

Food and Hunger

Christian Reflection

A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS

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JESUS AND THE PASSOVER

What has the Passover meal meant to Jewish and Christian communities of faith? Paul says the Corinthian Christians, as “unleavened” people, should lead “unleavened [lives of] sincerity and truth.” He bases this breathtaking metaphor on the sacrificial death of Christ, “our paschal lamb.”

TABLE FELLOWSHIP

The Corinthians’ divisions at the Lord’s Supper were a microcosm of their fractured, dysfunctional fellowship. Yet, if properly celebrated, the Supper would foster the assembly’s unity as a body of believers.

HUNGRY SOULS

Oscillating between the extremes of gluttonous indulgence and puritanical self-denial, we miss the true joy of eating. Furthermore, we distort our meals with our individualistic ways. No wonder many of us are leaving the table with hungry souls.

HEAVENLY HUNGER

A new Christian fitness culture is dramatically redirecting older concerns about gluttony and corpulence into schemes for getting “slim for Him.” Though participants in devotional fitness regimens are well-meaning and moral, the implications of this growing fixation on appearance are sobering.

WHO’S HUNGRY AND WHO CARES?

Efforts to reduce chronic hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity have shown some success recently. But who is still hungry? We can influence governments and other organizations to respond to the one in seven people who are hungry in the world.

A MOMENT OF RECOGNITION

Anyone can take a dish of food to someone, but not everyone does this with love. Vincent de Paul taught the Daughters of Charity to serve others as we would serve Jesus Christ—always seeing our Lord in those who need us.

Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

We should be eating much better—with more zest and fellowship and health for ourselves, more justice for the poor who endure hunger and food insecurity, more humility before the creation, and more gratitude to God. And that’s advice from the Bread of Life.

Food and how we produce, distribute, and consume it are important in the life of God’s people. We were formed to enjoy the lush profusion of the first garden, and even in the wilderness, through the gift of manna and the gathering of quails we discern God’s providential care. Through Elijah’s hand God sustains the resources of the faithful widow in Zarephath, and gleaning laws broadly distribute the land’s bounty to impoverished widows, strangers, and aliens on the margins of the community. Jesus feeds the crowds who become hungry for bread as well as for his words, and Paul exhorts the churches to make their love feasts a place of welcome for the poor. Furthermore, when Jesus turns wholesome water into excellent wine for the nuptials at Cana and calls us to prepare for the eschatological wedding banquet, we see that food is to be enjoyed without guilt and shared with pleasure.

“Eating with the fullest pleasure—pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance—is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world,” Wendell Berry reminds us. “In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.”

In *Table Fellowship of God’s People* (p. 11), Todd Still traces through Scripture the common meals of the Jewish people and the church of God—from the Passover feast to the Lord’s Supper and banquets in the early church. “As we explore what prompted our predecessors in the faith to sup to-

gether," he promises, "we'll discover how table fellowship can mold our communities of faith."

As many of us oscillate between the extremes of overindulgence and self-denial, we miss the true joy of eating. And even when we approximate the practice of temperance, we distort our meals with our individualistic ways. "Whether we consume fast food in the privacy of our automobile or in front of the television, or in our communal eating we are preoccupied with private calculations of carbs and calories," Thomas Hibbs observes in *Hungry Souls* (p. 18), "we exclude the properly social dimension of eating." He finds in the remarkable film *Babette's Feast* guidance for restoring a right attitude toward food.

Marie Griffith examines the Christian weight-loss programs that have become a cottage industry in recent years. Though their participants are well-meaning, many programs uncritically embrace cultural ideals of slimness and distort the devotional significance of the body. "If no critique emerges to challenge today's Christian fitness and beauty culture," Griffith worries in *Heavenly Hunger* (p. 62), "we may soon be faced with a still narrower set of Christian exemplars: an army of born-again bodies and malnourished souls."

While many American Christians struggle to remain fashionably slim, the poor are emaciated by hunger in developing countries. Even in industrialized countries that enjoy food abundance, many people still are threatened by food insecurity. In *Who's Hungry? Who Cares?* (p. 26), Jack Marcum gives a statistical overview of world hunger. He's encouraged by the fact that "efforts to reduce chronic hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity have shown some success recently" even as he urges us to "influence how governments and other organizations respond to the one in seven people who are hungry in the world."

David Beckmann and Sister Alice Marie Quinn, D.C., describe practical ways to respond to the hungry. "People go hungry because they are poor and powerless—through lack of education, violence, bigotry, climate, and the apathy of people who have more than enough," Beckmann notes in *Sharing Our Bread* (p. 54), yet congregations devote little "effort to addressing the root causes of hunger." He invites us to join Bread for the World members and others in advocating in the halls of government for legislation that is important to hungry people in the United States and around the world. Sister Alice Marie's *Love Serves* (p. 58) describes the downtown Los Angeles ministry of St. Vincent Meals on Wheels. "St. Vincent de Paul taught us to serve others as we would serve Jesus Christ—always seeing our Lord in those who need us," she writes. "Anyone can bring a dish of food to someone, but not everyone does this with love."

We hunger not only physically, but also spiritually for community with one another and God. At the Lord's Table we are doubly nourished as we recognize the Bread of Life who gives himself to us and draws us into

communion, even as he breaks bread for us to eat. Heidi Hornik's *Beckoning the Hungry* (p. 36) looks at the eloquent invitation to the Lord's fellowship depicted in Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*. Gerard Thomas Straub's powerful images draw us toward a similar moment of recognition—of the face of Christ in the poor, and the ministry of Christ in the ministry to the poor and hungry—as Hornik explains in *Photographs from a Captivated Heart* (p. 38).

At the Lord's Table we hear God's call to meet others' hunger, and find "Bread to fill each hungry spirit, bread for hungry stomachs, too!" in the words of Carolyn Winfrey Gillette's hymn, *Where Is Bread?* (p. 43). Gillette's concluding prayer, "Give us bread and help us share it. Richly blest, may we serve you," becomes the theme of the service of worship by Katie Cook (p. 46). Her liturgy includes a Communion service that could be joined with an agape meal, or love feast, shared by members and homeless people from the neighborhood.

John Sage and Chris Dearnley's Pura Vida Coffee company successfully combines their passion for ministry in Costa Rica and their love of coffee. "Initially most of our customers were faith-motivated or socially conscious coffee drinkers," John Sage observes. "Today college students respond well to Pura Vida's fair trade, organic, and shade-grown coffee, and giving its profits to charity." In *Pura Vida Is Way Cool* (p. 72), photojournalist Clark Baker introduces the ministry of these innovative Christian entrepreneurs who are reinventing capitalism with "Pure Life."

When it comes to conquering hunger, "we have what we need to make our way—a world blessed with abundant fertility," Norman Wirzba discovers in his review essay, *The Culture of Food* (p. 84). "What we still await is a culture devoted to the just production and sharing of this blessing." He appreciates Douglas H. Boucher's anthology, *The Paradox of Plenty: Hunger in a Bountiful World* and Marion Nestle's *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* for surveying the economic and corporate contexts of hunger. Michael Schut's anthology, *Food & Faith: Justice, Joy and Daily Bread*, reminds us that "eating is a sacramental act, an act that has the potential to bind us faithfully and charitably to each other, the creation as a whole, and God."

In *We Are How We Eat* (p. 89), Lori Bateman looks for practical ways to live better in our culture without uncritically adopting its food values. She finds that Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, Sara Covin Juengst's *Breaking Bread: The Spiritual Significance of Food*, and Holly Whitcomb's *Feasting with God: Adventures in Table Spirituality* "offer suggestions for recapturing the spiritual meaning of food so that people of faith can become more connected to each other, creation, and ultimately, God." ❖

Table Fellowship of God's People

BY TODD D. STILL

“Let us break bread together on our knees,” says the spiritual, inviting us to the table fellowship of God’s people. As we explore what common meals have meant to the Jewish people and the church of God, we discover how table fellowship can mold us in faithfulness.

The primary reason we gather for a meal is to take nourishment, and given the grisly reality of starvation and malnutrition that continues to plague the human race, this should not be quickly dismissed as a trite truism. Famine, war, poverty, and the inequitable distribution of food prevent many people from having the nourishment they need to survive, much less to flourish. Yet, even though the main reason we gather round a table is to satiate our appetites and, if possible, delight in the fare on offer, other factors prompt us to share a meal.

“Let us break bread together on our knees,” says the spiritual, inviting us to the table fellowship of God’s people. Beyond caloric intake and creaturely comfort, why have the faithful gathered at tables, and what have these common meals meant to the Jewish people and the “church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31-32)? As we explore what prompted our predecessors in the faith to sup together, we’ll discover how table fellowship can mold our communities of faith.

THE PASSOVER

Festivals were part and parcel of Israel’s life together as God’s covenanted people.¹ No sacred celebration on biblical Israel’s calendar, however, was more cherished and pivotal than the Passover. In time the people linked the Passover with the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread and

transformed it, along with the Festival of Weeks (or, Pentecost) and Festival of Tabernacles, into a pilgrimage holiday. Passover afforded Israel a protracted opportunity each spring to commemorate and celebrate Yahweh's delivery of his people from Egyptian captivity. In Jesus' day, throngs of Diaspora Jews—estimates run as high as 100,000 Passover pilgrims—would join with Judeans at the Temple to worship and offer sacrifices to God, who was their “help in ages past” and “hope for years to come” (to borrow the words of Isaac Watts' hymn).

At the center of the Passover celebration is a shared meal. Scripture records its rationale and a brief description of the menu of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs (Exodus 12-13; cf. Numbers 9:1-14 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8). While the specifics of and explanations for the meal developed over the years, especially during the century after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in A.D. 70 (see in particular *Mishnah Pesahim*), the Passover meal continues to play an integral role in the life of the Jewish people.

JESUS AT AND AS THE PASSOVER

According to Luke's Gospel, Jesus' parents attended the Passover festival every year. Luke highlights Jesus' pilgrimage to Jerusalem when he was twelve years old, presumably the age when he was expected to become religiously responsible (2:41-51). Perhaps Jesus journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem for this festival often during his adolescence and early adult years (note John 2:13; 6:4). His final trip to the holy city occurred near the time of the Passover (see Luke 22:1; cf. Mark 14:1; Matthew 26:2; John 11:55).

Before his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, Jesus shared a final meal with his disciples (Mark 14:12-31; Matthew 26:17-30; Luke 22:1-23; John 13:1-30).² The Synoptic Gospels explicitly refer to this supper as a Passover meal (Mark 14:12, 16; Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22:8, 15), though they do not mention the preparation of a lamb. Furthermore, they report that during the meal Jesus compared the shared loaf with his body and the shared cup with his blood. These significant variations signal that the supper Jesus shared with his disciples on the night of his betrayal was different in kind from the Passover meals that were shared at other Jewish tables. The fact that this meal, which we call “the Last Supper,” is the model for the Lord's Supper in the earliest churches suggests that Jesus' first followers considered his instructions to the twelve during their final meal to be especially valuable and readily applicable to all would-be disciples (note especially 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

When the early Christians reflected on the significance of the Last Supper and its host, they reached penetrating insights about Christ and the church. For example, when writing to the Corinthian congregation regarding its need for moral purity, Paul christianizes aspects of the Passover meal. The apostle proclaims the Christians in Corinth to be “unleavened”

people who should be leading “unleavened [lives of] sincerity and truth,” and he bases this breathtaking metaphor on the sacrificial death of Christ, “our paschal [Passover] lamb” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Other passages—John 1:27, 36; 1 Peter 1:19; and the Book of Revelation (twenty-eight times)—liken Jesus to a slaughtered paschal lamb. John’s Gospel explicitly links Jesus’ crucifixion to the Jewish day of Preparation, the day on which, beginning at noon, the Passover lambs were slain at the Temple (19:14-16).³ This suggests that John construed Jesus’ death as a type of paschal sacrifice (19:36).

We may note that Paul, with a display of interpretive chutzpah not uncommon among the rabbis of his time, links the Lord’s Supper to the Exodus event remembered in the Passover. The manna and water that the Israelites miraculously received from God in the wilderness, Paul says, was spiritual food and drink from Christ, “the spiritual rock that followed” the wandering people of God (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). With this typological reading, Paul is intimating that the ancient Israelites participated in a kind of Lord’s Supper. Be that as it may (and this is Paul’s point to the Corinthians), their ingestion of spiritual food and drink did not shield them from the consequences of their sinful behavior (10:6-13).⁴

This ostensible connection between the Passover and the Lord’s Supper continued to be fertile theological ground for Christians beyond the New Testament period. In his Pashal Homily (*Peri Pascha*), which is the oldest known Christian Easter

sermon, Bishop Melito of Sardis explores the link with these remarkable metaphors: “For this one [Jesus Christ], who was led away as a lamb, and who was sacrificed as a sheep, by himself delivered us from servitude to the world as from the land of Egypt, and released us from bondage to the devil as from the hand

of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls by his own spirit, and the members of our bodies by his own blood” (*Peri Pascha*, 68).⁵

Paul christianizes aspects of the Passover meal, proclaiming the Christians in Corinth to be “unleavened” people who should lead “unleavened [lives of] sincerity and truth.” He bases this breathtaking metaphor on the sacrificial death of Christ, “our paschal lamb.”

WHAT, WHERE, AND WITH WHOM TO EAT

Table fellowship became a flashpoint within the early Christian communities. Certain Jewish religious authorities looked askance at the meal-time company of Jesus and his disciples (Matthew 9:10-11; Luke 15:2), and their failure to follow ritual washing practices (Mark 7:1-23; Luke 11:37-41).

Jesus' detractors called him "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 11:19; cf. Luke 5:30; 19:7). At a later time, Peter was forced to examine whether it was permissible for Jewish Christians to eat Gentile food with Gentile people in Gentile space (Acts 10:1-11:18). Whereas men of "the circumcision faction" in Jerusalem viewed Peter's decision to eat with Cornelius and his household as dangerously progressive, Paul regarded Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch at the arrival of "certain men from James" to be harmfully conservative. Indeed, Paul believed Peter's conservatism was fueled by cowardice and insincerity, and that the pillar apostle's tactical adjustments at the dining table compromised the very "truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:11-14).

Paul's acceptance of table fellowship with Gentiles, which would have been scandalous to the vast majority of Jews, surely was very rare among Jewish Christians outside of the Pauline mission. Furthermore, other Christians' guarded position with respect to "idol foods" (Acts 15:29; Revelation 2:14, 20) was not fully embraced by Paul. He does not appear to share the dietary scruples of his fellow Jews. Basing his view, in part, on Psalm 24:1 ("the earth and its fullness are the Lord's"), Paul instructs the Corinthians, a congregation comprised of Jews as well as Gentiles (see 1 Corinthians 7:18), that they may "eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience" (1 Corinthians 10:25-26). Similarly, he states his conviction to the believers in Rome that nothing (i.e., no foodstuff) is unclean in and of itself (14:14a). For Paul, "the kingdom of God is not [about] food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

Why did Paul embrace this comparatively radical stance vis-à-vis food and table fellowship? He was convinced that a new day had dawned in Christ (see, e.g., 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 1:4; 3:23; 4:4-5) and, as a result, the traditional Jewish boundary lines needed to be redrawn and well-established Jewish beliefs needed to be reconfigured. He promoted the ideal that there was neither Jew nor Greek in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Gentiles, therefore, could be full-fledged members of the people of God without adhering to Jewish customs such as circumcision and, more central to our present concerns, dietary laws.

Although Paul was adamant that Jewish Christians not add the "works of the law" to his Gentile converts' faith (Galatians 3-4), he also warned those with no dietary scruples against spiritually running roughshod over the "weaker" members in a congregation. When writing to the Roman believers, Paul insists that a "weaker" brother or sister who is a vegetarian be welcomed and not despised by a Christian who is a carnivore (14:1-3). More pointedly, Paul calls the "strong" not to allow their dietary liberty to "cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (14:15). On the contrary,

members of the Christian community, like their Lord, should bear with, please, and edify one another (15:1-3).

SULLYING THE SUPPER IN CORINTH

Paul probably wrote the letter to the Roman church from Corinth around A.D. 57. In a letter written to Corinth from Ephesus a few years earlier, he said more about how believers should relate to one another with respect to food, specifically "food offered to idols" (1 Corinthians 8-10). Paul implores some Corinthian believers who continued to dine in temples for idol sacrifice—much to the detriment or even destruction of fellow Christians—to seek the good of others and not themselves (10:24). A commitment to serve and to please his neighbor characterized Paul's ministry. He did not pursue his own advantage, but sought to benefit others so that they might be won to faith (9:19-23; 10:33).

Paul recalls the experiences of the Israelites whom God brought out of Egyptian captivity: the vast majority of them succumbed to idolatry and, as a result, never entered the land flowing with milk and honey (10:5). He warns the "strong" Corinthian Christians, who think themselves knowledgeable, to be careful lest they stumble (10:12). The spiritually confident Christians, who eat and drink freely in the sacred space of other deities without a worry, must shun idolatry (10:14). As Paul makes his case that it is both spiritually prudent and morally responsible to forego altogether dining in the temple of an idol, he highlights the inherent incompatibility between partaking of food and drink at the "table of demons" (i.e., those sinister, malevolent spirits that stimulate and sustain idolatrous worship) and eating and drinking at the table of the Lord (10:21). To ignore commitments conveyed by and inculcated through table fellowship, Paul maintains, compromises the Christian community and incites divine jealousy (10:22).

Paul repeatedly chides these arrogant Corinthians not only for their brazen overconfidence in their own spiritual strength and stamina, but also for their

reckless disregard for the well-being of fellow believers. Their egocentric attitude of entitlement threatened to rend the church asunder. In addition to their careless stance toward temple dining, the spiritually cocky Corinthians were exercising their 'freedom' in law courts (6:1-8), brothels (6:16), and, rather predictably, within the congregation of believers. They were "hijacking" the church's worship gatherings with protracted ecstatic utter-

The Corinthians' divisions at the Lord's Supper were a microcosm of their fractured, dysfunctional fellowship. Yet, if properly celebrated, the Supper would foster the assembly's unity as a body of believers.

ances (1 Corinthians 14) and turning the Lord's Supper into a humiliating, divisive laughingstock.

