What Makes Food Sacred?

Congregational Resources

for the

Abrahamic Traditions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF WHAT MAKES FOOD SACRED
A study in 8 Dimensions

The following is a discussion of what makes food sacred according to the three Abrahamic traditions. It is organized according to eight dimensions, some of which were mentioned in the article above. It covers a wide spectrum of issues wherein there is some disagreement. The term "dimension" is deliberately used to express the existence of a range of different views and teachings within each of the traditions. Each of the eight dimensions are drawn from four sets of sources from the classic texts of the three traditions: The Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, the Christian Scriptures or New Testament, and the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Points of agreement and strands of difference

Preface: The Web of Life.

We celebrate God's creation of a self-sustaining web of life in which plants, animals, land, water, air, and human beings are interwoven. There are many relationships in this web that can heal or damage the web itself. Among these, food production is one of the more significant forces. So we must choose ways of producing food that protect and heal the web of life.

Dimension 1. Growing Food in Ways that Protect and Heal the Web of Life

Food production, as one of the more significant forces in the natural world, affects the delicate balance of plants, animals, human beings, land, water and air – interdependent in seeking sustenance and survival. Farming and grazing together occupy one quarter of the world's lands and are the leading cause of deforestation and loss of natural lands. In order to maintain this balance for future generations, we human beings must choose to produce our food in ways that protect the web of life, preserve the living spaces that other life-forms need, and learn to use methods that return vibrant health to our soil and water. Some strands of our traditions focus on finding ways to produce food for an ever growing human population without continuing to encroach on natural and sensitive areas, and others focus on limiting human populations.

Dimension 2. Humane Treatment of animals

All our traditions agree that animals must be treated humanely and their suffering minimized. Some strands of our traditions focus on using animals for food through methods of maintenance and slaughter that minimize suffering; others suggest vegetarianism.

Dimension 3. Protecting the integrity and diversity of life

The ways in which we produce food must respect the integrity and diversity of the world's plants and animals, as well as taking active steps to prevent the extinction of animal species and plant Some strands of our traditions emphasize concern for the integrity of the genetic line of plants and animals; others strongly

encourage putting considerable effort into increasing food production and developing the health-giving properties of foods. Even when these values may seem to conflict, our choices should be guided by the principles listed above.

Dimension 4. No One Should Go Hungry

All our traditions share a strong commitment that no one should go hungry at the end of the day. This applies especially to the poor and times of famine. Everyone should have access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally customary food. Each local community and the world-wide human community acting in concert share the responsibility for ending hunger and famine. Our traditions present a range of opinions about how best to do this. Most strands strongly encourage very localized and decentralized approaches (e.g. gleaning); some strands describe highly centralized approaches (e.g. Joseph's solution to famine in Egypt). It seems likely that both approaches will be taken in today's world, though the question remains whether it is better that we aim policy toward one over the other or strive for a balance between them.

Dimension 5. Fairness toward and empowerment of workers

All our traditions agree that workers must be treated fairly, justly and humanely. One out of every six people works to provide the food we eat – in the fields and in food transport, in restaurants and food preparation, and in food stores. We affirm their right to decent incomes, working conditions, and to organize themselves.

Dimension 6: Responsible and ethical forms of business

All our traditions require that we act honestly, fairly, to the benefit of others, and in accordance with the ethical teachings of our faith traditions when dealing with customers, employees, partners, and the communities in which we conduct business. These relationships must be accessible to public scrutiny and accountability. The specifics of how we conduct responsible and ethical business relationships, as well as the meaning and implications of accountability to the public, may be reflected in different ways by the various strands in our traditions.

Dimension 7. Food as an Aspect of Spirituality

All our traditions affirm that food is an element in spiritual celebration and experience. Whenever we eat, we consciously affirm that eating is a sacred spiritual practice which celebrates the delicate interplay of plants, animals and people, land, air, and water that makes this possible and we commit ourselves again to maintaining this creation. All our traditions affirm that specific times and practices of great religious significance, such as Passover, the Mass, and Eid al-Adha, include food as a central element. Some of our traditions affirm that for religious reasons, certain foods may be forbidden to eat and others encouraged, either all the time or at specific times.

Dimension 8. Reflection on our Actions and Impact

The rhythm of Action and Reflection, renewed Action and renewed Reflection, is encouraged in our traditions in such forms as Sabbaths, Ramadan, and Lent, as well as other holidays when we refrain from our daily work and reflect on our roles in the web of life. Meaningful observance of these occasions can be expanded to include reflection on and assessment of the impact of human activity on the integrity of the web of life. In different ways, our traditions may choose to encourage reviews, similar to "environmental impact assessments," when considering whether to endorse new approaches to providing food. Some version of what is called the "precautionary principle," analogous to the medical code's, "First do no harm," could be taken into account, while still encouraging the development of new technologies and social arrangements.

Coda: New Era of Religious Life?

This Sacred Foods enterprise itself – because it draws strength from both interfaith, and inter-secular/faith interactions -- signals something of a new era in religious life. At that level and in many other arenas, Modernity is having a major impact on the self-understanding of the religious traditions. Indeed, Modernity is affecting both technology and social structures in ways that may require us to rethink some of the teachings of the past. Major changes in previous religious wisdoms have often accompanied major social and technological upheavals. That occurred when the impact of Roman/Hellenistic civilization opened hearts and minds to the new revelations of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity about two thousand years ago, and when social change in Arabia opened hearts and minds to the new revelations of Islam1400 years ago. After the Sacred Foods project reaches agreement and establishes leadership in areas that the Eight Dimensions easily point us toward (like support for sustainably grown food, grown, packaged and distributed with fair labor standards), we might choose to tackle some larger and more complicated questions. For example, one of the major ways in which Modernity challenges and is challenged by the traditional outlooks of our communities is that the traditions lean toward providing food mostly through decentralized, local, and neighborly means. Modernity often looks toward global/ corporate ways of providing food. We face the question of whether to treat the focus on local means as a crucial and eternally wise teaching, or to treat it as historically conditioned, while absorbing global / corporate arrangements so long as they meet other traditional values. On these and perhaps on other questions, we will need to keep seeking to distinguish eternal wisdom from temporally conditioned history, as we draw on the religious and spiritual teachings of the past.

What follows are short essays on the holiness of food from several faith traditions.

ISLAM AND SACRED FOOD

Mazhar Hussaini

Islam is a primordial religion of mankind, having been consistently revealed by the One and Only Creator to the first man and the first prophet, Adam, for the guidance of mankind. It was revised and refined through human history as revealed to Prophet Noah, Prophet Abrahim, Prophet Moses, Prophet Jesus, and Prophet Muhammad, for the guidance of man at various stages of the development of mankind. Islam in its present form is a complete and comprehensive way of life, relevant to all people, at all times, and in all places.

Islam is a universal religion and its 1.2 Billion followers (Muslims), are a part of different nationalities, societies, races, and geographical backgrounds, constituting one world Muslim community (Ummah). Because of this diversity, Muslims have contributed to the food habits of the world's many cultures. Muslims eat the same food of the region they belong to. Nonetheless, their food selection is determined by the injunctions and regulations of Islam, as outlined in the Qur'an and explained by the traditions (Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad.

In Islam, every thing one says or does, in accordance with the commandments of God (Allah), as revealed in the Qur'an, and carried out in the manner of the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah), becomes the worship of Allah and hence is considered sacred.

The food that is permitted by divine decree is called, "HALAL", and the food that is forbidden is called, "HARAM". In Islam, every thing is Halal (sacred), except the things that are specifically forbidden (Haram) by a divine injunction or a Prophetic traditon (Sunnah). Only six categories of food and drinks are forbidden. They are: Alcohol (and Drugs); Blood; Carnivorous animals and the birds of prey; Dead animals/birds; Immolated foods to other deity; and Swine. Any food with all halal ingredients that is devoid of any haram items is considered sacred.

Since, eating, like any other act of a Muslim, is an act of worship, it begins with a supplication, asking God to bless the food/drink. After completing the meal, Muslims praise and thank God.

Fasting in the month of Ramadan (9th month of Islamic lunar calendar) is observed all over the world by every adult, sane, able, and resident Muslim. Fasting involves abstinence from three primal human needs - food, drink, and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset. Fasting is an act of obedience and submission to Allah through the highest degree of commitment, sincerity, and faithfulness. The purpose of fasting is to seek Allah's mercy, atone sins, errors and mistakes, and to avoid condemnation to Hell. The fasting person experiences the pangs of hunger and thirst, consequently empathizing with the poor and needy.

Islam, being the religion of nature (Fitrah), allows its followers to experience the pleasure, joy, and gaiety of festivals and celebrations. Islam has two main festivals, namely the Feast of Fast Breaking (Eid ul Fitr) and the Feast of Sacrifice (Eid ul Adha). The Feast of Fast Breaking marks the completion of the month of Fasting (Ramadan). The Feast of Sacrifice (Eid ul Adha) is celebrated on the tenth day of the last month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Eid ul Adha is celebrated in commemoration of the great sacrifice of Prophet Abrahim. He offered the life of his (then) only son Ismail at the command of Allah. These festivals are celebrated on the same days by all the Muslims all over the world glorifying and thanking Allah in the form of congregational prayer, exhibiting Muslim brotherhood and the solidarity of one Muslim Ummah.

In addition to these two festivals, other special festivities such as the Festivity of the Newly Born (Aqeeqah) and the Festivity of the Wedding (Waleemah) are celebrated. Celebration of special occasions such as Harvest, Literacy Initiation (Bismillah) of Muslim children, etc., have also been traditionally accepted in Islamic culture.

The Islamic celebrations are marked with two distinct features: thankfulness to Allah, expecting a worshipful attitude from the participants, and fostering and strengthening of social relations among the members of the community.

