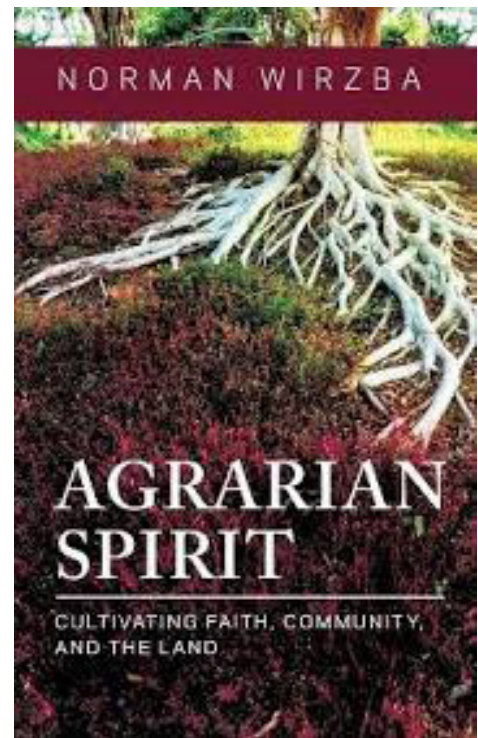
Journalist Austen Ivereigh reports on an interview with Norman Wirzba about his recently published 15th book, *Agrarian Spirit: Cultivating Faith, Community and the Land*. In this book, says Ivereigh, Wirzba “argues that only by living and working with nature in ways that are mutually beneficial can we recover an authentic spirituality.” Below are several excerpts from Ivereigh’s complete account in THE TABLET which can be accessed at — <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/>

Wirzba, a Canadian theologian and ecologist, is the Gilbert T. Rowe Distinguished Professor of Christian Theology at Duke Divinity School and senior fellow at the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University in Durham, NC.

.... *Agrarian Spirit* – Wirzba’s fifteenth book – proclaims from the treetops that an authentically incarnate, embodied, landed spirituality is absolutely central to Christian life and thought. “By saying that God is an agrarian God, I want to say very clearly that land is not optional,” Wirzba tells me with passion. “Because once you say it’s optional, you’ve denied embodiment. Because you can’t make sense of a human body apart from all the bodies – soil, water, microbes, fish, birds, weather patterns – we are connected to. And this is a scientific fact but also a theological fact, because God’s covenant from the beginning is with the whole of Creation.” Agrarian spirituality, then, “is to take embodiment seriously:” it is at the heart of the story that culminates in, and begins from, the Incarnation of Jesus. From which it follows that the ways in which people satisfy their basic, inescapable, human needs — to eat, breathe, clothe themselves, seek shelter — are all inextricably moral, spiritual questions that demand our attention and action.

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.... It is not enough to hear what is happening; in order to care for Creation we must care about it. Which means entering what Wirzba calls a “dark night of the soil,” an agrarian mysticism that journeys into the presence of God via Creation, learning who and how God is, through habits and practices of faith that people can cultivate “to participate in God’s gardening and farming ways with the world.”



A reviewer on www.amazon.com observes that this book “explores how agrarian sensibilities and responsibilities transform the practices of prayer, perception, mystical union, humility, gratitude, and hope. Wirzba provides an elegant and compelling account of spiritual life that is both attuned to ancient scriptural sources and keyed to addressing the pressing social and ecological concerns of today.”