Their divisions at the Lord's Supper were a microcosm of their fractured, dysfunctional fellowship. If properly celebrated, the Supper would foster the assembly's unity as a body of believers: "Because there is one bread," Paul reminds them, "we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (10:17). But their sharing of the single loaf and one cup had become farcical. The Corinthian church partook of the Lord's Supper in conjunction with a full meal—a potluck dinner, if you will. While in theory this was a positive practice, in Corinth it merely compounded the community's discord. Ironically, their coming together was tearing the assembly down, not building it up; their worship gatherings were not for the better but for the worse (11:17).

Instead of sharing their food, some church members were eating and drinking in excess, while other believers were left wanting and without. This humiliating treatment of fellow believers, Paul exclaims, denigrates the church of God (11:18-22). Their feast had run so afoul, he contends, that they are no longer eating the Lord's Supper (11:20). The apostle is clearly alarmed by the Corinthians' distortion of the tradition regarding the Supper that he had received from the Lord and subsequently entrusted to them (11:23 ff.). He refuses to commend the congregation at this juncture in the letter, for they were profaning the Supper by not honoring and receiving one another (11:17; contrast 11:2). The proclamation of the Lord's death through the Supper was being upstaged by their slurred speech and growling stomachs (11:21)! In addition to instructing the Corinthians to come together for fellowship rather than food orgies, Paul cautions that their behavior at the Lord's Supper is literally a matter of life and death—physically and spiritually, individually and collectively (11:27-34). It is hard to imagine how the apostle could have taken Christian communion more seriously than he does in this epistle.⁶

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we've all too often mimicked the Corinthians' divisions and neglected the apostle's admonitions regarding the Supper. Rather than being a sacred, unifying event, our observance of the Lord's Supper sparks theological controversy and spawns denominational acrimony.⁷ We become so preoccupied with describing the precise relationship between the body and blood of Christ to the bread and cup, or determining who is worthy to administer and receive the Supper, that we rend the bond of unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:11, 21). Nonetheless, we would do well to continue hoping that our Lord, working in and through those who seek to follow him, may gather the pieces of our fractured table fellowship—even as the fragments of the loaves and fishes were gathered after his feeding miracles—so that nothing and no one will be lost.

"Until he comes" we are "to proclaim the Lord's death" in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:26), and when Christ comes, we will share in "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). Then and there, Passover pilgrims will embrace the Passover lamb at the Passover feast, which is presently foreshadowed, albeit imperfectly, by "the *communion* of saints."

Recently, at a luncheon where Baptists and Jews shared in table fellowship and theological dialog, I recalled Paul's prayer: "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Jesus Christ, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6). With this benediction the apostle concludes his instructions on eating and drinking. Here he captures the hope to which we are called, and the love that our table fellowship should embody.

NOTES

1 For an overview, see Carl E. Armerding, "Festivals and Feasts," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 300-13.

2 On the relation of this meal to Passover, see I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980); Barry D. Smith, *Jesus' Last Passover Meal* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993); and Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "'Not by Bread Alone...': The Ritualization of Food and Table Talk in the Passover Seder and in the Last Supper," *Semeia* 86 (2001): 165-91.

3 On the chronological conundrum this creates vis-à-vis the Synoptic Gospels, see Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 66-75.

4 I've been helped on this puzzling passage by E. Earle Ellis, "A Note on 1 Cor 10:4," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1957): 53-56.

5 Quoted in Gerald F. Hawthorne, "Melito of Sardis," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 731-733. For an English translation of the sermon, see S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis, On Pascha and Fragments: Texts and Translations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).

6 For thoughtful and useful suggestions on how congregations today might do the same, see John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), especially 215-259.

7 Justo L. González reviews the controversies in *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century*, vol. 3, revised (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1975), especially 167-172. My tradition's wrangling over the Lord's Supper is told in Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003).



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Hungry Souls

BY THOMAS HIBBS

As we oscillate between the extremes of gluttonous indulgence and puritanical self-denial, we are missing the true joy of eating. And even if we approximate the practice of temperance, we are distorting our meals with our individualistic ways and cutting ourselves off from the natural sources of food production. No wonder many of us are leaving the table with hungry souls.

An abstemious character in the acclaimed film, *Babette's Feast* (1987), explains to the members of his religious community that they should engage in feasting just as the participants in the wedding feast at Cana, where “food was unimportant.” The line is unintentionally comic; the humor reposes upon the double mistaking of Scripture: nowhere does it say food is unimportant and it indicates clearly that wine is quite important.

Babette's Feast is perhaps the greatest artistic statement of the way the communal enjoyment of food and wine provide more than necessary nourishment for our bodies. Unlike the more recent film, *Chocolat* (2000), which opposes religious self-denial to a pagan affirmation of bodily appetite, *Babette's Feast* argues for a sacramental union of matter and spirit, both human and divine. The feast—prepared by Babette, a Parisian chef and Roman Catholic, for the strict Protestant sect that has given her sanctuary in remote Denmark over the years—is a love affair that combines “spiritual and bodily appetites.” It unites and elevates the entire community in a spirit of gratitude toward those who have made sacrifices and offered gifts on their behalf, especially toward the “giver of every good and perfect gift.” It is an anticipation of the heavenly banquet.

BETWEEN THOUGHTLESS INDULGENCE AND SELF-DENIAL

The obstacles to our recovery of natural and spiritual virtues of eating are many, rooted commonly in what Wendell Berry calls a “mainstream American life of distraction, haste, aimlessness, violence, and disintegration.”¹ Increasing numbers of Americans suffer from obesity, and recent polls locate the number of overweight Americans at roughly two-thirds of the population. Among those who are not obese, there is a growing number afflicted with eating disorders. Even the physically fit cannot be assumed to have virtuous attitudes toward eating; they often exhibit a maniacal and excruciating devotion to a model of the perfect body. Americans seem to oscillate between the extremes of thoughtless indulgence and instant gratification, on the one hand, and puritanical self-denial, on the other.

The failure readily to achieve the desired restraint can lead to revulsion toward one’s body and toward food itself. Indeed, we often construe the virtue of temperance as purely negative and as coming into play only in moments of great temptation, where it requires that we slap down our appetites. The classical understanding of temperance is quite different. Although wary of excess, it is not principally a virtue of negation or repudiation. Indeed, if one’s chief experience of the moral life is one of restriction, prohibition, and deprivation, then that is a clear sign that one is not yet virtuous, not yet capable of experiencing pleasure properly, as one ought to experience it. And that is the point of the virtue of temperance: to make possible a right ordering of pleasure, an experience of pleasure at the right things in the right way. It is marked by ease and delight, not calculation and anxiety.

Far from being a virtue of self-abnegation, temperance insures bodily health and proper pleasure; it is a source of cheerfulness of heart (*hilaritas mentis*). Intemperance generates not active rebellion against the good but indifference, dissipation, “lazy inertia.”² Without temperance, the soul becomes restless and anxious, confused by noisy distractions. Josef Pieper writes, “unchaste abandon and the self-surrender of the soul to the world of sensuality paralyzes the primordial powers of the moral person: the ability to perceive, in silence, the call of reality, and to make, in the retreat of this silence, the decision appropriate to the concrete situation” (p. 160). The extreme form of this roaming unrest of the spirit (*evagatio mentis*) is “complete rootlessness” (pp. 200-201). “It may mean that man has lost his capacity for living with himself; that, in flight from himself, nauseated and bored by the void of an interior life gutted by despair, he is seeking with selfish anxiety and on a thousand futile paths” (p. 201). Wisdom, as Nietzsche says, puts limits to knowledge, to the seemingly endless desire for experience and titillation as an end in itself (p. 198). The scope and function of temperance is not limited to the curbing of this or that sensitive

impulse; Aquinas relates temperance “to the root of the whole sensual-intellectual life” (p. 187).

In our culture, even where we may approximate an understanding and practice of temperance, we still tend to conceive of eating in an individualistic way. Yet in the classical tradition, still dominant in many places in Europe and the Middle East, eating is inseparable from its social dimension. When we are consuming fast food in the privacy of our automobile or in front of the television, or in our communal eating we are preoccupied with private calculations of carbs and calories—in any case, we exclude the properly social dimension. We are also, as Wendell Berry eloquently insists, increasingly cut off from the natural sources of food production, from the planting and nourishing of the sources of food in the setting of the local farm. Food and eating thus increasingly become isolated from natural and social contexts that have traditionally provided them with intelligibility, purpose, and meaning.

A LESSON OF CANNIBALISM: ANCIENT AND MODERN

Any attempt to recover the proper understanding and proper practice of temperance needs to return to first principles, to some account of what human beings are, of their potentiality for greatness and their vulnerability to vice. In his fine book, *The Hungry Soul*, Leon Kass explains:

Possessed of indeterminate and potentially unlimited appetites, willing and able to appropriate and homogenize nearly anything in the formed world for his own use and satisfaction, man stands in the world not only as its most appreciative beholder but also as its potential tyrant.³

As the great classical myths and religious traditions inform us, human beings are peculiar animals, capable at once of being prudent stewards of created things and of being cosmic devourers. Thus, there is need for prohibition and restriction: “man’s protean and indeterminate appetites need to be delimited and constrained.” But negation is misconstrued if it is not predicated upon a clear affirmation of the goods the prohibitions safeguard and protect. Thus, our account of human eating must also “embellish and dignify,” by “shaping virtually every aspect of human eating; it will determine what, when, where, how much, with whom, and in what manner human beings eat” (p. 98).

To recover a language for the significance of various practices of eating, Kass returns to classical myths, such as Homer’s *Odyssey*, and to modern films, such as *Babette’s Feast*. In the *Odyssey*, feasting is an occasion for the exercise of the virtue of hospitality and for storytelling and poetic singing. The latter are more than mere accompaniments, since the tales and songs constitute a communal acknowledgment of the virtues, sacrifices, griefs, thanksgivings, and longings of a particular people. But Homer also

teaches about the virtues of eating by negative example, most dramatically in the characters of the Cyclops, the famous one-eyed monsters who live isolated from the rest of the world, even from members of their species. The bodily constitution of the Cyclops tells much about their characters. "Cyclops single eye lacks a horizon, all depth of perspective and can see only what is immediately before him here and now. His one eye, lined up directly over his mouth seems to serve the mouth rather than the mind" (p. 111). In the famous episode from Homer's epic, a Cyclops, Polyphemus, takes Odysseus and his men captive and threatens to eat them all. In an attempt to reason with the Cyclops, Odysseus appeals to the universally recognized obligation of hospitality. But the Cyclops repudiates such obligations, claiming that his kind "acknowledge no gods," and arrogate to themselves a position superior to that of the gods. By making themselves the "measure of all things," the Cyclops abandon any sense of restraint; it is instructive that Homer would select cannibalism, a vice of eating, to illustrate the tyranny of the Cyclops. The choice illustrates how central eating and hospitality were to ancient cultures.

Tied to brutal behavior and reflected in repulsive physical appearance, the vice of the Cyclops is unmistakable. The Cyclops embody a violation of the orders of nature and of the gods. In our time, artistic repudiation of the very notion of natural and divine order is sometimes celebrated as a sort of liberation; indeed, some artists depict in attractive terms a nihilistic inversion of conventional mores. Perhaps the premier mainstream example of such inversion is the Oscar-winning 1991 film *Silence of the Lambs* featuring Hannibal the cannibal. An aesthetically refined serial killer with a penchant for eating his victims, Dr. Hannibal Lecter (in an Oscar-winning performance by Anthony Hopkins) savors the liver of one victim with a side dish of "fava beans and a fine Chianti." Lecter is the hero or anti-hero of a

Whether we consume fast food in the privacy of our automobile or in front of the television, or in our communal eating we are preoccupied with private calculations of carbs and calories—in any case, we exclude the properly social dimension of eating.

series of novels by Thomas Harris and several very popular films. Whereas Homer depicts the Cyclops as crude and barbaric exceptions to the order of nature and of human society, Harris depicts Lecter as exceptional in the sense of transcendent. He is a sort of Nietzschean super-man who stands beyond good and evil and inspires fear and awe in ordinary human beings, who still hold to an irrational and cowardly order of conventional moral-

ity. An accomplished psychiatrist and expert musician, Lecter turns evil itself into an art form. His acts of evil, especially cannibalism, are blunt and offensive repudiations of any code of justice or hospitality; they are nothing more than opportunities for aesthetic self-expression, which itself involves the culinary consumption of other human beings. If we have witnessed a serious erosion of the classical understanding of eating and hospitality, we still witness the symbolic power of eating.

In Hannibal's world, where the divine, natural, and human orders have utterly dissipated, the only thing that matters is the cultivation and satisfaction of amoral aesthetic taste; all things, including human persons, become mere instruments of cultivated taste. By contrast, in the pagan Homer as in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, the "vulnerable stranger reminds us of providence" (p. 103). As Kass astutely observes, the traditional obligation to hospitality "recognizes necessity and generosity, needy vitality and human self-consciousness, and, above all, the importance of preserving yet moderating the distinction between same and other, between one's own and the alien" (p. 107).

SHARING BABETTE'S FEAST

The most remarkable artistic account of the sensibility Kass thinks we need to recover can be found in *Babette's Feast*, a film based on a short story by Isak Dineson. *Babette's Feast* is set in Denmark amid a small, austere religious community of Protestant Christians, united in their devotion to their founding pastor, whom they honor as "priest and prophet." The founder's beautiful daughters, Martina and Philippa, named after the great reformers Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon, inevitably attract the attention of worthy suitors. Neither daughter is capable of tearing herself away from devotion to her father and the community he has established. One of Martina's suitors, Lorens Lowenhielm, leaves quickly in frustration and disappointment. Upon his departure, he complains that he has learned from this religious family that "earthly love and marriage" are mere illusions. He vows to devote himself entirely to his career and ends up becoming a decorated General. Another, Achille Papin, a famous Parisian opera singer, discovers a great musical talent in Philippa. She agrees to his offer of vocal training. But the erotic tenderness and worldly longings expressed in a duet from *Don Giovanni* causes her to cut off the relationship. Papin sings Don Giovanni's invitation to Zerlina ("Come, then, with me, my beauty...I'll make you a great lady"). Philippa responds in Zerlina's words: "I tremble, yet I listen, / I'm fearful of my joy; / desire, love, and doubting / are battling in my heart." At the end of the piece, Zerlina yields; but Philippa, "fearful of her joy," is not capable of this. With little inner turmoil, she has her father send Papin on his way.

Many years later, as war envelops Paris and families are torn asunder, Papin sends a friend, Babette, to live with the family he still admires. A

devastated Babette, who has endured the murder of her family, begins work as a cook, preparing the simple meals the sisters insist upon eating. A series of fortuitous events make it possible for Babette to prepare a feast for the entire community, a feast that reveals the elevating and transforming power of the communal meal.

After their father's death, the sisters wish to commemorate the anniversary of his founding of the religious community, a community now afflicted by "testy and querulous" disagreements. What they have in mind is a "modest supper followed by a cup of coffee." Plans change, however, when Babette wins the French lottery and has 10,000 francs at her disposal. She persuades the sisters to let her prepare a French feast. As wine and live sea turtles arrive, the sisters begin to regret their decision, suffer nightmares, and confess to their religious brethren that they may have "exposed" everyone to "evil powers" and a "witches' Sabbath." The mildly shocked brethren call upon the virtues of fortitude, forbearance, and moderation. Out of charity, they consent to partake of the meal but they will do so with complete detachment, "as if they never had the sense of taste." They will speak "no word about food or drinks."

It looks at this point as if the stage is set for an evening of quiet misunderstanding, an evening in which the splendors of the senses will be wasted on a community that identifies religious asceticism with a state of disembodied detachment. But another chance event, the last minute arrival in town of General Lowenhielm, alters the chemistry of the meal. His presence means not only that there will be twelve at the meal but also that a person of cultivation will taste and provide commentary on Babette's feast.

Although cultivated and successful, the General experiences a kind of spiritual vacuity; just before he leaves for the meal, he remarks to himself, "vanity...vanity...all is vanity." The suggestion here is that one can arrive at a sense of the emptiness of created things by at least two quite different routes, by a distortion of religious devotion and by world-weariness.

In "Babette's Feast," a series of fortuitous events make it possible for Babette to prepare a banquet for the entire community, a feast that reveals the elevating and transforming power of the communal meal.

But the General is also the first to sense the transforming effects of the feast, as he repeatedly expresses surprise and wonder at the quality of the food and the wine. The dinner is at first characterized by comic incongruity between the General's comments and the non sequitur responses from the other members of the dinner party, who remain steadfast in their com-

mitment not to say a word about food or drink. Finally a woman, who had earlier described the tongue as a source of “unleashed evil,” speaks innocently and happily of the pleasant-tasting wine, which she describes as a kind of lemonade.

The film completely transcends our popular way of framing the debate over appetite, which pits a repressive Puritanism against a celebration of

In so far as we view ourselves as cut loose from God, nature, tradition, and community, the traditional practices surrounding food and meals look increasingly less significant to us. Their loss only increases our sense of abandonment and isolation.

the indulgence of untutored desire. If the religious views of this community are in many ways shallow and repressive, the film’s corrective consists not in a repudiation of religion as oppressive. Instead, the film makes clear that bodily goods and sensible pleasures can be vehicles for the manifestation of grace, that is, they can be occasions of communal

transformation. The feast achieves what the sisters’ attempts at moral and religious reform could not; it achieves reconciliation as warm memories of the departed founder flow forth in speeches from those assembled. As the General recounts famous meals at the Parisian restaurant, Café Anglais, where the renowned chef was a woman (Babette of course!) with a gift for transforming dinner into a love affair in which there was no distinction between spiritual and bodily appetite, he offers an education to the other members of the dinner party. Even if they fail to grasp the full philosophical and theological import of his speech, they confirm its truth by the increasing delight they take, not just in the food and drink, but also in one another’s company. The reunification of the community through the feast confirms Wendell Berry’s thesis that “healing is impossible in loneliness; it is the opposite of loneliness. Conviviality is healing. To be healed we must come with all the other creatures to the feast of Creation.”⁴

TOWARD SANCTIFIED EATING

Here human artistry works in tandem with nature and divine grace. A famous poem by John Donne, entitled “The Exstasie,” captures rather nicely this relationship of soul to body, spirit to matter, in which the higher is made manifest in and through the lower and the lower raised to a participation in the higher. Having described a Platonic union of lovers’ souls beyond the body, he asks why we forbear our bodies? Donne responds,

So must pure lovers soules descend
t’affections, and to faculties,

that sense may reach and apprehend,
else a great Prince in prison lies.