In Islam, there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular. The fulfillments of the rights of self, the rights of the people, and the rights of the environment, are as sacred as the fulfillment of the rights of Allah.

THE KOSHER PATHWAY: FOOD AS GOD-CONNECTION IN THE LIFE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow

The People Israel began its relationship with the sacredness of food as an indigenous community in its own land, by offering local food in sacred shrines as a primary way of connecting to God.

The Hebrew word usually translated as "sacrifice" or "offering" is *korban*, which literally means, "what is brought near." A word from the same root means "innards," and the *korban* was what brought God near to the most inward part of the human body.

The foods that brought God as near as physically/spiritually possible included beef and mutton as well as barley, wheat, leavened and unleavened bread, pancakes, olive oil, various fruits, wine, and water.

Varied configurations of these *korbanot* or "nearings" were celebrated at sunrise and sunset, the new moon, every seventh day as a day of rest, and sacred festivals connected to the spring and autumn harvests. These "nearings" were also used to restore personal equanimity by expiating guilt, celebrating joy, and addressing other moments of spiritual disturbance.

Sometimes these foods were "turned into smoke upon the altar." In this way, as smoke that joined with air, they also joined with the Breath of Life, the Inter-breathing of all life that may have been evoked by the divine name "YHWH." (Try pronouncing these four letters with no vowels. Most people find what emerges is the rush of a breath or of the wind. In Hebrew, the word *ruach* means "breath," "wind," and "spirit" -- just as *pneuma* does in Greek, *spiritus* in Latin.)

More often, however, these foods were given to the Priests, their assistants--the Levites, and to the poor, landless, orphans and "resident sojourners" to eat. Since Priests and Levites had no land of their own to cultivate, they were amongst the categories of people that would have nothing to eat without the food from these "nearings" and from the gleanings the poor were entitled to gather from the fields of every landholder.

In addition to the practice of sacrifice that defined food as the sacred channel for bringing us near to God, some specific foods were defined as sacred and some as forbidden. Endless debates have been engendered over the specifics of this regimen – why the meat of pigs, camels, crabs, and hawks was prohibited while that of sheep, goats, cows, doves, chickens, and tuna was permitted. To some extent, the forbidden animals were predators, carnivores, and omnivores, while those permitted were more likely to be herbivores and/or domesticated animals. There was a tendency toward what might be called "vicarious vegetarianism" --eating mostly creatures whose own diet was made up of plants. There is in fact

evidence in some of the sacred texts of a wistful memory of a time, past or future, when human beings might eat only plants.

Some have also argued that the permitted foods came from creatures strongly connected with living on the land, or in the sea, or in the air – as against amphibians or insects that might cross these boundaries. It is argued that since the creation legends of the Israelites distinguished and emphasized these three domains, eating from these distinctive domains was a way for human beings to affirm or even join in the process of Creation.

Whatever one thinks of such efforts to explain the content of the code of permissible foods, it is clear that the regimen itself put great emphasis on knowing that choices of food were sacred decisions.

As part of this process of connection with God through food, the land as well as the people were entitled and obligated to pause from work every seventh day, every seventh year, and an extra year after the seventh cycle of seven years. In those years, the community ate from what had been stored and from free-will gathering of food that grew on its own, without sowing or harvesting.

All this affirmed and gave physical reality to the collective Israelite assertion that no human being, not even the human community as a whole, owned the land: Only God, YHWH, the Interbreathing of all life, owned the earth.

This system of sacred foods reached its apogee in the great spring festival of Pesach, or Passover. It seems to have sprung from a festival of shepherds, celebrating the birth of new lambs, and a festival of farmers, celebrating the sprouting of barley. As tokens of these celebrations (later redefined to fit into celebration of the spring-like uprising of the people against slavery and Pharaoh), the eating of leavened bread was prohibited, the eating of unleavened bread was required, and the *korban* of roasted lambs was also required.

Starting over, rebirth, was the focus: Bread must be the simplest food a farmer could make: grain and water and heat, without yeast or flavoring. Meat must be the simplest a herdsman could make: new lamb roasted on a fire, not even water would be used to boil it. No raw meat and no raw vegetables were included, for human beings are technological animals. These were the foods from the dawn of fire and farming.

This process was interrupted for about seventy years by the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire. But even before then, the channels of God's wisdom who became canonized as the Prophets began to speak out for other ways of connecting with God.

Some of the Prophets excoriated the assumption that offerings of food could bring God near if the society did not insist on justice, on sharing the abundance

of food from the land, on sacred rest for workers and owners alike from the toil of producing. Others began to speak of offering words – what came out of the mouth as well as what went into it—as a way of connecting with God.

But it took the triumph of Roman/Hellenistic civilization in economics, politics, science, philosophy, and weaponry to shatter the whole system of food-and-body Judaism enshrined in the Hebrew Bible. As the economy of the Mediterranean basin was transformed, more and more Jews lived far too far from the Jerusalem Temple to bring their food there as "nearings" for God. The foods they ate were no longer from a small strip of land along the eastern Mediterranean, but from such great bread-baskets as Egypt and from their own locales. Fewer and fewer Jews had political control over the land policy of the societies where they lived, and therefore could not celebrate sabbatical years or other physical ways of reaffirming God's ownership of the earth.

Moreover, the use of words of prayer and study as a way of making Divine connection became more and more attractive as Jews watched and learned from Hellenistic philosophers.

This process of divorce from the "nearing" of food as the most sacred practice was made full and final by the Roman Empire's destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and the decimation of the Jewish population of the Land of Israel after the Roman repression of the Bar Kochba Revolt, in 135 CE.

What we now call Rabbinic Judaism emerged from this crisis. It preserved the celebration of food in a much lesser way and elevated the use of words to a much greater one.

The mouth remained the locus of God-connection. But the emergence of the notion of *Torah sheh baal peh* – literally, "Torah through the power of the mouth," or "the oral Torah," was Torah of words, not food. This "Oral Torah" was said to emerge alongside with and intertwined with the Written Torah, from the word-study of skilled interpreters over the centuries from Sinai on and into the future forever and in every land.

But food was not forgotten. The rabbis taught that with the Holy Altar gone, the dinner table in every Jewish home was now an altar. While the specific rituals of the Altar were mostly not transferred to every kitchen, the elaborateness of the sacred "nearings" was transformed into elaborate rules that went far beyond the biblical limits on what to eat.

A few mysterious biblical lines about "not boiling a kid in the milk of its mother" were interpreted into a vast network of rules for how to separate milk and all its products and utensils from those of meat. Rules for the ritual slaughter of animals permissible for meat likewise became extraordinarily elaborate.

Alongside the legal requirements of what to eat and not eat for Passover grew up strong customs of what to eat to mark each festival: oil-fried pancakes and doughnuts to honor the consecration of oil at Hanukkah; fruits and nuts and wine in carefully ordered series for Tu B'Shvat; rebirth-day of the trees; apples dipped in honey for the sweet new round cycle of the year for Rosh Hashanah; and so on.

In our own generation, the impact of modernity on rabbinic Judaism has in some ways replicated, even gone beyond, the impact of the Roman/Hellenistic civilization of biblical Israel. In the arena of food as in others, this has shattered much of the old system and is beginning to sow seeds of new possibility.

For example, the smallest proportion of the Jewish people in rabbinic history now adheres to the official rules of kosher food in its own eating. Yet out of the economic and cultural clout of even a minority of Jews has grown a pantry of kosher-certified commercial foods eaten by millions of non-Jews -- in numbers that would have been an utter astonishment to Jews of the last three thousand years.

And the world-wide ecological crisis created by the actions of the human race in the last few generations of modernity has begun to raise concerns among Jews as well as other communities, for how to redefine what food is proper and sacred to grow and to eat. Questions about the use of pesticides and of genomic engineering; of the burning of fossil fuels to transport foods across the planet, meanwhile disturbing the whole climatic context in which the foods are grown; the misuse of topsoil and the use of long-term poisonous fertilizers; the effects of massive livestock breeding on production of a potent global-scorching gas, methane -- all these have raised profound new questions.

These questions are global in scale and are not for Jews alone. And so there has arisen another radical departure from the conventions of previous Jewish life: Consultations in which Jews join with others to refine and redefine these questions.

The new technologies of modern life have thrust upon the Jewish community still another unexpected question: Should the category "kosher" be reserved for food alone, for what we literally put into our mouths and gullets? – Or would it make sense in our generation to apply the basic concept to other products of the earth, other forms of "eating" – consuming? If the whole notion of "kosher" food emerged when most human beings were farmers and herdsfolk, eating food, should there be a new kind of "kosher" for a world in which human beings also "eat"/consume coal, oil, uranium? Should we attempt to imagine an "eco-kosher" code for consuming not only food but also all that an abundant and partially depleted earth produces?

Through the peculiar history and theology in which the Jews preserve both a sense of indigenous earth-connected peoplehood and a sense of worldwide

presence and significance, can the Jewish attention to food as a crucial means of connection with God play an unusually useful role in the future of the human race and planet earth?

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Eating Theology

Clint Schnekloth

All Christians think about eating. I'm contemplating the preparation of a mid-morning snack even as I write this. Many Christians say grace before they eat, in this way locating the act of eating doxologically. And some may practice certain vestigial forms of fasting, like eating fish (fry!) on Fridays, or foregoing chocolate during Lent. But I believe it is safe to say that most of us—with the exception of some vegetarians—do not reflect theologically and in detail on the ethics of eating itself.

A quick review of the social statements of my own denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, reveals that our church has adopted several excellent statements on sustainability and livelihood (so that people can eat) and care of creation and "the land" (which is the source of all that we eventually eat), but no social statement on food and eating per se. A glance at the list of Bishops' Statements from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops re-affirms this observation. At least one statement is on "Food Policy in a Hungry World" but here again the focus of the social statement is on distribution and production, aiming towards the alleviation of hunger and malnutrition. I have not been able to locate social statements from these bodies that address the ethics of eating itself. Neither of our churches has turned the conversation around quite in the way Wendell Berry did when he said, "Eating is an agricultural act."

To find more sustained reflection on eating, one would need to read literature in biblical exegesis and sacramental theology, especially material related to the Eucharist. Our continuing concern for ritualized forms of eating has its origins in the Scriptural witness. What we eat, how we eat it, and how it is prepared, all are important concerns in the history of Israel. Think of the Passover, or the number of *mitzvot* in the Torah related to diet and the ritual preparation of food. These laws were of no small concern to the early Christian community, because historically they had been some of the defining marks of the people of God. When Jesus eats grain gleaned from a field with his disciples on the Sabbath, his actions bring the community back to fundamental questions of the law, especially who and what the law is for (Matthew 12). He later proceeds to re-define what defiles a person, proclaiming that it is not what goes into the mouth as food and into the stomach that defiles, but what comes out of the mouth (words) and proceeds from the heart (Matthew 15).

The Christian community's new position vis-à-vis food is recapitulated in Peter's vision in Acts 10-11. Jesus' new command regarding purity is stated directly by God to Peter in a dream—"What God has made clean you must not call profane." Clearly, something new is happening. Peter is encouraged to eat these foods in his dream not simply for the sake of reconfiguring Jewish dietary law, but because it is a way forward for full table fellowship with the Gentiles. What God calls clean (certain heretofore forbidden foods) Peter hears as a gospel message

freeing him to relate to the “unclean” Gentile Cornelius. The consistent theme, beginning in the gospels and the witness of Jesus, continuing in Acts through the actions of the early Christian community, and then reaffirmed by Paul in his epistles, is that the Christian community is subject to new dietary laws and freedoms precisely because the Christian community now embraces people groups previously excluded under the “old” covenant.

The most exacting text on this is Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth. His is a complicated argument, and I hope readers will refer to a good commentary to explore the issue further (see, for example, Gordon Fee’s commentary in New International Commentaries on the New Testament). For our purposes, it is sufficient to point out the two fundamental questions that occupy Paul. First, in chapter 8, Paul asks: Can Christians eat food sacrifice to idols? His answer is clear, if also indicative of the paradox of Christian freedom. Yes, Christians *can* eat food sacrificed to idols, but if it wounds the conscience of others, then the Christian who is free to eat such food will not and should not for the sake of those who are weak.

The second question related to food comes later, in chapter 11. Here, the question is: Is the Lord’s table truly the Lord’s table if there are divisions among those who gather? In the case of the Corinthians, apparently some were going hungry, while others ate sumptuously. Paul says that those who eat and drink at this table without discerning the body (in this case taken as the body of believers, not the real presence), eat and drink condemnation against themselves.

These two basic questions remind us that the issues of food, idolatry, and community run close together. The early Christians needed to know when they could eat with non-Christians, some of whom routinely ate food sacrifice to idols. They needed to know about the ethical ramifications of the source and handling of the food they ate. They also needed to know how to eat together in such a way that they were faithful through their meal to the one who had established the meal.

These are our contemporary questions as well. Granted, the cultural contexts are quite different. I don’t know anyone who believes that the food they purchase at the grocery store was offered as sacrifice to idols. Nor do I know any churches where a certain group within the congregation drinks fine wine during worship while the poorer members go without.

Nevertheless, resonances exist. If we take the concept of idol sacrifice and translate it into our 21st century worldview, it is apparent that we offer up sacrifices to certain “idols” all the time. We agree with Paul that “no idol in the world really exists” (1 Cor. 8:4). But we acknowledge as a faith community that there are many false gods in our life of which we are frequently unrepentant or unaware. These idols may include things like the free market economy, or the nation state, or the particular brand or consumer product that we trust to bring us

healing, satisfaction, and joy. They might also include our own desire for comfort, or even more subtle and damning, our desire not to have to reflect ethically on our consumer choices. The false god of the present age may be the god of indifference.

Furthermore, we know that when we buy and consume certain foods, we have purchased food that was grown and harvested through the underpaid labor of fellow Christians. It is ethically untenable to underpay anybody for their work, but if we follow the logic of Paul's argument in the 11th chapter of 1st Corinthians, it is especially sinful for us to eat abundant and lush foods while those who partake of the same body (Christ) go without. Indeed, it may be why there is sickness and dis-ease in our communities.

These rudimentary reflections should establish sufficiently in our minds that the ethics of eating are considered frequently and in some detail in the biblical witness. This being the case, we can turn to our own context and life together to reflect further on how and what we are called to eat.

Most Christians or churches do have a latent or unspoken theology of food. Witness the potluck, or the traditions maintained in churches across the country of bake sales, food pantries, lefse fests, lutefisk dinners, barbecues, pancake breakfasts, world hunger appeal Sundays. Christian people the world over know that it is good to eat together, it is good and right to celebrate the kinds of food we eat together, and it is especially good and important to help provide food for those who otherwise would go hungry. They also believe, ostensibly, that it is good to invite those from outside the church to eat with them, at least at certain times.

Some Christian communities have also emphasized fasting as an important practice in the Christian life. Interestingly, though, this fasting has, by and large, been an outgrowth of the penitential disciplines of the community and individual believers, rather than in the service of those who produce or prepare the foods. A great case in point is 30 Hour Famine (www.30hourfamine.org). This international youth movement is designed to raise awareness of world hunger issues. Youth participants raise money to *give away* to hunger-related charities. I have yet to see a 30 Hour Feast, where participants eat exclusively fairly traded, locally grown, and organically produced food, and give no money away because they actually paid the right price for what they were eating.

I believe that at least one reason for this situation is that, although much has been written on the ethics of land and crop stewardship and the fair distribution of food to those who lack it, there is little theological reflection in the church on the act of eating itself. Take for example the hard sell fair trade coffee and chocolate has been in many congregations. Although by some measures fairly traded coffee has been a success, this has been due in large part to steady (some might even say persistent or nagging) teaching and preaching on the part of lay leaders

and clergy in congregations. I've had the experience of trying to introduce fairly traded coffee in three different congregations, and each time, there was considerable resistance to the idea, primarily because of the cost. The same people who give money to Lutheran World Relief prefer to purchase Folgers coffee in bulk because it costs less than fairly traded coffee from Equal Exchange (http://www.lwr.org/coffee/index.asp) or the Mt. Meru Coffee Project (http://www.mtmerucoffee.org). We have been conditioned so long to think of care of the neighbor in terms of benevolence rather than fair and just dealings that we are actually inured to the idea that our purchasing is a moral action. We assume buying is morally neutral.

In fact, because so many of us have taken the availability of cheap and abundant food for granted for so long, we have turned it into a moral responsibility to buy the cheapest things we can find. It is for many an example of moral uprightness and thrift to cut every coupon, shop for the lowest price, shop at the lowest priced stores, etc.

As a result, any alternative to the free market economy is looked at as itself morally suspect. Because we have gorged ourselves on freely traded products, fair trade is a difficult pill to swallow. We have so structured our spending habits around the assumption that abundant and inexpensive food, always present in diversity at any time of year, is a good thing and an inalienable right. The same people who happily give money away to world hunger organizations stumble on the idea that their own purchasing and consumption is a moral decision with theological implications. I myself am still a potential target for this complaint.

Furthermore, and more to the point of an actual ethic of *eating*, cheapest is not always best, or even that good. This is certainly true of coffee. The demand for cheap coffee beans was so rampant in the 20th century United States that few Americans even knew what a quality cup of coffee tasted like. The same is true of fresh produce. Our economy is so focused on keeping tomatoes present in the store year round that we have abandoned any concern for whether the tomatoes actually taste good. The recent proliferation of small batch coffee roasters, farmers' markets, chocolatiers, and organic gardening, is an indication of a slight reversal of this trend towards cheap mediocrity.

This past summer, my wife and I joined a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) just outside of Stoughton, Wisconsin. We spent many summer afternoons visiting with the farmer and his staff, and socialized with other members of the CSA when we picked up our fresh box of organic produce each week. Sometimes we even stopped out to pick our own vegetables, thereby getting dirt under our nails. The food we did receive, when it was in season, was delightful. I learned, for example, how to cook using green garlic.

For the most part, participating in the CSA was enlivening, but there were some downsides. Since our investment in a share with the CSA was substantial, we

chose not to purchase non-local, non-organic produce from the grocery store. So we had to go without some of our favorite vegetables if they weren't in season. It was especially difficult when we wanted broccoli for our stir-fry to remember that the purchasing of broccoli out of season shipped from who-knows-where is an ethical choice with theological implications. Sometimes you just get a hankering for broccoli.

So we had to decide how much of a sacrifice we were willing to endure in order to bring our eating habits more closely in line with our ideals. I confess, many times each week we still fail to eat food that supports our ideals. Sometimes we don't even know where our food came from or who cooked it! Nevertheless, I am convinced that it is practices like membership in a local CSA, and being attentive to where our food is from, who grew it, how the workers were paid, how they care for the land, how they grow and care for that which they produce, that should be at the heart of any theology of eating, and it is incumbent on our churches and bishops to help us be attentive.

This kind of attentiveness will make us better eaters in two ways. First of all, it will bring the Christian tradition to bear on our eating habits. Second, it will help us actually taste our food, and the food, because it is lovingly grown and prepared, will indeed taste better!

Since the theology of eating is such a fledgling science, it would be impossible to provide any kind of systematic or exhaustive account. Instead, I will conclude this article by simply pointing you in the direction of three resources I myself have found helpful in exploring the ethics and theology of food.