To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
but yet the body is his booke.

In a discussion of “sanctified eating,” Kass highlights the “celebration of Creation—and of its mysterious source” (p. 221). The spark of divinity in the human soul is at once the source of our dignity and a temptation to assume divine status. The key, which the codes of hospitality and the customs surrounding eating as a sacrificial and sacramental bond preserve, is to realize that the rational animal is “only an image.” The great temptation is to make ourselves the measure of all things; modernity, with its elevation of autonomous human choice to supreme status, exacerbates the temptation. The influence of an exalted conception of human autonomy can be seen not just in our endless and increasingly vituperative battles over rights, but also in the erosion of customs, even those customs concerned with the consumption of food. In so far as we view ourselves as cut loose from God, nature, tradition, and community, the traditional practices surrounding food and meals are likely to look increasingly less significant to us. The loss of an appreciation of these customs only increases our sense of abandonment and isolation. The corrective, Kass proposes, is an alternative conception of human dignity. He concludes, “The upright animal, his gaze uplifted and his heart filled with wonder and awe, in fact stands tallest when he freely bows his head.”

NOTES

1 Wendell Berry, “The Use of Energy,” in Norman Wirzba, ed., *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint Press, 2002), 292.

2 Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 197 (further page citations will be in the text).

3 Leon R. Kass, M.D., *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 98 (further page citations will be in the text).

4 Berry, “The Body and the Earth,” in *The Art of the Commonplace*, 99.



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Who's Hungry? Who Cares?

BY JACK MARCUM

Efforts to reduce chronic hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity have shown some success recently. But do we know the facts about who's still hungry? We can influence how governments and other organizations respond to the one in seven people who are hungry in the world.

One in seven people in the world are hungry. Most of these live in developing countries, where efforts to reduce hunger have shown some success over the last decade. Hunger in industrialized countries is less severe and more episodic, but in the United States at least, it has proven stubborn to further reductions. The first section of this article provides a statistical overview of these patterns and trends.

Christian citizens can influence how governments and non-governmental organizations respond to the large numbers of people who remain hungry. To find out what Christians are thinking, the second section examines opinions on hunger among members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).¹ The results indicate much agreement among Presbyterians on hunger-related issues. Furthermore, Presbyterians with different beliefs and religious practices have similar opinions on hunger, suggesting that the results may apply more broadly to other Christians in the United States.

WHO'S HUNGRY?

At the outset of the twenty-first century, the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization estimates the number of hungry people worldwide at 842 million, with all but a fraction of these living in developing countries:

- Industrialized countries, 10 million
- Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 34 million
- Latin America and the Caribbean, 53 million
- China, 135 million

- India, 214 million
- Asia and the Pacific, 156 million
- Sub-Saharan Africa, 198 million
- Near East and North Africa, 41 million

In relative terms, hunger is greatest in Sub-Saharan Africa, where a third of the population is undernourished. Other relatively high regions include the Caribbean (25%), Oceania (27%), India (21%), and the rest of South Asia (29%). Among the lowest hunger rates in the developing world are those in China (11%), South America (10%), and North Africa and the Near East (10%).

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The number of hungry people in the developing world declined from 817 million in 1990 to 798 million in 2000, despite an overall net population growth from 4.0 to 4.7 billion people over the same period. That brought the percentage of hungry people in developing countries down to 17% in 2000, from 20% a decade before. Nowhere was the change more dramatic than in China, with a drop from 193 million to 135 million hungry people during the 1990s, a relative decline from 17 to 11%. Other areas with sizeable declines in hunger are South America (42 to 33 million, or 14 to 10%); Southeast Asia (76 to 66 million; 17 to 13%); and West Africa (36 to 33 million; 21 to 15%).

In contrast to China, India's hungry population remained static at 214 million over the decade, although population growth in India was such that their relative share still dropped from 25 to 21%. Other areas with a similar pattern (the number of hungry people stayed constant or even grew, but the percentage of population who were hungry declined) include the rest of South Asia (77 to 79 million, a drop from 29 to 25% of the population); East Africa (73 to 81 million; 44 to 39%); Southern Africa (34 to 37 million; 48 to 41%); the Caribbean (8 million in both years; 28 to 25%); and North Africa (6 million; 5 to 4%).

The hungry population grew both absolutely and relatively in Central America (5 to 8 million; 17 to 21%), the Near East (20 to 35 million; 10 to 14%); and, most dramatically, Central Africa (22 to 48 million; 35 to 58%).

THE UNITED STATES

Because food is generally abundant in the United States and other developed countries, few individuals face a chronic lack of sufficient calories. Instead, hunger more commonly takes the form of *food insecurity*, defined by Bread for the World as "a condition of uncertain availability of or ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in a socially acceptable way." By this definition, 12 million households, containing 35 million people, were food insecure at some time during 2002, as measured by the United States Agricultural Department. In relative terms, 11% of all households, containing 12% of the population, are food insecure.

Children are more likely than other Americans to live in food-insecure homes. Of all households with children, 16%, containing more than 13 million children, had food insecurity at some time during 2002. Other groups with higher rates of food insecurity include black households (22%), Hispanic households (22%), and female-headed, single-parent households (32%). Relatively few elderly households, 6%, are food insecure; the rate is only marginally higher for elderly persons who live alone (7%). Regionally, relatively more food-insecure households are found in the South (12%) and West (12%) than in the Midwest (10%) or Northeast (10%).

The percentage of households with food insecurity has remained relatively constant since 1995, the year the current measurement process was begun. Then, 10.3% of all households were food insecure. The highest rate, 11.8%, was found in 1998. The 2002 rate of 11.1% is thus an increase from the mid-1990s but a drop from 1998.

CHRISTIAN OPINION ON HUNGER

What do Christians think about the current hunger situation? As a partial answer, this section looks at results from a questionnaire on "Hunger Issues" that was distributed in February 2003 to a national representative sample of members in Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations.² While not typical of all Christians, Presbyterians are likely similar in their views to those in other mainline denominations (i.e., Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, Reformed Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, American Baptist Churches).

SIZING UP THE PROBLEM

Most Presbyterians believe (77% *agree*; 15% *disagree*; 8% *not sure*) that "the problem of widespread hunger can be solved in the United States." They are much more closely split on whether "the problem of widespread hunger can be solved throughout the world," however, with 44% responding *agree*, 33% *disagree*, and 24% *not sure*. The greater pessimism about world hunger is consistent with respondents' evaluations of current trends. When asked about the hunger problem in the United States over the last decade, 39% of Presbyterians believe it has *gotten worse*, 19%, *gotten better*, and 24%, *remained the same*. To a parallel question about hunger worldwide, 63% believe it has *gotten worse*, 6%, *gotten better*, and 13%, *remained the same*.³ The rest responded *don't know*.

Only one in six Presbyterians (16%) chooses *food insecurity* as the best word or phrase to describe "the real problem" when it comes to hunger in the United States. Similar percentages select *malnutrition* (20%), *child hunger* (19%), or *chronic hunger* (18%). Only 1% selects *starvation*. Another 25% responds *don't know*.

That so few choose *food insecurity* may indicate that this new way of conceptualizing hunger in the United States is not widely known. Nevertheless, most Presbyterians seem up-to-date in recognizing that relatively

more children than older persons have hunger problems: when asked which one of four categories of people needs the most help “when it comes to the hunger problem in the U.S.,” 41% choose *children* but only 8% *senior citizens*. The other two options are *poor families*, chosen by 42%, and *women*, chosen by 1%; 8% respond *don't know*.

PROVIDING FOOD, TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Presbyterians do not blame the hungry for their circumstance, but they do expect them to take responsibility for it when food assistance enables them to get back on their feet. Less than one in ten Presbyterians (7%) believe “people who are hungry are hungry because it is their own fault.” Most Presbyterians view hunger as something that needs to be eliminated *before* individuals can be expected to take responsibility. This view is most apparent in response to this statement, “We need to do more to help feed the chronically hungry so they can then get back on their feet enough to take responsibility for feeding and caring for themselves and their families,” with which 83% *agree*.

At the same time, Presbyterians want accountability. While 20% choose (from only two options) *to help the chronically hungry, we have to first provide them with food, because otherwise they will be too weak to get back on their feet and take responsibility for themselves*, 74% choose *we need to help the chronically hungry by making sure they have food so they are not too weak to get back on their feet, but at the same time we need to demand accountability and work*.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

When asked which of two statements “comes closer to your own personal opinion” about “the best way to fight hunger in the U.S.,” 87%

choose *through programs that help poor people to get better jobs that pay enough so they can feed their families*. Only 10% choose *through programs that provide food to poor families*. Another 8% *don't know*. Consistently, more Presbyterians choose economic or other structural answers (50%) than direct food provision

(32%) when asked “when it comes to fighting the hunger problem in the U.S., which *one* of the following do you believe is the *most* effective in fighting hunger?” The remainder, 18%, *don't know*.

DOING MORE, SPENDING LESS

Three in four Presbyterians *agree* (74%) that “there should be major new efforts, led by charitable and religious groups, with some taxpayer support, to make sure that every child in America has enough to eat.” Yet less

Presbyterians in the survey think “we need to do more to help feed the chronically hungry so they can then get back on their feet enough to take responsibility for feeding and caring for themselves and their families.”

than half that number (31%) *disagree* that “enough money is being spent on the hunger problem.”

Clues to resolving this apparent inconsistency are found in responses to other questions, where Presbyterians indicate that reforming current efforts would allow the same amount of money to have a bigger impact. Nowhere is this clearer than for a question on hunger among children. Two-thirds choose *we spend enough money on programs for hungry children, but we need to reform programs to make them more effective*, from a list of three statements. Of the rest, only 10% choose *we spend too little money, which is why we have too many hungry children*. Another 4% select *we spend too much money on hunger programs, and in the end most of the money is wasted*. The rest, 19%, *don't know*.

POLITICAL CONCERNS

As the “higher priority for Congress,” many more Presbyterians (58%) choose *reducing hunger in the United States over reducing hunger throughout the world* (7%). Another 30% believe both *should have the same priority*, and 6% *don't know*. As for which political party is better suited to accomplish that goal, opinions are divided:

- *Republicans*, 19%
- *Democrats*, 15%
- *Both equally*, 31%
- *Neither*, 16%
- *Don't know*, 18%

But politicians should pay attention to hunger issues, according to Presbyterians. Fully 86% indicate they would be more likely to vote for a candidate for Congress *who says s/he will make fighting hunger problems a higher priority over one who says there is currently enough being done to fight the hunger problem* (14%).

FAITH DIFFERENCES

To explore the link between hunger issues and religious characteristics, responses to questions on hunger issues were examined by categories of three other variables. In general, Presbyterians' opinions are similar (1) whether they view the Bible as literally true or not, (2) whether they attend worship weekly or less frequently, and (3) whether they agree or disagree that “All the world's religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth.” Of opinions on 23 hunger issues for each of these three religious variables—69 comparisons in all—only ten reveal statistically significant differences, and only four of those involve differences of ten or more percentage points. The largest is found for frequency of worship attendance: more Presbyterians who attend every week (81%) than those who attend less frequently (69%, once a month or less; 66%, 2-3 times a month; 75%, nearly every week) *agree* that “there should be major new efforts, led by charitable and religious groups, with some taxpayer

support, to make sure that every child in America has enough to eat.”

In short, differences in worship attendance and two important beliefs are associated with only small variations in hunger-related opinions, if any.

CONCLUSION

Despite gains made in eliminating hunger the last several years, the number of hungry people in the world remains high, especially in the developing world. It is not surprising that only a minority of Presbyterians are optimistic that global hunger problems will ever be solved. In contrast, three in four are hopeful that a solution is possible in the United States, where policies and programs have ameliorated the worst problems and hunger is more often viewed as “food insecurity.”

At the individual level, few Presbyterians blame the hungry for their circumstances, and most want more direct food aid. At the same time, they expect those so helped to take more responsibility for feeding themselves and their families. They want more done to ameliorate hunger, but believe that reforms in current efforts will be more effective than spending more money. Only a minority believe that one of the major political parties is likely to do a better job than the other in effecting change, but almost all would vote for a candidate who makes fighting hunger a priority over one who does not.

Other analyses show that these hunger-related opinions are similar across categories of worship attendance, beliefs about the Bible, and perspectives on the uniqueness of Christian faith.

These results leave open the question of what it is about faith and practice that shapes their hunger concerns. Alternatively, the similarity of opinion among Presbyterians of varying beliefs and behaviors may indicate that core Christians values, rather than more variable dimensions of faith, underlie the views they express regarding hunger.

The finding that hunger-related opinions do not differ greatly between

Presbyterians who take the

Bible literally and those who do not, is particularly suggestive because theological differences among individual Christians are often more salient than denominational ones. Given these results, it is not unreasonable to think that Christians in more evangelical groups, for example, may hold similar views. If so, the results presented here provide more than a detailed look at hunger attitudes within one denomination. While we await

Those who attend church every week are more likely to want “major new efforts, led by charitable and religious groups, with some taxpayer support, to make sure that every child in America has enough to eat.”

additional research, individuals seeking to speed up the process of ameliorating hunger both at home and abroad could do worse than using the Presbyterian responses as a broad blueprint for effecting further change.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Every year Bread for the World Institute issues a report on the state of world hunger. Download a free copy of *Are We on Track to End Hunger? Hunger Report 2004* (Washington, DC: Bread for the World Institute, 2004) at www.bread.org/institute/hunger_report/index.html.

Food Insecurity in the World 2003 (Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization, United Nations, 2003) maps hunger, malnourishment, and food insecurity around the world and recommends international strategies for eliminating hunger. Download the report at www.fao.org/docrep/006/j0083e/j0083e00.htm.

For more on the situation in America, see Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2002*, Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. 35 (FANRR35) (Washington, DC: Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003). It's available online at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr35/.

The survey report on which this article is based, *Hunger Issues: The Report of the February 2003 Presbyterian Panel Survey* (Louisville, KY: Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2004), is online at www.pcusa.org/research/panel/0203_full_report.pdf. Its charts and further analysis will supplement your reflection on the ideas presented here.

NOTES

1 This survey was undertaken as part of the Presbyterian Panel, a national random sampling of members, elders, and ministers affiliated with the Presbyterian Church who respond to questionnaires quarterly. This analysis is limited to members' responses (n = 654). The questions were adapted from those asked on a telephone survey of likely U.S. voters conducted in 2002 for Bread for the World by McLaughlin and Associates. The Panel survey was conducted by Research Services with funding from Research Services and the Presbyterian Hunger Program, both parts of the General Assembly Council, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

2 Respondents were not provided with facts on hunger before being asked these questions. The largely inaccurate perceptions on world hunger indicate that the progress in recent years is not widely known, even in a denomination with high levels of education.



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❖ Other Voices ❖

Eating with the fullest pleasure—pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance—is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend.

W E N D E L L B E R R Y, “The Pleasures of Eating,” in *What Are People For?*

The first step toward authentic social justice begins with personal conversion—a continual growth in knowledge, love and service of Christ. We must become less self-absorbed and our lives lived more in communion with the poor. Personal conversion and the common good go hand in hand. Injustice is rooted in sin.

G E R A R D S T R A U B, *When Did I See You Hungry?*

Rabbi Mendel wanted to know what heaven and hell looked like, and the prophet Elijah took him to show him. Elijah led him into a large room where a big fire was burning and where there was a large table with a huge pot of spoons that were longer than their arms, and because the people could not eat with these spoons, they sat around the table and starved. Rabbi Mendel found this room and what he saw there so terrible that he quickly ran outside.... Then Elijah took Rabbi Mendel to heaven and into another large room where a big fire was burning and where there was a large table with a big pot of steaming soup on it. And around the table sat people with the same spoons, but they did not have to starve because they were feeding each other.

D O R O T H E E S O E L L E, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity*

At the end of our lives, we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made or how many great things we have done. We will be judged by “I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless and you took me in.”

Hungry not only for food—but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing—but naked for human dignity and respect.

Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks—but homeless because of rejection.

This is Christ in distressing disguise.

M O T H E R T H E R E S A (1910-1997), in Andrew Harvey, ed., *The Essential Mystics*

It is God's table around which we gather, whether it is a food table, a board table, a desk, or an altar. It is the love of God for all of God's creation that binds us together. That is the shared food of the table. As Douglas Meeks writes, "Those who live from the table of God's household are no longer simply advocates of those who struggle to live without what is necessary for life; [we] have become brothers and sisters." It is not simply that we care. We are actually kin. We are bound in a deeper relation than that created by ideology, affection, utility, our own engineering, or the happenstance of birth or life circumstance. Solidarity is about more than shared beliefs, feelings, or strategic interests. It is about the radical hospitality of the banquet, the extravagantly inclusive invitation to the table and the relationships born at the table.

CATHY C. CAMPBELL, *Stations of the Banquet: Faith Foundations for Food Justice*

Road to Emmaus

There have been crucifixions, too,
in our town—innocents
gunned down in their doorways
or in school halls; or radiation's
black outlines, three crosses
marked a sister's chest: no wonder
we walk in quiet rage, musing

And who, on this road, will join us,
seeming unaware
of the worst news in the neighborhood,
but spelling out the history of the prophets
and a future:

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things
and to enter into his glory?
Could our hearts still burn within us?

Will we ask the stranger to stay?
Break bread? And how
will our well-hammered and nailed
kitchens and bedrooms appear to us
when we understand who he is
just as he steals away?

SANDRA R. DUGUID, *in AMERICA 188:15 (April 27, 2003)*

(Reprinted with the permission of America Press, Inc., americamagazine.org.)

Do you want to honor Christ? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked.... Of what use is it to weigh down Christ's table with golden cups, when he himself is dying of hunger?