Shannon Jung, in his recent book, *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating*, has helped me begin a journey of greater attention to the spirituality of eating. He begins his book with the assertion that those who read his book will enjoy their lives more. That's quite a claim. But he is right, because mindfulness and enjoyment of our food—as opposed to the mindless consumption of forgettable meals—discipline us in encountering God's goodness, giving thanks, and enjoying God. Jung is not unaware that on a personal and global level, our relationship to food is disordered. He takes time in the book to reflect theologically on personal eating disorders like anorexia, as well as global disorders like rampant and pervasive hunger. These disorders arise, according to Jung, out of a lack of theological imagination, where theology gets disconnected from the body. They arise also out of our interconnected sinfulness, which affects us on a corporate as well as a personal level.

His solution is, in a way homeopathic. Take the very thing that ails you. After your awareness has been raised regarding the many ways your relationship to food is disordered, then confess it, and enter into means whereby it can be transformed. The two activities for transformation recommended by Jung are gardening and cooking.

The Slow Food movement (www.slowfoodusa.org), though secular in its origins, is a great resource for examining some of the practices that may be at the heart of a Christian theology of eating. Some examples from the organization's web site include the encouragement to: join a local convivium (a convivial small group); trace your food sources; visit a local farmers' market; join a CSA; invite a friend over to share a meal; visit a farm in your area; create a new food memory for a child; start a kitchen garden; and learn your local food history.

I am convinced that food is not only an ethical *justice* issue, it is also an ethical *enjoyment* issue. God cares about the good, the true, and the *beautiful*. We are responsible for the land, for our neighbors, for just economic policies, and so on. But we are also called to enjoy the gifts we have been given, and to do so graciously. This means first of all that we are called always to say grace before we eat, because God has graciously given to us, and the food graciously becomes gift to us. But we are also called, like Babette in *Babette's Feast*, to graciously and abundantly enjoy the gifts we have been given, even to gratuitously bestow possibly unrecognized and under-appreciated abundance on others. Food is one simple yet beautiful way to do this.

Finally, although I am not (yet) a practicing vegetarian, some of the most thoughtful literature on the ethics of eating does argue compellingly for the vegetarian option. J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* is a fictional account of a series of lectures given by Elizabeth Costello (a fascinating fictional persona created by Coetzee, and the namesake of one of his more recent novels) on the issue of animal rights and the moral obligation of vegetarianism. No book of which I am aware better portrays the complexity (should I say awkwardness?) of the conversation that ensues when omnivores and vegetarians sit down together to eat. Why don't they eat this? Should I eat this? What should we talk about?

A more expressly theological work on the same topic, making similar arguments explicitly from the Christian tradition, is Stephen H. Webb's *Good Eating*. He has famously remarked that "the unexamined meal is not worth eating," and he constructs a doctrine of Christian vegetarianism in eschatological perspective, grounded in Scripture and the early church fathers. If you are hoping to avoid reading such books because you want to keep eating and enjoying meat, I sympathize. Nevertheless, to disregard the argument is a sign of a lack of our grace and gratefulness for what has been given to us to eat, and care for, by God. Consider reading one or both books as your Lenten discipline, thereby freeing yourself to enjoy chocolate throughout the forty days.

Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating, L. Shannon Jung, Fortress Press, 2004
The Lives of Animals, JM Coetzee, Princeton University Press, 2001
Good Eating, Stephen H. Webb, Brazos Press, 2001.
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Table Talk: Ethics of Eating

Brother David Andrews, CSC

This is a talk about food, tables, and a talk about talking.

A few years ago, Christopher Loetscher (Office of Social Concerns, Diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota) developed a discussion exercise for small groups in a parish setting. "We converse, eat and learn to share around the family table," he said, and recalling these habits and "manner" can help us to connect family life, Christian life and civic life.

Think about your community's table, where the community's work gets done. Think about the social, economic, political life of your community -- the table wider than your family table.

What is the greatest injustice in the local community? What rules ought to be enacted to enforce or counter this injustice? What can be done to enact or enforce these rules? The aim of politics is the realization of justice and peace. Politics is the art of seeking and fostering the common good. Politics establishes the rules whereby people work, compete, raise families, and share the benefits and burdens of society. These rules are either just or unjust. The goods and services available or needed in the community are like the food present or lacking on a family's table. Public policy helps or hinders people as they present themselves at the common table and seek their just share of the table fare. And so we say, "money talks." "What goes around, comes around." "It's not right!" 'Special interests have too much power." "They never listen to us."

Think about the table of the Lord.

Who is called to the Lord's table? Does Christ have any expectations of his disciples when they gather at his table? How are disciples expected to treat one another? Consider the actions at the table of the Lord: assembling, singing, hungering for the Word, listening, expressing gratitude and wonder, blessing bread, breaking bread, sharing bread, eating bread, drinking the fruit of the vine, remembering the example we've been given and being sent to the world, to love it, and transform it. "We say to each other: "Love your neighbor as yourself." "Remember, as long as you did it to one of these, the little ones, you did it to me." "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall see God." "Do unto others as I have done to you." "This is my body, this is my blood." "Take and eat."

Our table fellowship reminds us that we are created in God's image to be sons and daughters of God, brother and sister to one another in Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. We have personal dignity. We are called to participation in Community to seek the common good. The goods of creation are meant for all, that all might flourish. We are called to be good and just stewards of creation.

Through our work, we are called to continuing participation in God's creation. Those who are weak, sick, or poor are entitled to particular attention.

Think about your tables, family tables, community tables, faith tables. Who eats? How is food prepared? How is it shared? And who gets to talk? What do they say? Tables are for eating and tables are for talking. Eating is a moral act. We shape each other and our world at our tables: family tables, community tables, faith tables.

Our choices create our tables, our food, our talk.

The stories of the people of God are often stories of land, people and food. Consider Genesis and the story of Adam and Eve. They were given the responsibility to tend the garden and to keep it. They were given the responsibility to care for all of creation. Evil’s entry into the world in the scriptures was described as a decision to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Responsibility and choice was associated with the act of eating. Similarly, when Jesus was to choose to accept or reject the direction that his Father had chosen for himself that choice was identified by the drinking of a cup. "Let this cup pass from me." This was the voice of Jesus. Eating and responsible decision- making are thus conjoined in the life of Jesus. Eating becomes a symbol of deciding, of responsible decision making. As eating can symbolize responsible choice, so too eating can itself demonstrate moral behavior. Eating is a moral act.

Eating is significant not only to personal behavior and individual actions. It is also related to a social order, to a food system. Consider the story of Joseph at the end of the book of Genesis. At first this story is one of fraternal conflict and jealousy when Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt. But, while in Egypt, Joseph demonstrates his managerial expertise gets noticed by the Pharaoh who puts Joseph in charge of his food policy. Joseph takes the land of all who abide in Egypt in exchange for seed and food. Readily people allow themselves to give up their freedom in order to eat. The social order becomes centralized in Pharaoh's hands, managed by Joseph. Out of hunger people give themselves over to slavery. The social order in which slavery was an acceptable form of social order in recompense for hunger becomes a way of life in Egypt. To quote the scripture: "Joseph told the people: "Now that I have acquired you and your land for
Pharaoh, here is your seed for sowing the land…. And the people answered: "You have saved our lives!" They answered. "We are grateful to my lord that we can be Pharaoh's slaves." (Genesis 47: 23, 25) A food system can become a structure of unfreedom. Where God tells the Hebrews that he has created them to "tend and keep the garden." And that He has created humankind so that the human being could "stand erect." "To rise to full stature," as St.Paul says. We find structures of food production and consumption, which are systems of unfreedom, of slavery.

Remember the table of the Lord? How he washed the feet of his disciples? How he asked us to remember his action…of feeding us with his body and blood? Remember how his table fellowship included a lying friend's life's decisive act--Judas' momentous meal. Remember how Jesus treated those who condemned him with dignity and kindness, but nonetheless with decisiveness: "It would have been better that he never have lived." "Today you will be with me in Paradise." The meal of suffering is also the meal of justice and love.

At the National Catholic Rural Life Conference we have a campaign directed at eaters, those who shape the structure of agriculture and the structure of our food system. By our choices we shape the world. Do you purchase food from retailers who support family farmers? Do you eat food that was grown by farmers who treated their animals with dignity and respect, who raised the animals humanely? Does your food come from Kansas's farmers or does it travel to get long distances to your table? Does your food habit contribute to global climate change? Is the food you eat part of a sustainable food system that contributes to the well being of unknown future generations, to a healthy environment, to a local community in a rural or urban area which has a great deal of vitality. Or will the food you eat come from a system which depopulates the countryside and demeans farmers, farm workers, food process workers, corporate executives and their families?

Eating is a moral act. We are what we eat! And we can ask ourselves who is at the table? What are they saying about the food system?

The picture shows a closeup of a farmer's hands.
He is wearing work gloves.
The hands are pressed together palm to palm and he holds them at waist level.

You do not see the farmer's face. Only his hands.
And wrapped around his gloved hands are strands of twisted barbed wire ---like a rope--- binding them like those of a prisoner or a slave.

This photograph is part of a campaign of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. It is an informational campaign meant to stimulate thinking about issues of justice in the production of our food and the people who labor to produce it.

The campaign is called,
"Eating is a Moral Act" and it attempts to open our eyes to see what we otherwise ignore:

To take note of deficiencies of justice in the midst of mounting riches.

To take note of the hard work of farming, the dangerous working of fishing, the tedious work of processing...all those raw and unsettling realities not reflected in

the soft glow of the candle light in fine restaurants; human realities blanched pale in the glaring convenience of fast food, economic oligopolies glossed over by plastic packaging by the handful of companies who control our eating at bargain prices and bargain basement wages.

"Look, take a good hard look at what you are overlooking!" This is the cry of all prophetic voices throughout the history of faith: to see what is otherwise ignored!

Though it is difficult to admit, we all have this tendency to overlook essential elements of justice. Whether it is the food we eat or the clothes we wear or the services we use we all have a tendency to take our comforts for granted.

We set a fine table for our fine foods and our refined talk. And on the other side of this otherwise innocuous tendency comes the surprised reaction when we are confronted with words warning us about the long-term results of our lack of attention.

This is our habit and it leads to sin,
the sin of overlooking
the wages paid
the pollution made
the plans laid by the rich
and those for whom the buck never stops.

My words carry a terrible sting
and our reaction is certainly predictable.
We quickly reach for some ointment to alleviate the pain
caused by these accusations.

Amidst the soft glow of candle lights at our dinner tables
we begin reciting the soothing mantras
of neo-liberal doctrine:
"It’s a global economy," we whisper to ourselves,
"free markets benefit everyone."

And the automatic ritual allows us
to better ignore disturbing reports
and pass over such facts that, since the passage of NAFTA,
the working poor in Mexico has climbed from 40% to 60% of the population.

We know many such chants.
Here is another one:
"The low wages of the maquiladores simply reflect
the lower standard of living in that country."

It’s a comforting verse.

It numbs the gnawing fact that the average wage of $5.00 a day in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico
must buy food that costs the same as across the river in El Paso, Texas.
We ignore many things at home as well.
We ignore the growing poverty in rural America.
We are ignorant of the loss of 300,000 family farms
in the last twenty years.

See the wages withheld from the people who work the land, says St. James Gospel,
Take a look at what you'd rather ignore!
But it's so distressing to be reminded of this, you say.
It's so frustrating to be aware of injustice
and not be able to do anything about it.

When Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople was, on one of those rare occasions, invited to the table of economic leaders in Davos, Switzeerland in 1999, he said the following:

We should first like to express our joy that this meeting of distinguished and dynamic economists, political figures, and other eminent dignitaries has included on the agenda of its discussions the human dimension of globalization of the economy, as well as non-economic values. There is no doubt that when ranking values the human person occupies a place higher than economic activity; neither is there any doubt that economic progress, which is present when there is growth in economic activity, becomes useful when -- and only when -- it serves to enhance the non-economic values that make up human culture. …

Unfortunately, globalization tends to evolve from a means of bringing the peoples of the world together as brothers and sisters, to a means of expanding economic dominance of the financial giants even over peoples to whom access was denied because of national borders and cultural barriers.

It is not our intention or responsibility to suggest ways and means by which this danger can be contained or eliminated. We do, however, have a duty to point out and proclaim that the highest pursuit of humanity is not economic enrichment or economic expansion.

The Gospel saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Mt.4:4), should be more broadly understood. We cannot live by economic development alone, but we must seek the "word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt.4:4), that is, the values and principles that transcend economic concerns. Once we accept these, the economy becomes a servant of humanity, not its master.

Would that the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City invited religious leaders to its discussions about the future of rural America. I suggest this to Mark

Drabenstott, the Director of the Center for the Study of Rural America and to Thomas Hoenig, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City for their next April meeting. Would that Seaboard invited religious leaders to speak with it across the table to consider the needs of Kansas as it moves to exploit its resources. Would that the land, air, water of Kansas were considered as gifts from God to thepeople of Kansas as a sacred trust and not simply as a resource reservoir. Would that the notion of community were considered as a value added entity. Would that the welfare of animals were considered as part of our stewardship responsibilities. Would that concerns of wheat farmers about GMO wheat be appreciated now that we've had Starlink and Aventis' problems with GMO corn. Would that a more holistic vision of Kansas were part of the table conversations about our food system.

Indeed, what is the purpose of this diatribe?
What can sincere people do in a world
where injustice exits and will always exists?
Why bring up these unpleasant facts?

These are valid protests.
Religious rites, worship services, are to be banquets of joy and peace.
Eating is a moral act, and sometimes a religious act.
Yet, the gratitude for holy food
and the salvation it brings
is fully expressed only when we remember
that unleavened bread was first eaten by slaves on the run
and the cup of some drink is a cup of suffering.

Just as I believe that Bread and Wine are transformed,
so are we transformed...
transformed into people of compassion,
people who see what others overlook,
people who can begin to trace the vague outlines
of the prophetic vision of the Reign of God
where justice and mercy embrace
and a grand table is set.

Where bankers sit next to farmers,
boarder guards converse with the undocumented
and ranchers share toasts with environmentalists.
Where work gloves lie next to linen napkins,
hands are scrubbed, feet are washed,
thirst is quenched, hunger satisfied
and there's no hint of injustice,
no whisper of enslavement,
no sign of barbed wire anywhere!

Eating is a moral act. Our tables need to include those who've been excluded. Our talk needs to include our farmers, their families, the rural communities, our environment, our landscape, our countryside, religious and moral values. We are what we eat. By our choices we shape our world. By our conversations, our talking, we influence others. Let us remember the challenge we have to shape a world of justice and peace.

Thank you.

AAR Pre-Conference SYMPOSIUM on "FOOD, FARMING AND FAITH" Nov. 17, 2006

Dieter T. Hessel

Food has always been a feature of religious rituals, fellowship, and injunctions to share. Religious leaders in agrarian societies paid close attention to how food was raised, harvested or slaughtered, sold and utilized. But today's monotheistic faith communities -- embedded in agriculturally industrialized, mass market society – have lost touch with their traditions.

The most basic teaching about food in the Christian tradition is the ethical priority that scripture gives to feeding the hungry and acting justly toward the poor. Making sure that everyone has enough food is the most prominent moral obligation at the center of the faith community's way of life. As Birch & Rasmussen put it in *The Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life* (Augsburg, 1989, 184) "The witness of both Old and New Testaments makes clear that concern for those who are forced to live a marginal existence in hunger and poverty is not an optional activity for the people of God." This is not a minor requirement to be met with token charities; it is a moral imperative "at the heart of what it means to the community of faith." In a similar vein consider the Jubilee vision in Leviticus (& in Luke's portrait of Jesus' ministry) that values sabbaticals for the land and justice to the poor – i.e., ECO-JUSTICE. Therefore, religious communities and faith-based NGOs must do much more than provide free meals or direct food relief, if they intend to respond to hunger and to overcome poverty.

As the mainline churches in North America began to realize more than 3 decades ago, Christians must get serious about the way food is subsidized, produced, processed, purchased, distributed, and consumed, and how the food system affects Earth, people and every other kind. Pursuing the subject of **Food, Farming and Faith** exposes the hard realities that corporate food production and marketing as well as government agriculture policies often mistreat land, workers, animals, & consumers; and constrict the options of small farmers and local communities worldwide.

So what have mainline (Protestant) churches, and networks or NGOs organized by progressive Christians, been doing in response, beyond providing emergency food aid and disaster relief? Let me point to several other basic aspects of creative, faithful engagement over recent decades by ecumenically cooperative denominations in the U.S.:

1. Educating about world hunger (including poverty & hunger in the U.S. and significant ways to respond. An early example of this is WHEAT ("World Hunger Education and Action Together", a multi-denominational project convened by the NCC in the 1970s that I actually chaired. It focused on causes of hunger and priority areas of church engagement (for which we raised funds, trained regional leaders, and urged denominational grants for):

Education and Interpretation
Direct food relief (communal and homeless feeding, food pantries)
Influencing Public Food Policy
Appropriate Development Assistance
Farm Worker Rights
Lifestyle Integrity

A much more recent example is the resource entitled *JUST EATING? Practicing our Faith at the Table,* developed by Church World Service and the Presbyterian Hunger Program (available from Presbyterian Distribution Service 1-800-524-2612. It encompasses the same emphases and also offers liturgical resources and action handles plus links to partner organizations.

Notice the shift from Combating Hunger to Just Eating. Why? On the one hand, it obscures a direct focus on hunger or malnutrition. On the other hand, it melds self-regard and other-regard and highlights our responsibility, as can be seen in the content sections of *Just Eating* (the CWS resource)

2. Faith-based Lobbying for Adequate Government Food Programs

BREAD for the World is a seasoned Christian citizens network focused on food policy, started in the early Seventies by Lutheran pastor Art Simon, who emphasized that one act of Congress has much more effect on people's food security than all of the churches' relief & food sharing projects. Often, acts of Congress, following the neo-liberal **ag-econ** model, actually increase the suffering of ordinary people and local communities abroad and at home. [What the USDA does (and doesn't do) makes a huge difference. Far-sighted church leaders have known this since the Great Depression.] Thus, the churches consistently show concern for rural life, school lunches, WIC, the impact of Welfare reform, and negative effects of agriculture subsidies. The churches have also voiced demands for **fair trade agreements and Debt Relief** communicated in appropriate ways to economic and political power centers, through Bread for the World and through regional or state-level organizations in the U.S.

3. Supporting self-development of people utilizing sustainable agriculture

at home and abroad. Mainline hunger action programs have consistently shown concern to save rural communities and family farms, since scale correlates inversely with care for earth and water. As Wendell Berry likes to say, "You can only care for as much land as you can walk." So the churches advocate LISA, organic farming, and farmers markets. (Less energy use, of course, helps to reduce global warming.)

This aspect of hunger action also provides grants and brings appropriate technology to organizations working in poor communities for the sake of food security and self-development. E.g., the Presbyterian Hunger Program is doing this right now in Eritrea, Bolivia, Bangladesh, & Puerto Rico.
Remember Ag Missions, and sustainable ag personnel fielded by churches.

Another e.g., in Maine there is a New American Sustainable Agriculture Project that trains refugee farmers to operate in sustainable ways. Its leader is on the board of Bread for the World.