First, fill him when he is hungry; then use the means you have left to adorn his table. Will you have a golden cup made but not give a cup of water? What is the use of providing the table with cloths woven of gold thread, and not providing Christ himself with the clothes he needs?

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (c. 347-407), *Homilies on Matthew, Homily 50*

The hungry man needs bread and the homeless man needs a roof; the dispossessed need justice and the lonely need fellowship; the undisciplined need order and the slave needs freedom. To allow the hungry man to remain hungry would be blasphemy against God and one's neighbour. It is for the love of Christ, which belongs as much to the hungry man as to myself, that I share my bread with him and that I share my dwelling with the homeless. If the hungry man does not attain to faith, then the guilt falls on those who refused him bread. To provide the hungry man with bread is to prepare the way for the coming of grace.

But what is happening here is a thing before the last. To give bread to the hungry man is not the same as to proclaim the grace of God and justification to him, and to have received bread is not the same as to have faith. Yet for him who does these things for the sake of the ultimate, and in the knowledge of the ultimate, this penultimate does bear a relation to the ultimate. It is the *penultimate*. The coming of grace is the ultimate.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (1906-1945), *Ethics*

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
 But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything.
 'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
 Love said, 'You shall be he.'
 'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on Thee.'
 Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 'Who made the eyes but I?'
 'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.'
 'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?'
 'My dear, then I will serve.'
 'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
 So I did sit and eat.

GEORGE HERBERT (1593-1632)

This photo is available
in the print version
of Food and Hunger.

We recognize Christ anew in each celebration of the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, as the celebrant blesses our bread. Through Caravaggio's powerful image, we hunger again for His attention and revelation.

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573-1610), SUPPER AT EMMAUS, 1600-1602. Oil on canvas, 54 3/4" x 76 3/4". National Gallery of Art, London. Photo © National Gallery, London.

Beckoning the Hungry

BY HEIDI J. HORNİK

The artist Caravaggio included people from all levels of society in his paintings. Most scholars believe that he preferred the companionship of the more indigent in Rome to the company of his wealthy patrons. In this sentiment, he was in line with the contemporary teaching of Ignatius of Loyola and St. Philip Neri to identify with the poor.

For most of his life, Caravaggio himself was a poor wanderer. Much of what we know about him is from police documents that survive in the archives of Rome and Naples. The artist struggled with his piety and Catholicism. While working for some of the most pious individuals of the seventeenth century, he would shock their sensibilities with his methods. For instance, when he painted a reverent image of the Virgin Mary's death, he used a prostitute's corpse, which had been dragged from the Tiber River in Rome, as a model for Mary's dead body.

In less dramatic but more significant ways, Caravaggio surprises us in *Supper at Emmaus*. Traditionally, paintings on this theme show a bearded Christ and depict his followers recognizing him as he breaks the bread (Luke 24:30-31). Caravaggio, working in Rome during the Catholic Reformation, chose a moment earlier in the narrative—the blessing of the bread—for the moment of recognition in his painting. Art historians have discussed at length the symbolic significance of this narrative shift in relation to the contemporary papal culture.[†] But the artist's focus on that instant of blessing the bread is also relevant to our theme of food and hunger.

In *Supper at Emmaus*, Jesus, being uncharacteristically clean-shaven, is disguised from his followers. Caravaggio positions the table so as to invite us into their meal. We become more than onlookers; we sit next to an unnamed disciple and participate in his moment of recognition. A delicately balanced bowl of fruit, laden with grapes, teeters precariously on the edge of the table, about to fall into our space. A scallop shell (a symbol of baptism) perches on the disciple's vest on the right, and he beckons us to join their fellowship. All the while the dramatic, tenebrist light for which the artist is so famous intensifies the occasion.

NOTE

[†] Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, "Caravaggio's London *Supper at Emmaus*: a Counter-Reformation Reading of Luke 24," *Christian Scholars Review* 28:4 (Summer 1999): 561-585.

Photographs from a Captivated Heart

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

Gerard Straub's powerful images draw us to a moment of recognition—of the face of Christ in the poor, and the ministry of Christ in the ministry to the hungry.

Gerard Straub left his Hollywood-television-producer lifestyle behind when he landed in Calcutta on October 26, 1999, to spend two years with the poor. He wanted to portray in his art the context of their poverty, rather than the emblematic child posed for a relief poster. The product of his journey was his book, *When Did I See You Hungry?* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2002, 274 pp., \$29.95), and companion film narrated by his friend, actor Martin Sheen.[†]

Straub's personal transformation began in 1995 as he was researching a novel in Italy; there he learned of St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226), who made poverty a way of life. Though an atheist at the time, Straub explains, "Francis captivated my heart and mind; the powerful story of his life, with its unconditional and unrestricted response to God, turned my life upside down" (p. 1). He never finished the novel, but spent the next four years studying the lives of St. Francis and his friend, St. Clare of Assisi. Later he lived in the slums of Philadelphia with Franciscan friars and sisters who feed more than five hundred people each day. Creating a documentary film on their work, *We Have a Table for Four Ready: The Saint Francis Inn*, changed his view of the poor—and of his calling in life.

The photographs reprinted here are from "A Meditation in Images and Words," the second part of *When Did I See You Hungry?*, which records the artist's life among the poor in the U.S., Canada, Italy, Kenya, Brazil, India, Mexico, the Philippines, and Jamaica. In addition to photographs titled only by their location, the "Meditation" uses short passages from Straub's personal journal, as well as words from Jesus, St. Theresa, the Book of Tobit, and others. I've included some of these passages in italics under his photographs on the next pages. Yet his powerful images speak for themselves.



Gerard Thomas Straub. PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

The widespread existence of hunger is a massive violation of human rights bordering on epidemic proportions (p. 36).

We are tempted to pass quickly over this image of a man in a Philadelphia soup kitchen because he is so familiar to us. We flash back to when we volunteered at a Salvation Army gathering around Thanksgiving or Christmas, primarily to feel good about ourselves. On closer viewing, however, the lines on the man's face, the texture of his skin and graying hair, and the years of age evident in the turn of his hands, bring him closer to us. His eyes are downcast naturally as he eats. This is his world. The photograph captures an individual, not a "type" of man who represents the indigent.



Gerard Thomas Straub. RIVERTON GARBAGE DUMP, KINGSTON, JAMAICA

Every day, hundreds of people rummage through the garbage dump in the Riverton section of Kingston searching for anything they can salvage and sell (p. 104).

Every year we produce a huge amount of trash in America and little of it is recycled. In a series of photographs, the artist records people who are not adding to the Riverton garbage dump in Kingston, Jamaica, but searching for something valuable to use or sell. It's a startlingly different take on recycling. The views are nondescript (as dumps tend to be) except for the people in the compositions. Here a young man, standing before an abandoned car frame, holds an object of some kind. An askew baseball cap shields his head from the Jamaican sun and gives him a bit of a personality. He's not angry or even aware of the camera. The image captures the young man's world, his context, an instant in his day, and offers a challenge: "What do we do? More importantly: What do I do?"



Gerard Thomas Straub. KINGSTON, JAMAICA

A young girl looks directly into the lens or “eye” of the camera. Her eyes are not pleading in desperation for food, and her stomach is not uncovered and bloated. Rather she and her doll, which she holds dearly to her face, welcome us into their private space. In her room, or her family’s room, she sits on a bed with a torn comforter. It is a place of calm and peace, a haven from the outside world. She is resting and secure, though around her are nondescript objects of her poverty. Straub invites us to look at her and be calm with her. Yet we wonder how she will maintain this calm as she begins to mature and understand, as the artist has come to understand, the poverty in which she lives.

And what you hate, do not do to anyone. Give some of your food to the hungry, and some of your clothing to the naked.
Tobit 4:15a,16

Straub's photographs draw us toward a moment of recognition that is not unlike, though it may be less obvious than, that of Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*. We recognize the face of Christ in the poor, and the ministry of Christ in the ministry to the poor and hungry.

Next to another image of a man living on the streets of Philadelphia, that 'city of brotherly love,' the artist writes, "The essence of Jesus' message is: Make every stranger, no matter how poor and dirty, no matter how weak or unlovable, your neighbor. Tough message" (p. 38).

NOTE

† We thank Mr. Straub for allowing us to publish these images from *When Did I See You Hungry?* Citations to this book are in the text. We also thank Matthew Wohlert and The San Damiano Foundation for their assistance. Mr. Straub's documentaries are available through The San Damiano Foundation (www.sandamianofoundation.org), which "produces films that showcase the active and contemplative dimensions of the spirituality of St. Francis and Clare of Assisi, along with the Franciscan concern for social justice, peace and non-violence."



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Where Is Bread?

BY CAROLYN WINFREY GILLETTE

"Where is bread?" the great crowd murmured,
thousands strong, yet all in need.
"Where is bread?" your people wondered,
faced with such a crowd to feed.
Who, Lord Jesus, could have guessed it?
One small boy brought food to share.
Taking what he gave, you blessed it;
all were fed, with much to spare.

Where is Bread? We know their yearning;
ev'ry day, we wish for more.
God, in time, we're slowly learning:
all we own can make us poor.
Our possessions can possess us,
leaving hunger deep inside.
Christ our Bread, come now and bless us;
at your feast, we're satisfied.

"Where is bread?" the call is rising;
millions cry who must be fed.
God, your answer seems surprising:
"You, my Church, you give them bread."
Bread to fill each hungry spirit,
bread for hungry stomachs, too!
Give us bread and help us share it.
Richly blest, may we serve you.

Where Is Bread?

CAROLYN WINFREY GILLETTE

CYRIL V. TAYLOR

(1907-1992)

"Where is bread?" the great crowd mur-mured,
 Where is Bread? We know their yearn-ing;
 "Where is bread?" the call is ris-ing;

thou - sands strong, yet all in need.
 ev' - ry day, we wish for more.
 mil - lions cry who must be fed.

"Where is bread?" your peo - ple won - dered,
 God, in time, we're slow - ly learn - ing;
 God, your an - swer seems sur - pris - ing;

faced with such a crowd to feed.
 all we own can make us poor.
 "You, my Church, you give them bread."

Tune: ABBOT'S LEIGH 8.7.8.7.D.

Who, Lord Je - sus, could have guessed it?
Our pos - ses - sions can pos - sess us,
Bread to fill each hun - gry spi - rit,

One small boy brought food to share.
leav - ing hun - ger deep in - side.
bread for hun - gry stom - aches, too!

Tak - ing what he gave, you blessed it;
Christ our Bread, come now and bless us;
Give us bread and help us share it.

all were fed, with much to spare.
at your feast, we're sat - is - fied.
Rich - ly blest, may we serve you.

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Worship Service

BY KATIE COOK

Call to Worship:

Leader: Welcome to you in the name of Christ,
for this is God's house and God's table,
and we are God's people.

**People: Let us rejoice and be glad,
for God has created this day and this time.**

We gather to worship God.

**Let us open our hearts to God's presence,
and open our hearts to God's word.**

We come together to exchange many things:

**to share our faith and thanksgiving;
to confess our shortcomings and seek God's guidance.**

We gather to become a community:

**to break ourselves open to each other,
to share the sacred moments of our lives.**

Invocation:

Holy God, come among us and make yourself known.

**Speak to our hearts;
help us to hear your words
and be doers of them. Amen.**

Hymn:

"Come, We That Love the Lord"

Come, we that love the Lord,
and let our joys be known;
join in a song with sweet accord,
and thus surround the throne.

Let those refuse to sing,
who never knew our God;
but children of the heavenly King
may speak their joys abroad.

The hill of Zion yields
a thousand sacred sweets
before we reach the heavenly fields,
or walk the golden streets.

Then let our songs abound,
and every tear be dry;
we're marching through Immanuel's ground,
to fairer worlds on high.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Tune: ST. THOMAS

Litany: (from Isaiah 58:3-7; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:8; and Isaiah 58:9-11)

Today, we call out to the LORD in our confusion:

"Why do you not notice us?

Why are you not pleased with our worship?

Why do you not believe that we love you?"

And the LORD answers:

"Look, you serve your own interests
and oppress all your workers.

You only go through your spiritual disciplines
in order to fight with one another."

So we ask the LORD:

"What kind of worship do you want?"

The LORD says through the prophet Isaiah:

"I want you to loose the bonds of injustice,
to let the oppressed go free,
to share your bread with the hungry,
to bring the homeless poor into your house,
to cover the naked."

But we answer:

"We do not understand your anger.

What about our sacrifices?

What about our solemn assemblies?

Are you not pleased with those?"

The LORD says through the prophet Amos:

"Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
Instead, let justice roll down like waters
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

And we respond:

**“What shall we give the LORD for our transgressions?
With what sacrifice shall we come before the Holy Presence?
What will take away God’s anger?”**

The LORD says through the prophet Micah:

“I have told you what I require:
do justice, love kindness,
and walk humbly with your God.”

So we confess to God:

**“O God, we pledge to you that we will put our feet on this path.
But we do not always know what is the just cause
or the kind action;
and sometimes we need courage to do what is right.
We need your help.
Give us wisdom and courage.
Guide our steps and illuminate our path,
that we might walk more closely with you.**

Hear this word of hope, you people of God.

God has said:

“If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom shall be like the noonday.
The LORD will guide you continually.”

May it be so.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD’s hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Hymn:

"Where Is Bread?"

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
(text and tune on pp. 44-45 of this volume)

Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:31-40

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"

Meditation of Confession:

Christ is shown in mercy when his people break bread to [the hungry]; he is shown in judgment when we do not. Never did Lazarus press closer to the rich man's door than does the hungry world that presses its claim upon us in Jesus' name right now. God's people ought to break bread to them in sacrificial giving, in political action, and in eco-

conomic sharing of our abundant resources. The challenge is to find the way rather than bemoan our helplessness.¹

W. Clyde Tilley

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

**Lord, we are a proud and stiff-necked people.
We have often heard your call and refused to answer.
We have seen you hungry and thirsty on the streets of our city
but we have not given you food or drink.
We have seen you homeless in our public shelters
but we have not worked to house you.
We have seen you stripped naked of your dignity
before our inhuman bureaucracies and institutions,
but we have not cared for your spirit.
Forgive us, Lord Jesus.
Be present to us, be patient with us,
and give us new opportunities to show our love for you.**

God so loved the world that Jesus was sent as a gift to us,
to be with us
and reveal the divine presence within each one of us.
We are assured that, in Christ, we are forgiven;
we are assured that God wants us to come to the Great Table.

Epistle Reading: Romans 12

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Hymn:

"When the Church of Jesus"²

When the Church of Jesus shuts its outer door,
lest the roar of traffic drown the voice of prayer:
may our prayers, Lord, make us ten times more aware
that the world we banish is our Christian care.

If our hearts are lifted where devotion soars
high above this hungry, suffering world of ours:
lest our hymns should drug us to forget its needs,
forge our Christian worship into Christian deeds.

Lest the gifts we offer, money, talents, time,
serve to salve our conscience, to our secret shame:
Lord, reprove, inspire us by the way you give,
Teach us, dying Savior, how true Christians live.

Fred Pratt Green © 1969 Hope Publishing Co.

Suggested Tune: KING'S WESTON

Alternate tune: WYE VALLEY (without refrain)

Pastoral Prayer:

Our God, make of our living a habit of giving. May the basic needs of others be a priority in our culture of magnified personal wants. And may we be uneasy eating the Lord's Supper as long as there are those that hunger—as long as there are the least of these whose needs are not yet met—as long as Jesus is not fully present. All this we pray in

the name of the one whose voice disturbs us from the very back of where we're comfortable. Amen.³

John Ballenger

Sermon

Hymn:

"Let Us Break Bread Together" (traditional spiritual)

Let us break bread together on our knees,
let us break bread together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us drink wine together on our knees,
let us drink wine together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us praise God together on our knees,
let us praise God together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

*Invitation to the Table:*⁴

I invite you now to the Table of the Lord.
Let us now share the bread.

**This is bread that is necessary for life;
bread which comes as a gift from God;
bread broken and shared to remember Christ's body broken for us.**

We have not earned this bread, it is a gift from God.

But what if we feel unworthy to receive this bread?

Hear this word, you who are created by God,
everyone here is welcome to this bread,
not because of our worthiness,
but because God loves us and wants us to have it.

Sharing of the Bread:

So let us pass the baskets of bread to one another
and be filled with the bread of heaven.

Let us say to each other:
God wants you to have this bread!

(Saying as they pass the bread) **God wants you to have this bread.**

Now let us pass the cup,
the fruit of the vine,
the drink that is poured out,
to remind us of Jesus' love poured out.

**May we be filled with the Holy Spirit;
may we be infused with new life;
may we be inebriated with that love.**

Let us say to each other: God wants you to be filled with love.

(Saying as they pass the cup) **God wants you to be filled with love.**

Passing of the Peace:

(Sharing a greeting/response, such as) May the peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Benediction:

Go in peace from this place,
and may all of you be drenched with the spirit of God.
And everywhere you go, through your lives, may these things
come true:
no one will go hungry;
no one will shiver in the cold;
and no one will cower in fear. Amen.

NOTES

1 Excerpt from W. Clyde Tilley, "Knowing Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread," in *Sacred Seasons* (Seeds of Hope Publishers, Hunger Emphasis 2002). Used by permission.

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3 Excerpt from John Ballenger, "The Table of the Lord," in *Sacred Seasons* (Seeds of Hope Publishers, Hunger Emphasis 2001). Used by permission.

4 This invitation to a shared meal is adapted from the Agape Meal at Broadway Baptist Church, Fort Worth, TX, a meal shared by members and homeless people from the neighborhood. It may also be used in a communion service.



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Sharing Our Bread

BY DAVID BECKMANN

God calls us not only to do acts of charity, but also to work for justice for people in need. Decisions by Congress or the President can influence poor and powerless people throughout the world, and that is why Bread for the World advocates in the halls of government for effective assistance to overcome hunger.

During a recent trip to Uganda I met a young AIDS orphan named Deborah, who helped guide me through a Kampala slum. Her parents had fled to the city from a spell of violence in Rwanda. They died from AIDS when she was little, and she has no relatives in Kampala. Deborah is lucky if she gets one meal a day and has usually depended on the kindness of neighbors to give her a place to sleep on the floor. At fifteen years old, she now has several men friends who give her clothes, food, and a halfway decent place to sleep. Given the prevalence of AIDS, these relationships pose a great risk to her life.

Deborah is one of more than fourteen million children who have lost their mother or both parents to AIDS. Yet many more Africans still die from causes related to chronic undernutrition, a continual deficiency of calories or of one or more essential nutrients, than die from the dramatic plague of AIDS.

SHARING OUR BREAD

We must respond to people such as Deborah with dire needs, for God is especially attentive to the prayers of people in want and on the margins of society—the orphan, the widow, and the immigrant. Our Lord fed the hungry crowds. Christians know this, so we set up food pantries in our churches, support soup kitchens, and send money to help feed hungry

people abroad. When people don't have something to eat, we must provide them with food.

What is our motivation for helping others? Perhaps we feel a little guilt and obligation, but guilt and obligation will not get us very far. The powerful motivation for Christians is that we recognize ourselves as people in need. We come to the Lord's Table because we are hungry for the bread of life. We know that we are sinful, our lives are broken, and we are alienated—from God and maybe from people in our own family. So, we gather and confess our sins and look to the Lord, who forgives us and fills us with new life and purpose. God feeds us, and we respond by sharing our bread with hungry people.

In our congregations we do much to care for hungry people directly, but we devote much less effort to addressing the root causes of hunger. People go hungry because they are poor and powerless. The causes of their poverty and powerlessness are many, including lack of education, violence, bigotry, climate, and the apathy of people who have more than enough.

A VOCATION FOR JUSTICE

We are not only called to acts of charity toward the poor; God also calls us to work for justice for people in need. This vocation echoes through the Hebrew Scriptures. God establishes a covenant with the people of Israel. As a member of this covenant community, each person is in relationship with every other person, including the poor among one's family, the resident aliens, and strangers. To nurture the gift of God's covenant with the community, the just person must be loyal to the responsibilities arising from these relationships.

The prophets remind the people to remain faithful to the covenant and true to the nature of their covenanting God:

who executes justice for the oppressed;
 who gives food to the hungry.
 The LORD sets the prisoners free;
 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

Psalms 146:7-8

Through the prophets, Yahweh complains that Israel time and again has forgotten the One who gave them land and provisions. The people, who

**Congregations care for the hungry directly,
 but devote much less effort to addressing
 the root causes of hunger—lack of education,
 violence, bigotry, climate, and the apathy of
 people who have more than enough.**

once were hungry and oppressed, now refuse to feed the hungry in their midst and have become their oppressors.

When ancient Israel was at the height of her economic and political power—not unlike the United States is today—God sent the shepherd Amos to call the nation to repentance. Amos railed against those who lived in luxury while the poor around them were crushed (Amos 4:1-3; 8:4-14)

Nations, as well as individuals, will be judged by the way they treat poor and vulnerable people:

How terrible it will be for those who make unfair laws,
and those who write laws that make life hard for people.
They are not fair to the poor,
and they rob my people of their rights.
They allow people to steal from widows
and to take from orphans what really belongs to them.

Isaiah 10:1-2 (NCV)[†]

Jesus continues the prophetic tradition of justice by reaching out to those at the bottom of the social pyramid—poor people, women, Samaritans, lepers, children, prostitutes, and tax collectors. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” he proclaims in Nazareth, quoting from the prophecy of Isaiah, “because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the outcast, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner (Matthew 25:31-46). In poor people we encounter Jesus.

Jesus also confronts laws that marginalize Samaritans or keep lepers from being healed. Religious and political authorities were intertwined, so when Jesus challenges the Sabbath law, he challenges the law of the land.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus gives us a fresh chance of forgiveness day after day. He offers a new covenant and way of life. Thus, those of us who are united with God through Jesus Christ must identify ourselves, as he did, with the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed.

WORKING TOGETHER AS CITIZENS

Living today in a democracy, with a government “by the people,” we have a say in shaping the laws of our land. And because the United States is the world’s most powerful nation, American citizens can help shape decisions that influence hungry people throughout the world. A single decision by Congress or the President can either offset our individual contributions to charitable organizations, or multiply them many times over.

In Christ, we are fed. And Christ said that we can respond to his love by helping people like my Ugandan friend, Deborah. That is why I advocate in the halls of our government for effective assistance to help Africa overcome AIDS and hunger.

And that is why hundreds of thousands of Bread for the World members and others over the last thirty years have offered letters to God—notes that they've written to members of Congress on legislation that is important to hungry people in the United States and around the world. Many of their letters were written in worship services and collected in an "Offering of Letters." Their combined voices have moved members of Congress to win increases in nutrition programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), to relieve the debt of poor countries, to appropriate money for battling the spread the AIDS, and to make international assistance programs more effective.

The new covenant makes all Christians into agents of love and justice, and calls us to look forward to the day when there will be "hunger no more" (Revelation 7:16).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Bread for the World is a nationwide Christian citizens movement seeking justice for the world's hungry people by lobbying American decision-makers and by engaging in research and education on policies related to hunger and development. To find out more about the "offering of letters" and other educational programs, visit Bread for the World's website at www.bread.org.

BWF believes "Hunger is one problem we can actually solve. But churches and charities can't do it all—we must get our government to do its part." To request a free twelve-page booklet, *What You Can Do to End Hunger*, write Bread for the World, 50 F Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001, or phone toll-free (800) 82-BREAD.

NOTE

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Love Serves

BY SISTER ALICE MARIE QUINN, D.C.

Serving the hungry out of obligation is one thing, but to help them in a spirit of Christian kindness is quite another. St. Vincent de Paul taught the Daughters of Charity to serve others as we would serve Jesus Christ—always seeing our Lord in those who need us. Anyone can bring a dish of food to someone, but not everyone does this with love.

In the early seventeenth century, Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), a priest ministering in Paris, became aware of the needs of the poor in that crowded city. His heart was moved with compassion and tenderness, for war had left many people without jobs and homes. There was no organized charity as we know it today. He considered it his Christian obligation to address the needs of the poor people living in and around the City of Lights.

As Vincent was getting ready for Mass one Sunday morning, a member of the parish came to him and announced that a large family, including the mother, father, and children, were very ill and had nothing to eat. Vincent told the people assembled at the Mass of the family's plight. On his way through the parish after the service, he was moved by the generosity of many people bringing vegetables, fruits, and other provisions to the family. Yet he was concerned that their food, being given all at once, might spoil for lack of available storage and be wasted.

Vincent called together some ladies of the church to organize and collect food, clothing, and other necessities for those needing service. It would not help the poor much to have everything given to them on one day, and then suffer a few days later because no one was available to

provide for them. Through this and similar incidents, Vincent de Paul began to encourage, organize, and train others to help the poor.

This was the beginning of Daughters of Charity, which is the largest order of religious women in the world. Louise de Marillac, a wealthy widow, assisted Vincent in the formation of the charity.

I am a Daughter of Charity living in Los Angeles, California, three hundred and fifty years later, doing what Vincent and Louise began in Paris, France. Taking food, clothing, medical assistance, and education to the poor out of a sense of obligation is one thing, but to do this in a spirit of love and Christian kindness is quite another. Vincent taught the Daughters of Charity to serve others as we would serve our Lord Jesus Christ—always seeing him in those who need us. Anyone can bring a dish of food to someone, but not everyone does it with love. As we say at St. Vincent Meals on Wheels, “Love Serves.”

LOVING THE HUNGRY

When, as a Registered Dietician, I was assigned in 1975 to a hospital kitchen in central Los Angeles, I visited in the homes of recently discharged hospital patients who needed dietary instructions for their medical recovery. I became aware of the many elderly people who were unable to get and fix food for themselves. Most of them lived alone and were poor. All of them were lonely.

As usually happens, God puts people in your path when He has a special mission for you. One person told me about government-sponsored places that served the elderly a hot and nutritious noon meal in a family setting. I checked several out. The food was hot, but not always very good. The seniors had to wait in line with their canes, walkers, and numerous parcels. Often the atmosphere was uninviting and even dirty, with little bugs flying around. I'm sure the food was nutritious, but it was not served with love.

Thus began my search for a small kitchen and hall where I could establish a lunch program befitting the Christ-like elderly poor. Where was the love? I was on my way to establishing what the good Lord wanted of me.

Jesus had a great concern for the hungry and all four gospels recount how he miraculously provided bread and fish for them (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13; and compare Mark 8:1-10). His concern for the hungry is evident in the details: he asked that they recline on a grassy slope and he requested the leftovers to be collected so nothing would be wasted.

I was formally educated in the techniques of food service management, but my religious vocation as a Daughter of Charity taught me the Christian values of compassion, love, and unselfish service. Through my religious instructions, reading of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, and daily prayer, I have let myself be opened to what Jesus

wants of me, namely to feed the poor with love and good nutrition. Love comes first. Or, St. Vincent told us, "first the heart and then the work."

Our first meal was served in the local church hall to eighty-four senior citizens on July 7, 1977. We invited them to sit at tables covered with white paper cloths and decorated with old beer bottles filled with fresh daises, and be waited on by cheerful volunteers. From this small beginning, we

Our meals are hot, nutritionally balanced, and delivered with love. Our visit, brief as it is, may be more important than the food we deliver. Often we are the only people our clients will see all day. I think their greatest poverty is loneliness.

established a meal delivery service to those unable to leave their homes because of illness or age. The St. Vincent Meals-On-Wheels Program today delivers over 2,400 meals every day, seven days a week, to persons unable to leave their homes.

The last twenty-seven years have been a service of love. We consider

Meals-On-Wheels to be our mission, not our job. We ask our guests what they *don't* like and provide a substitution if it's on our menu. When they are without money, they still receive the food they need. We check on each one every day.

Our logo is an angel who carries a meal while driving a cloud. Yes, we are angels, God's messengers to the hungry, delivering our love, compassion, kindness, and a hot chicken dinner or, if they prefer, a savory meat-loaf with vegetable gravy. "Love Serves" every day, every meal, and for every person who needs us. We continue Jesus' work here on earth, showing His love for each person by what we do.

MINISTERING TO THE LONELY

Our Meals-On-Wheels Program is located close to downtown Los Angeles. About ninety-one other MOW programs serve the Los Angeles area and each one is independently organized and operated. Many programs are funded by the government and the clients must be sixty or older. While most of the people we serve are elderly, we do not have an age limit. We are here for anyone who needs us. Our meals are hot, nutritionally balanced, and delivered with love. Our visit, brief as it is, may be more important than the food we deliver. Often we are the only people our clients will see all day. I think their greatest poverty is loneliness.

Over the years I have delivered meals to our homebound clients in every neighborhood. When I visit people in unsafe and dirty dwellings, it troubles me. I want to move them to a clean, safe, and beautiful place. Time and again this "dream" has come to me: the poor, the lonely, and

the hungry deserve the best. We are in the process of building fully furnished apartments for one hundred fourteen of our neediest clients in the St. Vincent Meals-On-Wheels program. This residence, located next door to our new kitchen, will be called *Hotel Dieu* (or, “the House of God” in French). We will clean the apartments each week and provide fresh sheets and towels. In a large dining room, everyone will gather for food and companionship at the noon meal. We also hope to have a beauty shop, exercise room, and game rooms for our guests. It is so wonderful these persons will move into a safe and comfortable home to enjoy together.

Motivated by the teachings of Jesus, we are doing what our Lord did while on earth. It is such a blessing to do this work. St. Vincent assured his Daughters of Charity, “If you have served the poor during life, they will open the gates of heaven for you when you die.” I believe this is true. What better assurance can there be for what we do. We are blessed!

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on the St. Vincent Meals on Wheels program, go to www.stvincentmow.org. There are Meals on Wheels programs all over the world, each with the hope of keeping individuals at home and as independent as possible. To find a program in your community in North America, visit the search pages of MealCall.org (www.mealcall.org), the National Meals on Wheels Foundation (www.nationalmealsonwheels.org), or the Meals on Wheels Association of America (www.mowaa.org),



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Heavenly Hunger

BY R. MARIE GRIFFITH

A new Christian fitness culture is dramatically redirecting older concerns about gluttony and corpulence into schemes for getting “slim for Him.” Does it distort the devotional significance of our bodies, making them the very medium of self-improvement, the primary stuff upon which to practice purification, obedience, and discipline and to establish perfection?

F*at People Don't Go To Heaven!* screams a headline in the *Globe*, a national weekly tabloid circulated to millions of American readers. The story beneath this lurid caption recounts the rise of Gwen Shamblin, founder and CEO of the nation's leading Christian diet company and subject of extensive press coverage from “Larry King Live,” “20/20,” and *The New Yorker*. The media flurry feeds partly on controversies swirling around Shamblin, who has alienated many supporters by rejecting the Trinity and allegedly firing several former employees for refusing to join her own start-up church, the Remnant Fellowship. But reporters are even more stirred by her stringent guidelines for proper Christian body size and their widespread reception. “I am not a savvy businessperson,” Shamblin pronounced in a front page *Wall Street Journal* feature. “I’m just a dumb blonde with a genuine heart for God, who found the golden product that everyone wanted.” That coveted discovery, a spiritual route to guaranteed weight loss, is marketed in the Weigh Down Workshop, whose Shamblin-packed videos, audiotapes, books, conferences, and twelve-week seminars teach restrained food eating as a divine command. The eternal costs of overeating are markedly severe: “Grace,” in Shamblin’s words, “does not go down into the pigpen.”¹

Forecasts for the future of Shamblin's slimming enterprise are mixed at best. Bad publicity recurrently trails her, as when law enforcement officials raided her Weigh Down office in May 2004 while investigating the suspicious death of an eight-year-old boy whose parents were Remnant Fellowship members and strict disciplinarians. But whatever happens to Shamblin, the culture of Christian fitness is increasingly mainstream and firmly secure. Millions of American Christians make something of a religious duty out of diet. They enroll in programs like First Place, Overeaters Victorious, Step Forward, Thin Within, 3D, PRISM, and the Hallelujah Diet. An ever burgeoning blitz of books, audiotapes, video ministries, and Internet chat groups steadily expand the reach of the Christian diet movement. Growing corporations are devoted to Christian fitness, including the Lord's Gym, a California-based national franchise operation whose logo features a muscular Jesus doing push-ups underneath his heavy cross; Logia, a company in Florida that sells highly processed Bible Bars, nutritional supplements, and other supposed "Foods of the Bible"; and the celebrity-drenched Tae Bo program developed by Billy Blanks and marketed in retail chain stores throughout the country.

Whether certain that God advocates calorie counts and pre-packaged foods or a creationist regimen of raw foods and barley green, whether preaching prayer and counseling or spandex and kick-boxing as the way to perfect health, the devout are theologizing about fat and fitness as never before. Disregard what goes into your body, specialists warn, and you will not only gain weight, look ugly, and feel awful but also doom yourself to a lifetime and possibly an eternity of divine disfavor. Put in positive terms—"Jesus wants you to be well!"—this message has been around for some time in gospels of health promoted by Sylvester Graham, William Alcott, and John Harvey Kellogg, to mention some notable proponents. But whereas these figures often were viewed as hucksters, even among their fellow Christians, the contemporary version of this gospel increasingly pervades American Christianity and the surrounding culture with its motivational blend of vanity, guilt, and fear. Here the body appears hazardous to the soul, able to demolish the hardest won spiritual gains merely through ingesting the wrong material or failing to work up a real sweat. If the message of a particular authority such as Shamblin seems extreme or unpalatable, there are myriad other Christian fitness plans from which to choose, all warning of the perilous yet arduously redeemable body.

TOWARD A PSEUDO-RELIGION

Christian diet vendors have hit upon a painful but highly marketable and lucrative theme. A few years ago sociologist Kenneth Ferraro correlated religious practice in the U.S. with obesity, focusing on Christians generally (Southern Baptists in particular) as the heaviest of all.² Demographic patterns and regional food habits likely provide better explana-

tions for this data than does theological analysis, but there's no disputing the preponderance of overweight church goers. Protestants (and recently some Catholics and Mormons) have seized the situation with tremendous force, creating a fast-growing fitness culture whose products sell purity and somatic perfectibility and whose consumption patterns cut across lines of gender, class, and race to permeate a wide swath of believers.

While repeatedly decrying the material rewards of slenderness offered by the secular world as superficial, these Christian writers appeal to them constantly. They urge readers against vanity even while assuring them that they will become more beautiful via their regimens.

How should we, as Christians, evaluate such diet programs? What theological assumptions do they make, and what ethical issues do they raise? Gwen Shamblin's *Weigh Down* may make for sensationalistic headlines, but clearly this group and others strike a chord with their focus on fat and its perceived cause, gluttony. Practices of disciplined eating and fasting, which have been respected for centu-

ries as devotional habits, also—conveniently for many devotional writers today—lead to good health. We might trace these practices through medieval and patristic times to see the complicated ways Christians have wrestled with matters of body and soul, seeking the release from the flesh of the true inward self.

But today's image-saturated media culture, aided by the Christian weight-loss industry, is distorting the devotional significance of the human body. No longer do our bodies merely represent important truths of the self; they now have become the very medium of self-improvement, the primary stuff upon which to practice purification, obedience, and discipline and establish perfection. More to the point, the Christian industry tutors us to read each other's flesh for signs of sin and virtue. Like the culture into which it's interwoven, American Christianity has aligned with the pseudo-religion of physical fitness in a new way, dramatically redirecting older anxieties about gluttony and corpulence into schemes for getting "slim for Him."

The earliest text to articulate this new message, aptly titled *Pray Your Weight Away*, was published in 1957 by the Presbyterian minister Charlie Shedd, who would later become very well-known and beloved in evangelical circles as an inspirational writer. Blending positive thinking with a sharp rebuke of fat (which he deemed a palpable sign of sin), Shedd

assured readers that beneath their bulk, “there is a beautiful figure waiting to come forth. Peel off the layers, watch it emerge, and know the thrill which comes when you meet the real you.”³ Other male pastors authored similar books over the next forty years, but women seized more intently on the genre, helping to turn Christian dieting into a multimillion dollar industry that capitalized on the American diet craze with a message specially geared to the faithful. The Episcopalian Deborah Pierce composed *I Prayed Myself Slim* in 1960, describing how she was transformed from a 210-pound object of campus ridicule to a “high-fashion model” in Washington. Evangelist Frances Hunter produced *God’s Answer to Fat* in 1975, a top religious bestseller whose 1977 sales figures nearly matched Charles Colson’s *Born Again* and the inspirational autobiography, *Joni*.