4. Advocating the Rights of Farm Workers
The churches continue to join in selective buying campaigns that challenge food producing and marketing corporations to improve the working conditions and income of farm workers. Such involvement began with ecumenical support of the United Farm Workers lettuce and grape boycotts in the Seventies. Currently, the **C**oalition of **I**mmokalee **W**orkers is getting a lot of church and some university attention. The main organizing instrumentality throughout has been the National Farm Worker Ministry, with affiliated state-level organizations that often focus on conditions facing migrant farm workers.

5. Challenging members and church-related institutions to change their food buying and consumption habits, by selectively buying locally-produced (organically grown) food, free range chicken, and food products based on fair wage & trade. This particular expression of lifestyle integrity features responsible food purchasing and consuming habits. It has institutional dimension, beyond appealing to individuals.

And what about concern for humane treatment of animals? Small networks of laity are beginning to resist factory farming that intensely confines or mistreats food animals: chickens, hogs, calves, cattle. But few denominations have adopted policy on this, (the United Methodists being a sterling exception). The lack of significant church programs to pursue animal welfare concerns, reminds us that: a) compared to the plight of human workers in poultry and hog operations, the mistreatment of animals closely confined in these operations has received little attention; and b) we are not yet in a post-anthropocentric era. But humane aspects of sustainability can and should be added, carefully, to comprehensive programs of hunger action and ethical eating. The goal should be to enlarge the church's moral concern and action, not to displace current emphases.

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PART TWO: SERMON TALKING POINTS AND MORE SPECIFIC ANALYSES

Roman Catholics and the Food System

Brother David Andrews, CSC
National Catholic Rural Life Conference

The United States Roman Catholic official teaching on agriculture makes sustainability a central consideration as it calls attention to the broken connection between consumers and the food system. Catholic ethical analysis is based on theological sources as well as a reading of the "signs of the times," which provide a social, historical, economic analysis of the topic under consideration. In analyzing hunger, food, agriculture, farming and community life we recognize that hunger continues at home and abroad because there is insufficient food going to millions. In addition, there is a growing concentration in the food system where a few "large institutions and corporations" can control the future of many. Increasingly we worry about the condition of air, water and land where negative environmental trends are being observed. These concerns of hunger, control, environmental degradation; the problems of small farmers and farm workers are seen as contemporary "signs of the times" and they require an appropriate moral response.

In order to frame that response we bring to bear our tradition in the form of scripture and Catholic social teaching. Scripture is clear about the requirement to feed the hungry (Lv. 25:6) (Mt. 25:35) Catholic Social Teaching, understood as the redemptive forces for the transformation of current sinful conditions and immoral practices to closer approximation to the reign of God, tell us that, "A farm or agricultural system that ignores economic realities is in financial trouble. An agricultural system or enterprise that ignores or neglects moral principles is in ethical trouble." [1]

We are led therefore, to the following conclusions about our priorities:

Overcoming Hunger and Poverty
Providing a Safe, Affordable, and Sustainable Food Supply
Ensuring a Decent Life for Farmers and Farm workers
Sustaining and Strengthening Rural Communities
Protecting God's Creation, including the humane treatment of animals
Expanding participation

An action agenda will include challenging the dominance of multinational corporations in favor of "local control over farming practices," recognizing the universal right to food, promoting food aid where it meets needs and demanding that "Food aid should not be a means for developed nations to dispose of surplus

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[1] *For I was Hungry & You Gave Me Food*, 2004-All quotes in this essay come from this document.

commodities, create new markets for agricultural products, displace local food production, or distort world food prices." In addition, caution is encouraged on the development and use of genetically altered agricultural products.

A Catholic Rural Ethic for agriculture, food and community

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference applies the following principles when considering economic, social and environmental policies on behalf of agriculture and rural communities:

Human Dignity
The Common Good
Preferential Option for the Poor
Universal Destination of Goods
Integrity of Creation
Subsidiarity
Solidarity

These principles of Catholic life are drawn from the Scriptures and church traditions. By these principles we are led as a faithful people to care for Creation and care for Community by the loving care of Christ.

Principle 1: Human Dignity

Human beings are created in the image of God. In this image, we human beings have worth and value by virtue of our existence, and that our dignity shall not be taken away from us or diminished in any way. It is never permissible to use a human being to attain some proscribed end or purpose. The rightful purpose of an economic system, therefore, is to serve the human person; no one is meant to be a slave to the economy. Any reduction of the human person to increase economic production violates that dignity.

In a system of factory farms or debt-laden contract production, farmers and farmworkers are turned into modern-day serfs. This goes against the principle of human dignity. We as a society sometimes refuse to see the dignity of a farmer when he clings dearly to his land even as market forces work against him. We may be led to believe that such farmers are poor operators. They may also begin to see themselves no longer as farmers, but as failures. As fellow human beings, we should not tolerate this lowering of others. Human dignity is not to be defined by market forces or by manipulators of the market.

Principle 2: The Common Good

The common good encourages individuals and communities to act on behalf of the good of all. What is the good of all? Surely a fundamental common good is the vital goods of human sustenance – food, water, the air we breathe, the right to life. The common good is also social, which means that each of us finds comfort and happiness when we belong to community and when we are accepted for who we are. The common good is cultural, which gives meaning to our lives by allowing us to act in concert with others and leading each of us to live, work, play and believe together. Do we include farmers and farmworkers in

how we bring meaning to our lives? Does rural life no longer retain a place in our modern world except as an idealized countryside image on a package of food?

Finally, we say as Catholics that the common good is religious, which deepens us as individuals and as a people in the sublime harmonies of the universe. The common good is at once a basic need and an ultimate end, the sharing of life's necessities and the love of one another and creation which flows from our love of God and God's love for us. Where the common good is ignored or disdained, then disharmonies in our social, economic, personal and ecological lives will grow like choking weeds around us.

Principle 3: Preferential Option for the Poor

A fundamental moral measure of any society is to ask how the poor and vulnerable are faring. The poor are those who suffer from lack of basic goods and necessities. The poor bring before us a profound question about the order of the world, and whether this order is truly good. The option for the poor means that we should act - as individuals and as members of community - to overcome the structural injustice of social and world orders.

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference assists by helping to analyze structural problems in our food and agricultural system. As consumers, each of us can decide to end our support of certain foods and food processes that favor large global corporations over small farmers. At the political level, we can fight against social injustice by contacting our local, state and federal representatives and voicing our concern for the rights of farmers and farmworkers, the safety and security of our food, and a greater protection of the environment.

Finally, the preferential option for the poor in rural life means to design realistic alternatives to how we currently produce food in an intensively industrial way. The preferential option for the poor is a commitment to transforming society into a place where human rights and the dignity of all are respected. Let us begin to build a new earth based on our new creation as the faithful followers of Christ.

Principle 4: Universal Destination of Goods

The earth is God's and is created for the well-being of all. Creation and all its goods are plainly for the good of all. We believe and accept that private ownership of goods is a natural right. So what is the best mechanism to distribute the goods of the earth? What is our measure of social equality that limits economic concentration of wealth and reduces the causes of poverty?

We say that on every private ownership there is a social mortgage: If bread is good for life, then bread for all is a goal worthy of us as human beings in universal solidarity. Greed, excess profits, and control by a few of the goods meant for many – these are contrary to God's desire that creation is for the good of all.

The universal destination of goods is plain to see: each person in the world is meant to receive enough to eat and drink, enough to clothe and house themselves, and enough to live in human dignity. In rural life, we need to realize that farmers continue to be squeezed by those who control farm inputs/supplies and by those who farmers must sell to. In some cases, farmers are caught in the grip of a single firm both supplying inputs and receiving the food or fiber produced, leaving the farmer vulnerable to monopolistic practices.

The destination and accessibility of goods today is twisted by our society's fascination with bigness and technology. The big operator or producer is favored over the small family farmer – these scales of size are weighed against the common good because global corporate interests win political and financial favors mainly for themselves. What might be called the "common good" is lost in the abyss between winners and losers, those who grow big and those who get pushed out.

Principle 5: Integrity of Creation

As Catholics we believe that the earth belongs to the Lord. If this is true, then creation has an integrity and an inherent value beyond its utility or usefulness for human beings. Human beings are meant to be responsible stewards of creation, and indeed we can say that we work in harmony with God as co-creators. Just as God is One, the web of life is one and we are its caring stewards.

How we live on God's land cannot be disconnected to how we live in community as social beings. If we are to sustain ourselves in authentic community, we must maintain a healthy environment, we must develop a beneficial economy, and we must build a just society. When we say "support the family farm", we are saying that the best proprietors of a farm is the family. Here nature and human life can live integrally and share the abundance of creation with the entire human family.

Principle 6: Subsidiarity

In harmony with personal dignity, human beings hold the natural right to organize, to associate with one another, and to exercise responsible self-governance in their communities and local regions. No higher political authority - no state - should strip a person or local community of their capacity to judge and act on their own behalf.

Subsidiarity means local control and democratic participation, as long as people within the locality are willing and able to fulfill their necessary functions. Opposite to subsidiarity is centralized bureaucracies or economic concentration which rob people of their ability to act freely. Subsidiarity creates attachment to a real place - a person's town or city - which in turn creates strong feelings to the preservation of the nation and our constitutional republic.

In respect to international agreements and global authorities, interventions should be applied to correct economic, political, social and cultural imbalances,

but then fade away as responsible local control regains its rightful place. The World Trade Organization, for example, may facilitate global trade, but not at the risk of superceding national or local labor and environmental laws. In many rural areas here and abroad, the land is turned into an endless stretch of commodity production for global export rather than a natural landscape of community imbued with rights. This we fight for in solidarity.

Principle 7: Solidarity

The virtue of solidarity propels individuals and communities to go beyond their narrow selfishness or enclave mentality, and to care for their neighbors, their regions, even the world. Solidarity moves us beyond blind self-interest and private advantage; solidarity reminds us that we are social beings. In solidarity, we are joined in a greater body of being and the fruitful sharing of common desires.