Other striking examples are Joan Cavanaugh’s *More of Jesus, Less of Me* (1976); Carol Showalter’s *3D* (1977, 2002); Patricia Kreml’s *Slim for Him* (1978); Neva Coyle’s *Free To Be Thin* (1979); Stormie Omartian’s *Greater Health God’s Way* (1984, 1996); T. D. Jakes’s *Lay Aside the Weight* (1998); Joyce Meyer’s *Eat and Stay Thin* (1999); Don Colbert’s *What Would Jesus Eat?* (2002); Judy and Arthur Halliday’s *Thin Again: A Biblical Approach to Food, Eating, and Weight Management* (1994, 2002); Ben Lerner’s *Body by God* (2003); and La Vita Weaver’s *Fit for God: The 8-Week Plan that Kicks the Devil OUT and Invites Health and Healing IN* (2004). By my count, more than 160 such books have been published urging contemporary Christians to embody true faith in their trimmed down flesh.⁴ More and more authors seek to win over the competition by claiming to be fitness experts. One of the latest, La Vita Weaver, describes herself as an ordained minister and fitness instructor, while the physician Ben Lerner advertises himself as “America’s Maximized-Living Mentor.” Such mantles allow their wearers to celebrate the apparent congruence between current medical dogma about health and the biblical writings.

BECOMING “SLIM FOR HIM”

While repeatedly decrying the material rewards of slenderness offered by the secular world as superficial, these Christian writers appeal to them constantly. Patricia Kreml’s *Slim for Him* exemplifies the common pattern of urging her readers against vanity even while assuring them that they will become more beautiful via her regimen. “We don’t diet, lose weight, and firm our bodies just so we can look nice and get compliments. This will be a result of our efforts but not the main reason for them,” she earnestly maintains. “Our first reason has to be keeping our bodies under subjection that we might live the temperate, Christ-like life we are called to live.” Likewise, Shamblin notes that “Being skinny will only be a side benefit, certainly not the major reward for being obedient in this area of food.” Yet authors like these entice the faithful with itemized rewards (“jewels” in Shamblin’s parlance) that will come their way through this obedience, gifts

both spiritual and material. Indeed, Shamblin's second book, *Rise Above* (2000), promises restrained eaters a kind of erotic fulfillment from pleasing God, whom she consistently describes as handsome and charming, "the best-looking and most-loving and richest Husband of all times." The Lord is "not a wimpy lover," in her words, but "a passionate, jealous God," the "Hero we have all been dreaming of," the "passionate pursuer of our hearts," "my Knight in shining armor," "your first, honeymoon-passionate love." The body is God's temple, authors remind their readers, and while the real aim of keeping it "under subjection"—that is, thin, firm, and disciplined—is sacrificial obedience to God, it has the additional benefit of making a person (usually, a woman) more beautiful, sexy, desirable, and naturally more envied by those who fail where she succeeds.⁵

In the course of researching this Christian fitness culture, I interviewed many women and men who participated in Weigh Down, First Place, 3D, Thin Within, and other groups, even going through one such group myself. I interviewed authors of Christian fitness literature such as Neva Coyle, Carol Showalter, and Charlie Shedd, along with less widely known curriculum writers and local group coordinators. I attended a variety of small and middle-sized conference meetings devoted to Christian dieting and talked with many other participants in these settings. I joined online Christian chat groups devoted to weight loss and engaged in thoughtful discussions with people leading quite desperate lives, due (as they see it) to their weight. Before email addresses became restricted, I even corresponded with numerous amazon.com reviewers of Christian diet books, asking them to tell me more about the impact of this reading upon their lives. From this ethnographic and personal experience, I can confirm that readers and participants in this Christian fitness culture hold a wide range of views as to the proper Christian way to think about slimness and the body in today's world. They read selectively and think for themselves, in other words, and it would be a mistake not to highlight the multiplicity of perspectives that find sustenance in this culture.

At the same time, the culture of Christian food restraint has consequences not always clearly perceived even by its more careful supporters. Consider how this culture idealizes a particular type of feminine beauty and calls (sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly) all Christian women to achieve this standard in order to be accepted. Here, the Christian diet industry overlaps in important ways with the Christian beauty industry, exemplified in classics like Anne Ortlund's *Disciplines of the Beautiful Woman* (1977, 1984) and more recent books such as *The Beautiful Balance for Body and Soul*, by mother-daughter team Cynthia Culp Allen and Charity Allen Winters (2003). "God's children, when compared with the children of darkness, should declare without a word that God is good," Ortlund noted. Her explicit solution was to give just over an hour a day to her appearance, and

she challenged her readers to moisturize their skin, style their hair prettily, tone their muscles, “stay supple,” and “stand tall; to be a good advertisement of God’s wonderful care of his children.” Weight was “a key factor in being a beautiful woman for God,” in her view, and God could “help you get to and keep the weight that is right for you.”⁶

Christian literature about fitness, weight-loss, and beauty frequently instructs its readers to uphold a pleasing image in the world, as standard bearers of Jesus’ love and prototypes of the redeemed life to which non-Christians hopefully would aspire. Yet it embraces American ideals of slender beauty which stand in glaring contrast to attitudes in the developing world that have long associated fat with beauty, wealth, and merit or divine blessing. Still more, these ideals mask the extent to which thinness signifies the very opposite of prosperity in many nonwestern contexts. Many commentators have denounced global patterns of food scarcity that emaciate impoverished populations in parts of Africa and Asia at the same time that privileged Americans struggle to stay fashionably slim. Perhaps this incongruity helps to explain why many citizens of other countries believe Americans to be deeply indifferent, if not contemptuous, toward them. Their ill health, life-shrinking poverty, and high death rates, a cynic might say, bolster U.S. supremacy in material and mythic ways.

Let’s not link world hunger with Protestant American body fixations too cursorily, or deny the countless initiatives aimed at helping the poor and hungry across the

globe. Nor is it fitting purely to scorn these modern-day pursuits as merely the solipsistic hobby of affluent, self-absorbed women and men. We may justly wonder, nonetheless, at the paradoxes evident here. American corporations are abetting the global proliferation of fast food chains and the promotion of heavily sugared drinks and processed

snack foods in developing world markets, transforming local eating patterns and increasing obesity rates overseas. As nutritionists and investigative journalists point out, these products contribute in highly visible ways to the bodily illness and poverty of expanding consumer populations.⁷ At a time when the most educated, affluent Americans increasingly shun junk food in favor of healthier “organic” and “natural” choices, the

Impoverished populations in Africa and Asia are emaciated by food scarcity at the same time that privileged Americans struggle to stay fashionably slim. Perhaps this incongruity explains why many citizens of other countries believe Americans to be deeply indifferent, if not contemptuous, toward them.

fast food and soft drink (not to mention tobacco) industries are achieving unprecedented levels of success among the poor, both in the United States and abroad. Where is the Christian protest to this brutal health inequity? Why is the inward-looking Christian fitness industry so much more conspicuous, and more assured of its righteousness?

A recent resurgence of fasting in American Christian circles is closely connected to Christian weight loss and fitness concerns. Christian books commend public and private fasting as instrumental for deepening spirituality, gaining God's favor, and strengthening prayer. The website www.fastforbush.com urges its cyber-audience to pray for President Bush, Vice-President Cheney, the Presidential Cabinet, and the policies of the Bush administration. Catholic layman Steve Habisohn founded a group called "e5 men," named for Ephesians 5:25 ("Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"), whose members commit to a monthly twenty-four-hour fast that creates a "fortress of flesh that protects the woman you love" for the explicit purpose of recapturing men's rightful role of headship over women within the home. The point is not that Christian body disciplines everywhere are linked to conservative causes—*Sojourners'* David Batstone recently commended food abstinence as a cure for our "culture of gluttony," and undoubtedly some liberals are fasting for the Democratic Party—but that such disciplines today are unashamedly linked to aspirations for personal and political power.⁸

This link remains evident even outside these more extreme examples of power fasting. "Fasting is the foundry in which we are purified," writes health minister Lee Bueno-Aguer, founder of Born Again Body, Inc. "Its fires refine our faith; its flames separate the base impurities from our true character in Christ; its hot blasts purify our hearts." More importantly, she continues, "Once we accept and practice fasting as a Christian duty, rewards will surely follow. The power of food will be exchanged for the miracle-working power of the fast."⁹ Like the Christian diet industry's promise that material gain accompanies fat loss, the purveyors of abstinence guarantee miracles, as bodily discipline once again acquires merit as a tool for getting precisely what the prayerful faster wants.

THE RARE AND INADEQUATE CRITIQUES

Christian critiques of the get-in-shape culture have been few and far between. A rare example is a 1998 book by Neva Coyle, the formerly obese author of several best-selling Christian diet books (including *Free to Be Thin*) and founder of Overeaters Victorious. Some years after earning renown as the model for successful Christian dieting, Coyle gained back more than one-hundred pounds she had so famously lost. Because she was still working in the Christian weight-loss industry, traveling around the country giving seminars and publicizing her books, her weight gain was public and deeply humiliating to her. She struggled despondently with her

mortification and sense of failure until she finally came to believe that God loved her even as an overweight woman and that she should accept herself that way. And then, she writes, she got angry.

Angry that I had been so unmerciful and shallow with myself and other large Christians. Angry that no one had guided me differently when I made decisions that risked my life and health in order to be slender. Angry that it had taken me so long and had cost me so much to finally realize that one reasonable alternative to weight management was healthy management of my large body. Angry that I had never before considered that one perfectly legitimate solution to my weight struggle was to focus not on the weight but on ending the *struggle*.¹⁰

Now “Loved on a Grander Scale,” as Coyle titled this account, she seeks to undo the damage she did before as one of this era’s most influential purveyors of Christian dieting, to free women and men from captivity to “fitness.”

However sincere, well-intentioned, and penitent, Coyle stands rather forlorn. “I’m kind of a lone voice out there,” she remarked in my 2001 interview with her. “It’s not a real fun place to be.” After she found the courage to make the videotape *Fit for a King*, an exercise video for large women, she received angry phone calls from strangers and was greeted with pity and contempt from Christian women who believed her to be a sinner for her weight gain. The indignities continue: *Loved on a Grander Scale* remained in print only one year, and media coverage was scarce to nonexistent. When called upon to comment on Shamblin’s Weigh Down program by the producers of PBS’s *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, Coyle’s views got short shrift.

A few other innovators are helping people of faith, usually women, heal from such fixations. Eating disorders especially are gaining more attention in religious circles. Christians may purchase texts such as Deborah Newman’s *Loving Your Body: Embracing Your True Beauty in Christ* (2002), sponsored by James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, or Gregory L. Jantz’s *Hope, Help, and Healing for Eating Disorders* (1995). And in Arizona, the Remuda Ranch Center for Anorexia and Bulimia advertises itself as a “Christ-centered, Biblically-based program” that, unlike secular programs,

Neva Coyle struggled despondently with her mortification and sense of failure until she finally came to believe that God loved her even as an overweight woman and that she should accept herself that way.

is dedicated to God's perfect and everlasting truth as a cure for eating disorders. One certified Christian counselor specializing in eating disorders told a student researcher, "When I am meeting with someone for the first time, I always start with the passage where Paul says that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.... When we understand that because of Jesus' ultimate sacrifice God dwells in us by the Holy Spirit, it really transforms the way we think about and treat our bodies."¹¹

These efforts to reexamine Scripture for messages of love and wholeness that may abet the healing process of food-obsessed young women deserve commendation, and many undoubtedly do provide a form of help for women and girls in need. Insofar as they fail to question the religious assumptions of the Christian fitness and beauty culture, however, it is difficult to view them as a vital counter to these far more powerful industries. They seem especially intent on protecting the Christian tradition from criticism: Newman's *Loving Your Body*, for instance, repeatedly points to Satan and his worldly temptations as the chief cause of poor body image. "There is nothing Satan would enjoy more than getting women to feel ugly and useless in God's kingdom," she notes. "The world measures men and women by their looks, their talents, their money, and their power. God has a completely different measuring system. We aren't supposed to measure ourselves by other people. We should measure ourselves only by God's Word."¹² Blaming poor body image on all that is ostensibly secular and derived from Satan, Newman acknowledges neither the decades-old Christian fitness culture nor the tradition's historic ambivalence toward flesh as vital sources of contemporary obsessions. With this strained blindness, it will take more than a few well-meaning counselors and curriculum writers to undo the body worship to which vast numbers of Christians have succumbed.

CONCLUSION

Though the Christian participants in devotional fitness regimens surely are well-meaning and moral, the implications of this growing fixation are sobering. These programs have not provided a robust solution to the much publicized obesity epidemic, nor is there evidence that they counter the persistently high rates of eating disorders in the populace. All of us, I believe, are enmeshed to a greater or lesser degree in this ideology, simply as people who live and struggle amid this culture's confused norms of right and wrong, healthy and unfit, beautiful and ugly. At our best, we may try to refine or contest these in some fashion, but still we daily (if unintentionally) help reproduce contradictory standards for others.

What we do with our bodies, how we work to make them ever appealing and desirable, the health care policies we obtain for ourselves and allow for others—all of these are religious matters. They speak louder than our words about what kinds of bodies we adore and what types we de-

spise or at least are willing to abandon. If no critique emerges to challenge today's Christian fitness and beauty culture, we may soon be faced with a still narrower set of Christian exemplars: an army of born-again bodies and malnourished souls.

NOTES

1 "Fat People Don't Go To Heaven," *Globe* (November 21, 2000), 5. Shamblin is quoted in Ianthe Jeanne Dugan, "Church Lady of Diet Weighs In on Trinity and Her Flock Flees," *Wall Street Journal* (October 30, 2000), A1, A18.

2 Kenneth F. Ferraro, "Firm Believers? Religion, Body Weight, and Well-Being," *Review of Religious Research* 39:3 (March 1998), 224-244.

3 Charlie Shedd, *Pray Your Weight Away* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957), 40.

4 See the bibliography in R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 294-302.

5 Patricia Kreml, *Slim for Him* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1978), 126; Gwen Shamblin, *The Weigh Down Diet* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 171; and Shamblin, *Rise Above: God Can Set You Free From Your Weight Problems Forever* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 99, 135, 137, 305.

6 Anne Ortlund, *Disciplines of the Beautiful Woman* (Waco, TX: Word, 1977; 1984), 45, 44, 78.

7 See, for example, Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), and Greg Critser, *Fat Land: How Americans Became the Fattest People in the World* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003).

8 For more on e5 men, see R. Marie Griffith, "The Fasting Masters of the Twenty-First Century" (www.beliefnet.com/story/122/story_12233_1.html, accessed August 5, 2004). David Batstone, "What's Eating You? Gluttony Takes a Toll on the Interior Life," *Sojourners* (July-August, 2003) (www.sojournal.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&issue=soj0307&article=030766, accessed August 5, 2004).

9 Lee Bueno-Aguer, *Fast Your Way to Health* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 2001), 201, 202.

10 Neva Coyle, *Loved on a Grander Scale: Affirmation, Acceptance, and Hope for Women Who Struggle With Their Weight* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1998), 10.

11 "Anne," quoted in Rebecca Hylander, "Starving and Saving the Body: Christianity as Cause and Cure of Eating Disorders," Senior Thesis in the Department of Religion, Princeton University (2003), 74.

12 Deborah Newman, *Loving Your Body: Embracing Your True Beauty in Christ* (Carol Stream, IL: Focus on the Family Publishing/Tyndale House, 2002), 34, 24.



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Pura Vida Is Way Cool

CONVERSATIONS WITH
CHRIS DEARNLEY AND JOHN SAGE

BY CLARK BAKER

Eight years out of Harvard Business School, the two friends were troubled. John Sage admits he was “long on cash but short on vision.” Chris Dearnley had the opposite problem: funds for his Costa Rican ministry were running out. A moment of inspiration changed their lives and now they’re reinventing capitalism with “Pure Life.”

At Harvard Business School, John Sage and Chris Dearnley became close friends because they were different from most of their peers: neither had financial training before enrolling and both were strongly spiritual. When they worried about failing their classes, they would meet for breakfast and pray for each other.

After graduation with MBA’s in 1989, however, their lives diverged. Six years out of school, Dearnley forsook his business career and, with his wife, started a Vineyard church in San Jose, Costa Rica. Sage, meanwhile, grew wealthy through his marketing work for Microsoft and later Starwave. Sage admits that by 1997 he was “long on cash but short on vision.” Dearnley had the opposite problem: the funding from his family inheritance for his Costa Rican ministry—which brings food, medicine, drug rehabilitation, shelter, and job training to adults and children at risk—was running out.

Sage and Dearnley credit a moment of inspiration for changing their lives. They developed an innovative business plan for a non-profit internet coffee company called Pura Vida, which means “pure life” in Spanish, but in Costa Rican slang translates as “way cool.”

Money from the sale of Pura Vida's fair trade products, along with customer donations and corporate grants, help pay for ministries in San Jose, Costa Rica, and for hurricane and flood relief in Nicaragua. Pura Vida is looking to expand into coffee growing regions in Africa and South America.

The company's pioneering approach is turning heads at Harvard Business School's Initiative on Social Enterprise: five years ago Pura Vida Coffee became the Initiative's first on-line study and continues as its longest-running case study.



(I interviewed Chris Dearnley as we traveled by truck into the hills of San Ramón, Costa Rica, where I documented the lives of fair trade coffee farmers.)

Clark Baker: In addition to being the ministry coordinator for Pura Vida Partners in Costa Rica, you are the pastor of La Viña. What was your vision for planting a Vineyard church in San Jose?

Chris Dearnley: For several years I had been training Fortune 500 executives in doing business in Latin America. But my wife and I felt God stirring us to go into something with more purpose.

While on vacation in Costa Rica in 1994, we heard that Vineyard was thinking of planting a church on the west side of San Jose. Since I had lived in Costa Rica for six years before completing the M.B.A. at Harvard, some friends at the Vineyard said, "Maybe you guys would like to do the church plant." As we prayed about it, we felt very clearly that God was calling us to do this.

Our decision was confirmed in a very powerful way at a conference that November. I went forward for prayer and a man from the host church started to pray for me si-

lently, just standing in front of me for twenty minutes. "You know, I don't quite understand this," he said, "but I believe God will raise up a church on your shoulders. He's going to take you to a place where you will be starting a church." It was exciting to experience that kind of confirmation two months before we went to Costa Rica.



Pointing toward a community he hopes to reach in the future, Chris Dearnley explains the challenges facing the urban poor throughout San Jose.

The Lord had placed on my heart the vision that this church should bridge not only cultures, but also social classes and denominations. With this vision in our hearts, we started a home group and began praying about how God wanted us to reach those in need. Although our church plant was in an upper-middle class area, we had a real heart to be serving in areas of deep need within the city.



Boys in the vicinity of 25 de Julio play street soccer. Pura Vida partners with a local church to provide meals and operate a computer center in this neighborhood.

How did you start the ministry, Pura Vida Partners?

Later that year, the director of a drug rehabilitation center spoke about his work in one of the poorest sections of San Jose. "How can I serve you?" I asked him a couple days later. "God's placed on my heart to serve you. What can I do?" He could have named many things, but he said, "Help me reach the children of this neighborhood because

they are the addicts of the future. We have a chance when they're young. It's much harder to rehabilitate them once they've been sucked into the cycle of crack cocaine and drug addiction."

At first we had no clue what we were doing. We just handed out hot-dogs to kids in the street; we gathered them to open our hearts and share the love of God. Clearly, to have an impact in their lives, we needed to be involved with them for ten, twenty, thirty years. There was no short-term solution. So, as an act of worship our church began Kid's Club on alternate Saturdays to reach these kids in at-risk areas riddled with drug addiction, prostitution, and violence.

At a gathering of graduate school friends in San Diego in 1997, I shared how these kids were being touched, but bemoaned that we were strapped for cash and no longer able to sustain the program financially. I had with me a bag of coffee from Costa Rica as a present for each of the guys. "Hey, have you ever thought of creating a brand of coffee that would help support what you do in the lives of these children?" John Sage asked. I hadn't, of course. But right there I thought we could call it Pura Vida Coffee because "pura vida" has a double meaning in Costa Rican Spanish: it means "cool" or "awesome" as well as "full of life" and "vibrant." John and I literally sketched our ideas on the back of a napkin. When I returned to

Costa Rica, I found a coffee supplier and we began putting out a product about four months later.

With a grant from Microsoft we created four computer centers and the impact was tremendous—way beyond just computer knowledge. The kids gained self-esteem as they flew a virtual plane, and experienced the joy of learning as they visited Brazil through *Encarta* software. It's opened up a whole new world beyond their neighborhood and given them a vision of who they can become.

Many of the kids were malnourished, so we opened a soup kitchen in 2001. These children can become the heroes of the future, because heroes are people who confront adversity and overcome it. They have many strikes against them—parents who've chosen the path of drug addiction or have abandoned the home. We are giving them an opportunity to make different choices.

What is the biggest problem these children and their families face?

Some families don't have money to feed the entire family, or for the children to stay in school. A child with great ability and desire may drop out of school because the family cannot afford the school uniform or other supplies.

A much deeper spiritual problem is for these kids to realize they are not victims, they do have the power of choice, and they are loved. Being around adults who care for them gives these children hope; it helps them encounter the love of God, which can make a great impact on their hearts and lives. The paid staff members who run the computer centers and work in the soup kitchen, and the twenty volunteers who share their lives through the Kid's Club, visit with families in the community so that they can better understand the needs of the children and their families.

How does your work with Pura Vida Partners relate to your pastoring La Viña?

Pura Vida Partners and Pura Vida Coffee have no structural relationship with La Viña. Some volunteers who work with Pura Vida Partners come from La Viña and other churches, so there is support in that sense. I wear two different hats. I pastor a church and am a director of Pura Vida



At four Pura Vida computer centers, like this one in La Tabla, children in at-risk neighborhoods can build self-esteem and hope for the future.

Partners. I'm also involved in the board of Pura Vida Coffee. But that's due to my background and interests in business as well as ministry.

Pura Vida creates a wonderful opportunity for church people to give of themselves. For those who reach out to the kids in the Kid's Club, the impact is mutual. It's changed the lives of those volunteers and had an incredibly positive impact in the lives of the kids.

Personally it is very fulfilling, on the one hand, to speak spiritually into the lives of middle-upper-class adults who are running businesses, yet, on the other hand, to rub shoulders with children who are looking for where their next meal will come from. I strive for a breadth of experience that allows the love of God to flow through me wherever the need might be.



Children and mothers gather for the lunches supplied by Pura Vida in Conception de Alejuelita, a low-income neighborhood of San Jose.

When did you realize that God was calling you to a ministry?

It has never been black and white, but always an

evolving process. Sensing God's presence and power in a supernatural way, I've always felt a part of me wanted to be involved in the spiritual because that was life-giving to me.

Early in business school it became clear that I did not want to be part of corporate America. I remember a party at which Procter & Gamble representatives were wining and dining Harvard students. "Hi. My name is Chris," I said to one person. "What's your name?" The man responded with a perfectly straight face, "Hi, I'm Tide." "Excuse me?" "Yeah, I'm Tide," he said. "I'm the detergent. I am fully responsible for Tide. I've increased market share by one percent in our new ad campaign and I am Tide." Right there it was as clear as day that I didn't want my life to be a detergent. I want my life to have more purpose than generating money for money's sake, and more meaning than working to be more comfortable, buy bigger things, and have more toys.

Who inspired you to pursue other goals?

A big influence during my college years was Tony Campolo—especially his radical challenge to let God be God, and to dream bigger than the status quo. The spirit of God continually makes me unsettled, restless, and unsatisfied with my choices to be less than what I'm supposed to be. The Spirit's stirring has caused me to search for something more.

How have you grown through your work in Costa Rica?

I have a tendency to get so wrapped up in *doing* things, in accomplishing tasks, especially when there is so much more to do. I struggle to have my heart in the right place and not lose my center, my spiritual focus. For me, the constant challenge is learning how to be still before God, to allow the light of God to be filling and present and real, even when there are a thousand things on my plate to do. I keep reminding myself an “in” box is meant to have a bunch of things in it. I try to release that constant burdensome pressure to get everything finished, and to allow first things to be first, to put my heart before God and seek Him.

Communicating is a challenge. Latin Americans speak to one another in an indirect way because they highly value relationships. For example, if you need to say something negative, you say it through someone else. Having come from a North American culture that values efficiency over personal relationships, I’m always challenged to bridle myself. I have become more sensitive in how I speak to others—to not hide or minimize the fact that something needs to be done soon and well, but at the same time to appreciate the person and not let their task overshadow their value to me.

What about sacrifices you’ve made?

The term “sacrifice” sounds like I gave up what I really wanted in order to do something that’s not as good. But I don’t see it that way. I view it as a trade-off. Sure, I’ve traded going after a higher paying job—the amount of money I could have made coming out of business school is ridiculous. Yet, I chose not to go that way because I valued something else more. I couldn’t pursue a job that was going to pay really well but consume my life.

Living in a foreign culture is another trade-off. We don’t live close to family, and don’t own many things we grew up with. But it’s great for our kids to be bilingual. There are other cultural challenges, where I have to think, “Wow, how do I handle this?” or “What do I do here?” because it’s outside my upbringing, it’s not second nature.

I remember a Procter & Gamble party for Harvard students. “Hi. My name is Chris,” I said to one man, who responded with a perfectly straight face, “Hi, I’m Tide. I’m the detergent. I’ve increased market share by one percent in our new ad campaign and I am Tide.” Right there it was as clear as day that I didn’t want my life to be a detergent.

How has your family been impacted by your work?

Our children see that we're involved with things of significance, when they choose to come with us. Sometimes they'll help in the Kid's Club on Saturday, and being part of the church is a very positive experience for them. We let their work be a personal choice for them as they continue to grow and develop.



After lunch, Chris Dearnley enjoys a lively discussion with children who live in Concepcion de Alejuelita.

They are becoming "third-culture" kids, not fully shaped by only Costa Rican culture or American culture. This creates a lot of independence early on. They learn coping skills that are healthy and good for them. Costa Rica is the world they know, and it seems natural to be here.

For my wife, Andrea, it's not as natural because she grew up in the United States. But she feels it's where we should be for

now. And we agree this is a good place to raise kids.

What are your hopes for Pura Vida?

The company is growing to the point where we need to create a little more structure. I'd love to see Pura Vida have an impact in other countries: we're clarifying its vision—defining what it's really about and how we help kids in need—so that we can replicate the model elsewhere.



(I visited with John Sage in the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport as he was traveling to San Jose, Costa Rica.)

How did the vision for Pura Vida come about?

It grew out of my friendship with Chris. Meeting on our first day at Harvard in 1987, we were both convinced that business school was going to be really tough, so we began praying in a little coffee shop every morning before class. We wanted to bring business together with faith, but neither of us knew what direction to take.

After graduation, though Chris moved to Costa Rica to plant a church and I worked for Microsoft in Seattle, we got together every year for a long weekend to play golf. On our visit in the summer of 1997 in San Diego, I was struck once again by Chris's vision and passion for ministry, particularly to these kids, and how much he had sacrificed to see his dream turn into reality. We were discussing how much of his attention and en-

ergy were focused on funding those ministries and covering his family's expenses. Then he handed me a bag of coffee as a gift. I was doing some consulting work at the time for Starbucks, and the first thing I said was, "How much did that cost?"

Chris gave me a "You jerk!" look. But in that moment God birthed the vision. "What if we started our own little company to sell Costa Rican coffee over the web and used the bags to share the story of your work with children?" I asked. "The profits could provide sustainable funding for your ministry." Without any hesitation Chris grabbed on to it: "We could call the company 'Pura Vida,' which is how Costa Ricans greet one another." We call this our pool-side epiphany.

I was so excited—it seemed the perfect combination of all my interests: technology, business, coffee, and ministry—so I was ready to get going. But Chris said, "I'm sure this vision is of the Lord, but I'd really like us to do nothing about it for thirty days, except pray." This was very counter-intuitive to me, and not what I was pumped up to do. "If God's truly in it, then we'll have clear affirmation," he said. "And, if he's not, then it will be a lot better not to have wasted our time." That was a great word, which set a tone for how we run the business; we rely heavily on prayer.

The vision hasn't changed over the years, but it's grown. We'll move about a quarter-of-a-million pounds of coffee in 2004, and we want to create long-term value for kids and their families in coffee-growing regions of the world. To use this profitable company to improve the living condition of growers, we're committed to carrying only certified fair trade coffee, which means we pay a minimum of \$1.26 a pound for the green that we buy. That's at the beginning end; at the back end we put all of our profit back into benefiting kids in those regions.

So, Pura Vida is non-profit?

It's a hybrid. Pura Vida Coffee is a for-profit company, but one that's wholly owned by Pura Vida Partners, a 501 (c) (3) public charity. We wanted the company to be accountable to the rigors of the market place. Chris and I believe that capitalism brings a level of quality, rigor, and accountability that is not often found in the non-profit world. That's a little inflammatory, but we want to run this as a



John Sage, who co-founded Pura Vita Coffee with Chris Dearnley in 1998, serves as President of the company. He often travels to San Jose to lend guidance to Pura Vida's programs.

business and be competitive. Ultimately, as the business grows and succeeds, it is accruing benefit to kids; in a sense, the shareholders are not as traditionally defined by Harvard, but are the kids and the families that we serve.

And there's a practical aspect too. Thousands of customers add donations to their coffee purchases, and these donations are tax-deductible

When religious institutions learn we have a faith mission, they ask: "What's your denomination, your faith statement, your views on biblical inerrancy?" You know, when calling on churches I think we'd be more successful if we said, "We are greedy, rapacious coffee sellers with a good product that's fairly priced. Would you like to buy some?"

gifts. The organization is an innovative structure with the best of two worlds, the charitable and the for-profit.

Speaking of charity and ministry, how do you integrate the Christian aspect of Pura Vida into the business world?

That's a great question. Making our faith explicit in our business message has been problematic in two ways—one that we expected and another that is surprising.

When a secular company or educational institution buys our coffee, they obviously serve it to customers who don't share our religious belief. For instance, we won a coffee contract at a big Seattle-based company, Real Networks, on the merit of our product's value and quality, after a tasting session for all the employees. But one person, who happens to be Hindu, saw on our website that we are explicitly faith-centered in our motivation and he was very offended and felt that his company's coffee dollars were being used to proselytize Christianity. He filed a formal grievance with human resources and the contract was shelved for ninety days. In the end, we still were given the contract. However, I suspect in many cases this has been an obstacle that has delayed or prevented a deal.

The surprising resistance comes from people within the faith community. When religious institutions learn that Pura Vida has a faith mission, they ask: "What's your denomination?" "Where's your faith statement?" "What are your views on biblical inerrancy?" and "If we're helping to fund your mission, then why doesn't Pura Vida support our mission?" You know, when calling on churches I think we'd be more successful if we said, "We are greedy, rapacious coffee sellers with a good product that's fairly priced. Would you like to buy some?" For these reasons we de-emphasize our Christian orientation in our promotional materials.

Our goal is to minister to those in need, hoping they will not only find relief and comfort but will want to know what motivates us. Only then have we been given permission to share our personal trust in Jesus. In the ministry in Costa Rica, the workers are people of faith, but we do not expect or require the kids they serve to believe the way we believe. That's a pretty important distinction.

In addition to marketing through your website, you're now selling coffee on college campuses.

Initially most of our customers were faith-motivated or socially conscious coffee drinkers who were comfortable buying online; the rest of our sales were to churches. Today institutions, particularly colleges, account for two-thirds of our revenue. Because college students are socially aware, environmentally sensitive, and spiritually motivated, they respond well to Pura Vida's fair trade, organic, and shade-grown coffee, and giving its profits to charity.

These institutions have helped us increase sales dramatically and improve cost structure and profitability. Yet individual customers are still critical for us, for they're the vast majority of our donors. Last year they gave \$190,000 to sustain the ministry.

When did you realize that God had a specific work for you?

Starting Pura Vida, it just felt like all cylinders were firing. It was everything I love, though there was no paycheck attached. I was working two jobs—for Pura Vida and on consulting projects for other companies. It took about a year before I felt God was calling me full time, because I could see the positive response coming from the market and the success of Chris's ministry. Chris knew from very early that this was of the Lord. But giving up all income and investing significant amounts of our personal resources, I took longer. Yet God kept providing sign posts directing me to where he intended me to be.

So, in the beginning you funded this endeavor?

Yes, my wife and I funded it for four years. It was stressful on our marriage; a very tense time. I'm grateful that through a board we've at-



Efrain Sanchez explains the finer points of shade-grown coffee farming to Chris Dearnley. Working through a fair trade coffee cooperative, Mr. Sanchez provides coffee to Pura Vida.

tracted outside investors and brought in other capital that's enabled me to start taking a salary.

Who influenced you to pursue a service-oriented life?

Definitely Chris. With awe I've watched him deviate from the expected path out of Harvard at great cost, financially and in prestige. I admire and respect him, but don't envy his path. Yet seeing him step out in faith and being content with his religion makes it possible for me to step further out.



Perla Gaitam and her children welcome us into their three-room home near Concepcion de Alejuelita.

Two other people who have influenced me are investors and board members at Pura Vida. Ray, with his faith and confidence in Chris and me and willingness to invest his funds, has been a great source of encouragement. And Paul is the one who helped us structure an investment vehicle that would attract capital. He was the guy who said, "I don't want to just loan you money. If I'm going to in-

vest in Pura Vida, it's because I believe it has the potential to reinvent capitalism." That was his term. He is a former football player and a very savvy entrepreneur; he's really walked with us to build the financial structure to support the weight of a growing enterprise.

What were the greatest challenges with Pura Vida?

I can be very impatient. Even though our growth has been rapid, it's taken us much longer to develop the company than I thought it would. In the computer industry I was spoiled by eighty-percent profit margins!

Raising capital has been another challenge. Pura Vida is neither fish nor fowl, neither a straight money-making enterprise nor a charitable organization. Our investors must think outside the box. But dozens of people are like the fellow who listened to my plan, shook his head, and said, "You make my head hurt." Marrying capitalism and finance, as traditionally defined by our culture, to benevolence has been hard.

I struggle to build a very competitive, performance-based business while cultivating a caring, warm, faithful work environment. When I have to fire an employee for under-performance, or deny someone a career opportunity because my view of their giftedness is completely opposite to their view, the conflict is really tough.

How is your family impacted?

I have more flexibility in my schedule and, on balance, more time at

home with my family. I can make it to the kids' games, which is a real blessing. It's also neat that my kids come down and visit at work. "Oh Dad," they'll say, "you're helping the kids in Costa Rica with the coffee." They think it's normal for business to help kids, which I think is great. And they see their dad experiencing joy and passion in his work; I hope that will have benefit for them some day.

On the other hand, it requires a lot of travel to talk to investors and for public speaking. Here I am on the way to Costa Rica!

NOTE

For more information on the "Way Cool," see the company's website www.PuraVidaCoffee.com.

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The Culture of Food

BY NORMAN WIRZBA

Our problems about food, ranging from its wasteful production and inequitable distribution to its reduction to a mere commodity, bespeak a defilement of God's good gifts. We have what we need to make our way—a world blessed with abundant fertility. What we still await is a culture devoted to the just production and sharing of this blessing.

Food is not something we worry about. Living in developed countries, we believe that food will always be readily and cheaply available at our grocery stores. We are, after all, the beneficiaries of the Green Revolution that made it possible to dramatically improve crop yields. Indeed, we have been so successful at food production that fewer people than ever before are directly involved in its growth and harvest (the farm population has decreased so much—we have fewer farmers in the United States than prison inmates—that farmers are considered a statistically irrelevant group by the Census Bureau). How many of us have ever seen empty shelves at the store?