For rural life, the principle of solidarity motivates us to care for the earth and the greater bio-community in which we ourselves are just a part. Solidarity in this sense means a stewardship of the land as we recognize that creation is a web of life in which we all cling together. What does not fall into the web of life? What is not a part of creation? We confess that all things are a part of creation, and solidarity extends this to say that all people and all living things are part of one community, the community of Christ - the new creation we seek in our modern lives.

CONCLUSION

By these principles, we believe that farmers and eaters need to be in solidarity. We need to once again know and understand who we are as a people of God. We need to learn again how to share and sustain the common goods of Creation. The American farmer needs to be in solidarity with farmers around the world, working in solidarity to provide food for their own communities rather than ruinously competing with one another for a share of the global market. To learn how to put this Catholic Rural Ethic into practice, please see our Green Ribbon Campaign and the Ethics of Eating.

PART THREE: THE HOLY CALENDAR

ISLAMIC FESTIVALS, FEASTS, AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Mazhar Hussaini, MS, LD.

The migration of the Prophet Muhammd (S) from Makkah to Madinah - known as 'Hijrah' - marks the beginning of the Muslim era. This event of the Prophet's migration culminated in the establishment of God's absolute ownership of the universe and man's delegation as a viceroy (Khalifah) of God on earth, to manage the web of life (Al-Qur'an 6:165). The year of Hijrah (622 CE) was therefore selected to mark the beginning of the lunar Islamic calendar.

ISLAMIC LUNAR CALENDAR:

The following are some of the significant dates of Islamic Lunar Calendar Year 1428 AH (After Hijrah) with corresponding dates of Solar Calendar Year 2007 CE (Christian or Current Era)

New Year	Muharram 1, 1428 AH / January 20, 2007 CE
Ramadan Begins	Ramadan 1, 1428 AH / September 13, 2007 CE
Eid ul Fitr	Shawwal 1, 1428 AH / October 12, 2007 CE
Eid ul Adha	Zulhijjah 10, 1428 AH / December 20, 2007 CE

There is no dichotomy between secular and sacred in Islam. Anything carried out in accordance with the injunctions of the Qur'an (Divine decree,) in the manner of the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah) is considered sacred. Anything repugnant to the Qur'an and Sunnah is considered unacceptable. The eight dimensions of the Sacred Foods Project both support and flow from Islamic principles and they manifest in the day-to-day lives of Muslims as well as in our celebratory events throughout the year.

RAMADAN:

Every resident, able bodied, adult, and sane Muslim is required to fast for the entire month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the calendar. Fasting involves abstinence from three primal physical needs from dawn until sunset - food, drink, and sexual gratification. In addition to fasting during the day, Muslims offer special additional prayers at night and exercise private devotional retreat in the Mosque during the last ten days of the month. Ramadan offers those who observe it an opportunity for training in:

Self-restraint, self discipline and self accountability;
Self evaluation - reflection on intention, action and impact;
Empathy with the poor and hungry;
Attaining spirituality through limited abstinence from three primal physical needs.

Mosques and individual Muslims in North America invite their non-Muslim friends, neighbors, and colleagues, to the Iftar (fast breaking) parties and share food and spiritual experience with them. This tradition has been catching on from the grass root level to the highest corridors of power in the United States. Every year the President of the USA hosts an Iftar party in the White House, inviting prominent Muslim leaders of the nation.

Children in Muslim parochial schools and Madarsahs (traditional Muslim seminaries) conduct "Canned Food Drives" and hold soup kitchens during the month to earn good deeds that are believed to be multiplied manifold during this holy month. Ramadan, when Muslim spirits are high, can be utilized to promote visibility for and congregational action on the Sacred Food Dimensions.

FESTIVALS:

There are two main festivals in Islam.

Eid ul Fitr (The Feast of Fast Breaking):

Eid ul Fitr is celebrated during the first three days of the month of Shawwal (the tenth month of Islamic lunar calendar) every year. This Feast marks the completion of the month of fasting (Ramadan).

Eid ul Fitr is the manifestation of real joy and thankfulness for the opportunities that Allah has given Muslims to fulfill their obligation of fasting and perform other good deeds during Ramadan. The Muslim community expresses its joy and gratitude collectively by remembering, praising, and glorifying Allah in the form of congregational prayer (Salat ul Eid). It is not unusual to find a congregation of 50 to 30,000 Muslims offering the Eid prayer at different locales in North America. A sermon on contemporary issues with advice from the Qur'an and the Prophet's life is delivered by an Imam (leader) after the Eid prayer. This occasion provides a ready platform, audience, and a forum to discuss issues of food, energy, the environment, and the like.

Every adult Muslim possessing an amount of food in excess of his family's need for a 24-hour day is mandated to pay Zakat ul Fitr on behalf of himself and all his dependents. Zakat ul Fitr is one full meal per person or the cash equivalent of the cost of one meal given directly to the needy and the poor before Salat ul Eid. The obligation of Zakat ul Fitr purifies the act of fasting from vain talk and shameful mistakes as it provides food and clothing to the poor and needy of the community, regardless of their cast, creed, or religion.

Eid ul Fitr offers Muslims a great opportunity to seek the poor and needy of the community, reach out to them, and share the joy of the festival by inviting them to the feast.

Eid ul Adha (The Feast of Sacrifice):

Eid ul Adha is celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Zulhijjah, the twelfth

month of Islamic lunar calendar. Muslims who can afford it make the pilgrimage (Hajj) in Makkah, Arabia in this month. The sacrifice of an animal on the tenth day of Zulhijjah marks the completion of the pilgrimage. Muslims who are not on pilgrimage are encouraged to fast during the first nine days of Zulhijjah, or at least fast on the ninth day (the day of Arafat), the day before the Feast of Sacrifice. On the day of Eid, Muslims collectively express their gratitude by remembering, praising, and glorifying Allah in the form of a congregational prayer (Salat ul Eid).

Eid ul Adha commemorates the great sacrifice of the Prophet Abrahim. He offered the life of his (then) only son Ismail at the command of Allah (Al-Qur'an 37:104-108). In memory of the spirit of the sacrifice of the Prophet Abrahim and the Prophet Ismail, the sacrifice of an animal on the day of Eid ul Adha is offered. All free, adult Muslims who can afford it and who are not traveling, are required to sacrifice an animal, symbolizing the voluntary submission to Allah's command. The sacrificial animal must be healthy and unblemished.

The Prophet Muhammad (S) said, "Be mindful of your duty to Allah in respect of these mute animals. Ride them when they are in good condition, and slay them and eat their meat when they are in good condition".

Islam assures animal welfare by prohibiting the consumption of the meat of the animals that died of strangulation, from a blow, from a fall, by being gored, or which are partly eaten by wild beasts (Al-Qur'an 5:3).

It is a common practice to divide the sacrificial meat into three parts. One part is retained for the consumption of one's own family; the second part is given to relatives, friends, and neighbors; and the third part is distributed among the poor and needy. This practice builds a feeling of care and concern and a sense of sharing among friends, relatives, neighbors, and the needy, fostering social cohesion.

Muslims of Chicago took the initiative for collecting the Eid ul Adha sacrificial meat and sharing it with the needy of the city. For the last two years, Muslims of Chicago have been donating about ten thousand pounds of natural, grass fed, ground beef to the Chicago Food Depository every year. This has been the highest high protein donation in Chicago Food Depository's 65-year history. This ground beef has been a good protein supplement to the children of Chicago.

FESTIVITIES:

There are two festivities that are recommended as the tradition (Sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad (S).

Waleemah (Festivity of Wedding):

The waleemah is a wedding banquet given after the consummation of a marriage. Giving a wedding banquet is a tradition (Sunnah) of the Prophet

Muhammad (S). The newly wed couple invites the immediate members of both families as well as relatives, friends, and neighbors to the waleemah to augment social relations.

Aqeeqah (Festivity of the Newly Born):

This festivity is usually celebrated during the first seven days of an infant's birth or as soon after as parents can afford the festivity. When the baby is born, he or she is given a decent Islamic name, his or her head is shaved, and a sheep, goat or lamb is sacrificed and shared with relatives, friends, neighbors and the poor and needy.

FOOD FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS:

Food plays an important role in all special occasions in the Muslim community. It is meant to promote brotherhood and a sense of sharing among fellow human beings. The following are some special occasions traditionally celebrated by Muslims.

Bismillah (Literacy Initiation):

The word Bismillah in Arabic means, 'In the name of Allah'. The celebration of Bismillah refers to the time when a Muslim child first starts reading the Qur'anic alphabets. Acquisition of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim male and female. In Islam, the real knowledge is the knowledge of the religion (Deen) through Al-Qur'an and Prophetic traditions (Sunnah). Thus, the beginning of the process of reading the Qur'an is very important and a cause for celebration. Parents invite relatives, friends, and neighbors for dinner. The child reads the alphabets, the creed (“There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger”), and a few verses from the Qur'an.

Death:

While food serves an important function in life's celebrations, it plays a significant role on the sad occasion of death as well. The relatives of the deceased prepare enough food for immediate members of the family of the "Mayyit' (dead person) for the whole day. The relatives encourage the grieving members to eat to prevent starvation/malnutrition due to lack of appetite caused by the sad occasion. This practice was suggested by the Prophet Muhammad (S).

Other Special Events:

In addition to the occasions mentioned above, any special event or occasion celebrated by Muslims follows the same basic spirit of gratitude to the Creator and involves caring for and sharing with fellow human beings.