If we admit that a food problem exists, we think it is someone else's problem. More specifically, we think the problem stems from explosive population growth in developing countries: there simply are too many people in those places and not enough food. These people cannot be expected to feed themselves, and so we take some comfort in promoting the Green Revolution abroad and advocating for food aid at home. Given sufficient technology and government intervention, particularly through programs of the World Trade Organization and the World Bank, these countries too will soon reap the blessings of readily available food. Problem solved.

REPAIRING THE LANDSCAPE OF HUNGER

According to the writers gathered by Douglas H. Boucher in *The Paradox of Plenty: Hunger in a Bountiful World* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 1999, 348 pp., \$18.95), virtually all of the aforementioned assumptions are misguided. Moreover, if continued, they present an effective barrier to understanding and addressing the very real problems of global hunger and food insecurity. These essays shift our frame of reference away from concerns about rising populations and food scarcity, and replace them with an awareness of wasted land, vast poverty, inadequate access to land, breakdowns in the world food system, and the lack of genuine economic citizenship. If we can address these latter concerns, the authors argue, we will discover that the world can produce more than enough food to feed everyone.

Francis Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, and Peter Rosset put the issue most directly when they say, “the root cause of hunger isn’t scarcity of food or land; it’s a *scarcity of democracy*” (p. 6). What they mean is that over the past several decades farmers have been driven from the land, sometimes by force and sometimes by economic necessity, and the land taken up by large, often foreign-controlled, landholders who adjust production to suit export markets (for flowers, coffee, or bananas, for example). Farmland, which once provided for local food needs, is held captive by volatile global markets that have the interests of the wealthy in mind. The result is that local populations, now made poor and helpless due to land dispossession, go hungry while export granaries are full to bursting. The solution to this problem, as phrased by Li Kheng Poh, is clear: “The only durable way to alleviate hunger is to support the grassroots efforts of local people to change the way food is grown, distributed and consumed inside their own country” (p. 203). The path to food security, in other words, is through local control of land and democratic citizenship in which people have the power and the responsibility to care for themselves. We know, for instance, that small, diverse farms are usually much more productive than their agribusiness, monoculture counterparts. The world needs more of these farms, not less.

Of course, this is more easily said than done. The world food system, which includes banks and international aid agencies, is heavily influenced by corporations that have the economic bottom line rather than local food independence foremost in mind. Trade agreements often specify that local farming markets be dismantled so that foreign imports—in seed, fertilizer, pesticides, and farm equipment—can gain a foothold. Even direct food aid from developed countries can be destructive if it undermines local food economies, driving more farmers off their land. Moreover, it is becoming clear that American policymakers are not as interested in feeding the starving (much of the food that is dumped in developing countries is known to be too expensive for the poor to purchase it) as they are in ridding U.S.

markets of price-depressing domestic surpluses, in opening new markets for sale of U.S. farm products, or pressuring foreign governments to be more accommodating of U.S. economic and military interests.

This is a rich, prodigiously researched collection of essays that will go a long way toward helping us become better informed about the problems of global hunger. Besides addressing the themes already mentioned, authors also discuss how land and biological resources are wasted through inefficient and unsustainable farming practices, or through the production of food for animals rather than humans (e.g., vast amounts of fossil fuel, feed, and water are used to produce protein—beef, pork, poultry—in large confinement operations that have as one of their byproducts huge quantities of toxic waste). We learn that the Green Revolution itself, because of its heavy reliance on fossil fuel and chemical fertilizers and poisons, is not sustainable over the long term and that a broad effort toward diverse, ecologically-informed farming practices must become one of our highest cultural priorities. Nevertheless, the overriding message of *The Paradox of Plenty* is not gloom and doom. We have what we need to make our way—a world blessed with abundant fertility. What we still await is a political and economic culture devoted to the just production and sharing of this blessing.

MAKING WISER CHOICES AMID ABUNDANCE

Marion Nestle's *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, 457 pp., \$15.95) demonstrates in great detail how cultural factors and regulatory bodies like the USDA can distort the blessing of food even in the context of food abundance. Nestle brings to her work a great deal of expertise as an academic (she chairs the department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health at New York University) and an advisor to government agencies (she edited the 1988 Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health). Her central question is this: how, in the face of food abundance and relative wealth, can we have so many people making poor food choices that contribute to overall ill-health?

For Nestle, as with the writers gathered by Boucher, the issues of health and food security need to be examined from the perspectives of politics and economics. In our culture, food has been transformed into a commodity (which, as we will see later, has serious significance). Since Americans are relatively affluent, they have more than enough money to buy food to meet their nutritional needs. Yet affluence sets the stage for intense competition within the food industry among the suppliers, distributors, regulators, restaurants, and so on. Food companies thus expend extraordinary amounts of resources to lobby government agencies, develop marketing strategies, and create products that will sell regardless of their nutritional effects. Nestle makes this point early and starkly: "Food companies will make and market any product that sells, regardless of its

nutritional value or its effect on health. In this regard, food companies hardly differ from cigarette companies” (p. viii).

The history of food in America in the twentieth century is largely about how players within the food industry fight to increase market share. They not only increase the amount of food available, but also promote certain foods as cheap, attractive, or convenient. Widely accepted scientific evidence routinely is withheld or distorted so that a product’s sale potential will not be undermined. Government agencies charged with the protection of consumer health find themselves in a bind since they are also charged with protecting the business interests of food suppliers. So far, Nestle notes, the suppliers have been winning.

She describes this tension beautifully by recounting the history of the food pyramid chart. What many of us do not know is that intense battles were fought over how the chart should be drawn (including whether it should be a pyramid), and how many daily servings in each category—vegetables, grains, fruit, dairy, proteins, sweets, and fats—should be recommended. (Clearly, recommending more servings from one category over another has tremendous economic effects.) From a scientific point of view we know that whole grains and ample servings of fruits and vegetables (the less processed the better) are best for our health. As we might imagine, however, representatives from the beef and poultry industries, as well as makers of highly refined food products (like sodas, candies, and convenience snacks), hardly saw this as advancing their business interests. Their proposal was to formulate vague, misleading counter-statements like the following: “balance, variety, and moderation are the keys to healthful diets; there is no such thing as a good or a bad food; all foods can be part of healthful diets; it’s the total diet that counts” (p. 91).

How, in the face of food abundance and relative wealth, can we have so many people making poor food choices that contribute to overall ill-health? Marion Nestle’s *Food Politics* goes a long way toward helping us become more informed and healthier eaters.

Nestle thoroughly discusses topics ranging from the mechanics of food lobbies and the exploitation of children as food consumers to the regulatory battles over dietary supplements and the development of technofoods like olestra. Her concluding message is simple: our primary job as citizens is to become responsible eaters, recognizing that with every bite we are making not only a nutritional, but also a political statement. *Food*

Politics, because it also provides numerous practical suggestions, will go a long way toward helping us become more informed and healthier eaters.

ENCOUNTERING GRACE

The great merit of Michael Schut's anthology, *Food & Faith: Justice, Joy and Daily Bread* (Denver, CO: Living the Good News, 2002, 296 pp., \$14.95), is to remind us that food is much more than a commodity susceptible to the vicissitudes of global economies or corporate power. Because food is essential to the processes of all life, it connects us directly to God as the Source of life. Whenever we eat, we are not simply consuming a fuel to get us through another day; rather we are participating intimately in God's divine economy of life and death. Eating is a sacramental act, an act that has the potential to bind us faithfully and charitably to each other, the creation as a whole, and God.

Schut covers many dimensions of food, ranging from its production and distribution to problems in industrial agriculture and global poverty. Writers as diverse as Wendell Berry, Diane Ackerman, Eric Schlosser, Vandana Shiva, and M. F. K. Fisher take us to the heart of understanding spiritual, physical, and cultural health. Even the themes taken up by Boucher and Nestle are included, yet amplified so that we can see the spiritual side of food consumption. Why do we take such pleasure in eating? And how is it that food tastes better in the company of others (remembering that the Latin word for companion refers to the sharing of bread)? Reading these essays, we sense how our engagement with food is always an encounter with grace. How we practically handle this divine creation, whether in sacrilegious or sacramental eating, may represent the most honest accounting of our love and our piety.

Though our food industry bespeaks in many ways a defilement of God's good gifts, this is not how it needs to be. Our congregations can become places wherein food's deep spiritual resonances are heard and celebrated. With greater attention to the religious dimensions of food, we can become members of grateful, sharing communities rather than remain isolated, fretful consumers. To encourage us to enter into joyful and just community, Schut includes a study guide for church people. Practical suggestions and useful tips (including a list of organizations and bibliographic/internet resources) round out this excellent and timely collection.



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We Are *How* We Eat

BY L O R I B R A N D B A T E M A N , R . D .

When we realize eating is our most intimate reception of the gifts of God, and when we begin to understand how our food consumption habits can impact our individual and collective well-being, we realize that food is deeply connected to our discipleship.

For Christians, the quandary of how to live *in* but not *of* the world is nothing new. When we realize eating is our most intimate reception of the gifts of God, and when we begin to understand how our food consumption habits can impact our individual and collective well-being, we realize that food should be deeply connected to our faith. Three books, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schlosser (New York: Perennial, 2002, 400 pp., \$14.95), *Breaking Bread: The Spiritual Significance of Food* by Sara Covin Juengst (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992, 113 pp., \$14.95), and *Feasting with God: Adventures in Table Spirituality* by Holly Whitcomb (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1996, 184 pp., \$16.95), challenge us to reexamine our eating habits in relation to our discipleship. Taken together, they portray a clear conception of contemporary individual and social problems related to food, and offer suggestions for recapturing the spiritual meaning of food so that people of faith can become more connected to each other, creation, and ultimately, God.

LOSING OUR CONNECTIONS

After reading these books, I recently experienced a real disconnect between my faith and the way I eat. On a blistering summer day in early June while traveling through Louisiana on I-20, our family was pretty uncomfortable: my two preschoolers were whining, my husband was tired of driving, and we were all cramped and hot. Needless to say, we needed a break. I saw a sign for McDonald's Playland and without thinking I suggested we stop at the restaurant. Immediately, everyone's mood lifted.

When we arrived, the McDonald's felt like an oasis; it was clean, bright, and cool inside, with a colorful playground attached. The workers were accommodating, the food was healthier than I expected (with low fat milk and salads balancing out the burgers and fries), and the Happy Meals included a fuzzy toy called a "Neopet" that made my preschoolers' day. As our family sat blissfully consuming our lunch, the McDonald's Corporation was seemingly providing us a great service, for only \$13.10. However, I could not ignore my underlying guilt prompted by Schlosser's proclamation that the convenience of fast food has had a great but hidden societal price. In the choice I made that day, my desire for convenience was in conflict with my values related to consumption and community.

While other authors have explored the breakdown of community in general, Schlosser highlights the specific damage from the dramatic changes in how we produce and consume food. He notes that the way food is processed has changed more in the past forty years than in the previous forty thousand (p. 7). In twenty-first century America, independent farmers no longer supply nourishing foods for meals shared around breakfast, lunch, and dinner tables. Instead, our inexpensive food often is processed beyond recognition and against our healthiness. We are becoming increasingly detached from the production of our food. We do not know where it comes from, because we're unfamiliar with the people who grow, process, or prepare our food.

We've also become more detached from those with whom we would share our food and from God who is the ultimate giver of our food, for we do not take time to eat consciously and thankfully with others. Though grocery stores carry tens of thousands of items, many families rarely cook meals or eat together. In the typical American family, each member on his or her own schedule consumes disjointed meals and snacks while on the way to the next activity.

Further, many of us have developed unhealthy relationships with food itself. While some bow to the pressure to conform to cultural images of thinness that can lure us into harmful diets and eating disorders, others suffer from obesity, which is now an epidemic and perhaps the greatest threat to our public health.

RECONNECTING WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Anthropologists claim a society expresses itself as much through its food habits as it does through language. Therefore, the way we eat is a primary artifact of who we are and what we believe about ourselves, the world, and God. Indeed, eating is a spiritual exercise. Whitcomb's *Feasting with God* and Juengst's *Breaking Bread* provide a valuable perspective for people of faith who seek to recapture the enjoyment of food as a meaningful symbol of who they are.

Juengst and Whitcomb's books complement each other well. Juengst

surveys the biblical background on the meaning of food and gives practical suggestions for utilizing food's symbolic significance to enrich our lives; Whitcomb offers ideas for intentional gatherings that explore one or more aspects of Christian faith. Both authors remind us that in our busy lives, we've pushed food away from the holy and compromised our life together. Thankfully, they provide hope for recapturing the connection between faith and food.

Juengst examines the Bible for insight into how we can reclaim the sacredness of food and thereby nourish our spiritually and emotionally hungry lives. She structures *Breaking Bread* around six theological themes: stewardship, hospitality, bonding, compassion, celebration, and hope and restoration. In each chapter, Juengst carefully analyzes one theme through Scripture before she offers "Food for Thought" (additional insights from a variety of authors) and "Recipes for Action" (practical suggestions for enhancing the theme in the reader's own experience).

Juengst relates much of the biblical story to food through these themes. Under the first, *stewardship*, she explains food as a gift from God. God is the loving gardener who provides food, and since it originates from God, food is to be "treated sacramentally." Gluttony is an aberration in receiving God's good gift. The second theme, *hospitality*, focuses on how we should use food to welcome and care for others. Both Testaments advise the practice of hospitality, especially toward strangers. In sharing food together, strangers become friends, and this is demonstrated in the third theological theme, *bonding*. Eating together breaks down barriers and is important in nurturing and healing human relationships. Also, we demonstrate our *compassion* for one another through the distribution of food, and the Bible continuously

calls us to demand justice for the poor and hungry. But Christians should not feel guilty about *celebrating* with food, the fifth theme. In Israel's feasts, the Passover Meal, and the Lord's Supper, food is used to celebrate and remember God's graciousness. And the Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the Messianic Banquet that will be the world's ultimate *hope and restoration*.

Where Juengst ends, Whitcomb begins her "adventures" with practical ideas for enacting the hopes and dreams of the Messianic Banquet. Throughout her book she vividly embodies many of the themes present ed

Scriptural explorations of stewardship, hospitality, bonding, compassion, celebration, and hope and restoration, guide us to reclaim the sacredness of food and thereby nourish our spiritually and emotionally hungry lives.

by Juengst. Drawing on her skills as pastor and cook, Whitcomb creatively converts the motifs that she gleans from biblical wisdom into plans for gatherings among family, friends, and acquaintances. The first section of *Feasting with God*, which is entitled "Feasts," focuses on entire meals, while the second, "Culinary Interludes," uses food in various aspects of devotional reflection. In feasts and culinary interludes with names like "Rites of Passage: A Feast of New Beginnings," "Nature's Bounty: A Summer Picnic," and "Tea and Sabbath," Whitcomb exudes respect for the holiness of God and sacredness of God's creation as she serves up insights into the meaning of food as a sacred symbol. She weaves together recipes, scriptural passages, popular songs, spiritual guidance, activities, and brief meditations (based on a variety of authors such as Walter Brueggemann, James Fowler, Martin Luther King, and Abraham Heschel) to enrich the motif for each meal or interlude.

Not everyone will feel comfortable at Whitcomb's enthusiastic, revealing, and reflective gatherings. Introverted guests and those who are not familiar with others in the group may feel intruded upon and out of place. Some may find a few of Whitcomb's themes too bold. However, Whitcomb makes clear that she's merely offering suggestions to be molded to the tastes of the host and guests. Her point is that the table is a significant place for faith to be revealed and community to be enriched. Juengst and Whitcomb agree that when we relegate food to the mundaneness of day-to-day subsistence, we lose an important connection not only to other people, but also to God.

FROM FAST FOOD TO GOOD FOOD NATION

Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* may seem misplaced in this trio of books since it does not claim to come from a Christian perspective, until we notice that what Schlosser presents is the mirror image of what Juengst and Whitcomb propose. Schlosser cites facts, trends, and stories about fast food to illustrate the cultural, economic, and societal factors that have led to the decline in the sacredness of food and eating.

Fast food emerged within a changing North American culture, and, in turn, it played a significant role in shaping those cultural trends. To realize the impact of fast food, consider that McDonald's is responsible for ninety percent of the new jobs in the United States; the Golden Arches is a more recognizable symbol world-wide than the Cross; the typical American consumes three hamburgers and four orders of fries each week; and from an order of fries priced at \$1.50, a potato farmer receives about two cents (pp. 4-6, 117).

Schlosser's statistics come alive through his use of story. He introduces us to migrant workers exploited by meat-packing companies, children who have died from food poisoning after eating fast food, fast food employees who receive the lowest wages permissible by law with no benefits, restau-

rant executives who fight every proposal to increase the minimum wage, and advertising executives who market unhealthy fast food to vulnerable children. In addition to presenting the problems, Schlosser offers suggestions for changing them. His solutions are more specific, but overlap with Juengst's ideas of seeking justice. No one is forced to eat fast food, and the fast food industry will change its practices if its customers demand it.

If we simply boycott fast food restaurants, we will not address the deeper issues of justice, compassion, and community. Instead, we must address some difficult questions: Why, in our society, is it a cultural phenomenon (of which the fast food industry is only one example) that a cheap product, prepared as quickly as possible and with almost no regard for the welfare of the people who prepare or consume it, becomes the industry standard? And, are we in the church willing to change this?

Of course, we should not ignore the fact that innovations in food technology have made positive impacts on society: many more people can be fed; women in particular have more freedom to pursue endeavors outside the home; and we're more interrelated with other regions of the world. Yet, to better nourish ourselves, our families, and the society in physical, emotional, and spiritual ways, some changes in our current priorities may be necessary. Individual actions will not be enough to solve the alienation we experience with regard to food; we must be willing to change our attitude regarding food.

Each of the books discussed here, by offering ways to reconnect to our friends, family, local community, and God, guide us to live better in the world without uncritically adopting its values. Fast food may provide an occasional welcome break in our journeys, but visiting locally owned restaurants, gathering for simple meals with friends, and sharing picnics with our families in the park will make our lives richer.



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