General agricultural and business principles that apply to all of the food gathered for the above celebrations and holy days:

In order to protect the integrity and diversity of life, Muslims are encouraged to produce food for sustenance. Prophet Muhammad (S) said, " When a man plants a plant or cultivates a crop, no bird or human being eats from it without it being accounted as a reward-able charity from it".

At the time of harvest, taking into consideration the economic and ecological factors, Islam recommends, "And the harvest you reap, you shall leave them in the ear, except a little you shall eat". (Al-Qur'an 12:47) Muslims are also advised to donate a portion of the harvest to the needy and the poor. Some of the harvested food is to be shared with relatives, friends and neighbors irrespective of their cast, color, or creed (religion) to build up social cohesion.

Emphasizing the fair treatment of the laborer, Prophet Muhammad (S) advocated, " Give the hireling his wages before his sweat dries".

Ethical business practices are recommended in growing and distributing food. Prophet Muhammd (S) exalted the status of honest and trustworthy merchant when he declared, " An honest and trustworthy merchant will be with the Prophets, the truthfuls, and the martyrs". Greed is curbed when the Qur'an declares, " And many do mislead (men) by their appetite unchecked by knowledge. Your Lord knows best those who transgress". (Al-Qur'an 6:119)

The Liturgy of Foods: Eating in Season

Robert Gronski

In choosing our daily foods, we can accustom ourselves, along with family and friends, to weave together "the year of nature and the year of grace, the seasons and the life of our Savior as relived in the feasts of the Church". This invocation comes from the archives of National Catholic Rural Life Conference: "The Unfolding of the Christian Seasons" (an essay by Mariette Wickes, c.1950). As we move into the repose of wintertime, let us set aside time to remember how the liturgical calendar corresponds to the natural seasons of the year. The farmer already knows well the turning of the seasons and how much depends on the temperance of nature and the blessings of the Lord.

Selections from "The Unfolding of the Christian Seasons":
Advent, "the time of the year when nature is closely attuned to the darkness that characterized the world before the coming of the Savior."

"Early spring in nature, the season of plowing, of pruning, and of making the soil ready for the seed to be planted, coincides with the Septuagesima and Lenten time when … through fasting and penance we make ready the soil of our hearts so that the seed of Christ’s Life can be sown and germinate in us."

"On the land, Easter comes as a true Resurrection… Easter is the beginning, the first blossoming of new life.... Pentecost is the fruition, the fullness of it. … Christ planted the Divine Life at Easter; it is at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit comes bringing to the souls of Christians the fullness of life."

"With the Sundays after Pentecost come the quiet summer months, the time of gradual maturing and ripening of the seed planted in the early spring. In the cycle of the Church we witness the unfolding and development of the new life sown at Easter."

"The Feast of Corpus Christi is the Feast of the Heavenly Food by which members of Christ are nourished and sustained in the struggle to grow up in Christ. In the Feasts of the Saints we celebrate the triumph of those who have conquered."

Then comes the harvest season. "The corn is being reaped; the last fruits of the garden are being gathered; we are canning and preserving what we shall need for the winter. In the year of grace, too, this is the harvest time … the beginning of eternity when all the redeemed will be gathered into the heavenly barns."

"The Feast of the Assumption, when Our Lady, as the first and most perfect flower of Christ’s redemptive act, is taken into Heaven, marks the opening of the harvest season. The Feast of St. Michael at the end of September celebrates the

"standard-bearer" the great harvester who at the end of time will lead all the elect into Paradise."

"All Saints' Day gives us a preview of eternity… The Sundays at this time have all a note of looking forward to the Parousia, Christ's final coming in power and majesty."

In a blend of tradition and new thinking, perhaps these liturgical lessons can be woven into seasonal food choices. If we believe that "eating is a moral act," then we are obliged to find ways to choose and prepare foods that sustain not only our bodies, but fulfill our faith tradition. In the seasons, St. Thomas Aquinas saw what awaited the faithful in Heaven, where there is "the beauty of spring, the brightness of summer, the plenty of autumn, the rest of winter."

WINTER: A time to rest; to fast and reflect on food; to determine how to place faith values over dollar value. Winter can be a time to convene with others and plan how to re-create a local food system. That is, to organize a better way to support local farmers and producers, and thereby secure the healthy foods we want for our family and community. Educate yourself about how the U.S. and global food system works, who reaps the benefits and who bears the risks and sufferings. Know where your food comes from and who grew it, processed it and prepared it. Educate yourself about the benefits of eating a diet that includes plenty of fresh produce and whole grains. Help create links between your child's school lunch program and local farmers. Get involved to change government policies, both locally and at the federal level.

SPRING: The time to admire the beauty of rebirth, the turning of gray to green; to enjoy the return of the sun's warmth. Spring is a time to feel the soil again, to turn a parcel of the lawn into a garden; to help children grow something themselves. Plant a garden and experience the wonder of plants, birds, butterflies and wildlife. Become a member of a "CSA" (a "community supported agriculture" farm) and get seasonal produce from May through October. Buy a CSA membership for a friend's birthday or Christmas present. Encourage your parish to subsidize CSA shares for families with limited resources. Organize your parish to produce a food garden for fellowship meals and donate the surplus to a local food pantry. Donate land at your church to help those without space to grow their own food. Help protect local water quality by choosing organic foods and using pesticide-free agriculture products.

SUMMER: The season of brightness and a time to realize the abundance of nature; to eat outdoors and to share the garden's overflow. Summer is a time to try something new; to make healthy choices, both in the quality of foods and the quantity you eat. Eat seasonally and regionally and get in touch with your local environment. Spend $10 a week on locally produced foods; ask your supermarket manager to stock locally produced fruits and vegetables.

Buy as much of your food as you can from a farmer whose face you can see, whose farm you can visit. Take local food to your church dinner and explain where it came from and why you buy it. Buy only meat that you know has been produced humanely and sustainably. Learn new ways to preserve water; reduce water use as much as possible.

AUTUMN: A season to practice thankfulness; to say grace at thanksgiving meals and to share with others. As always, remember those who hunger and resolve to end hunger. At harvest's end, autumn is a time to store up the abundance and prepare for the winter's rest. Learn how to freeze, can and store seasonal fruits and vegetables, especially those produced in your local area.Teach others about preserving local food by organizing canning and preserving sessions at the parish hall or in your home. Learn how to cook using whole or less-processed food; besides healthy eating, you save on packaging costs and learn how to be more self-reliant. Accept responsibility for making sure that all members of your community have access to an adequate supply of wholesome food.

OUR DAILY BREAD

A companion piece to eating in season is NCRLC's popular "Cooking for Christ" (subtitled "Your Kitchen Prayerbook") that offers recipes and reflections throughout the liturgical calendar. It is our intention at Catholic Rural Life to keep offering ideas on how to practice eating as a moral act, both in our daily habits and seasonal patterns. In doing so, we bring closer together those whose livelihoods depend on the harvest and those many in urban areas who need reminding of the sublime nature of agriculture. How we eat today ultimately determines the landscape and sustainability of tomorrow.

Besides daily choices in the foods we eat, we can make a political choice in the type of agriculture and food system we prefer. Just as there are natural seasons in the growing of foods, there are political seasons which allow us as citizens to shape the decisions in farm and food policies. The year 2007 is a time for a new Farm Bill; the U.S. Congress will begin writing this piece of legislation in the new year. The faith community can and should join with family farm, sustainable agriculture, healthy foods and other community-based groups to shape new federal policy. The National Catholic Rural Life Conference is in the forefront to do just that.

The world, we recognize, is an arena of political forces that involves difficult choices and repercussions. We also know the world is our temporal place of spiritual expression. When it comes to agriculture and food, we all have a vital stake and a moral obligation. That many in society do not see or act on this is not so much a blatant omission as it is a loss of memory. We have forgotten how cultivation of the land sustains us, certainly physically and perhaps even spiritually. In our food choices and civic duties, we can take steps towards the common good, so that in time we grow what is good for the earth, eat what is good to grow, overcome hunger for all, preserve our agricultural lands and

waters, and graciously thank both the Creator and farmer co-creators for our daily bread.

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PART FOUR: DETAILED THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Oh Taste and See
A Practice of Ecological Care and Relationship

By Rev. Clare Butterfield, Director
Faith in Place

Oh taste and see that the Lord is Good -- **Psalm 34**

This paper is submitted in response to a call for papers by the ACTS Urban Ministries CPE and the Valparaiso Project, a project which emphasizes new ways of practicing our faith.[2] The book on which that project is based describes a number of disciplines and approaches to the practice of faith in different areas of life, and describes standards for practice. To quote from that text, the standards for practices based on that description are these:

- *Practices address fundamental human needs and conditions through concrete human acts;*
- *Practices are done together and over time;*
- *Practices possess standards of excellence.*[3]

The basic practices described in that useful resource cover a number of areas of daily living. This paper would like to expand the idea of practice to include an ecological practice that works its way into every corner of a mindful life. In an ecology of practiced faith, the earth can be understood as the body of God, and every act that is mindful of the sacredness of God's holy body takes on the overtones of sacrament.

For all people of faith there are systems of belief, and there are practices. What we believe most intimately will find its expression in the way that we live our lives. On a symbolic level the practice of faith is expressed through sacrament. But it may be our day-to-day conduct that says most about what we truly value. Practices of faith may be defined as "those shared activities that address fundamental human needs, and that, woven together, form a way of life."[4]

The religious search is the search for the reasons that justify existence - the purposes in our being here. We rest on the goodness of God, and we seek to translate our belief into daily behavior. To put it in Alfred North Whitehead's terms, we wish to justify the fact of our existence by the nature of our existence.[5]

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[2] Bass, Dorothy C. *Practicing Our Faith*, *A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Inc. 1997).
[3] *Practicing Our Faith*, 6-7.
[4] *Practicing Our Faith*, xi.
[5] *Religion is the longing of the spirit that the facts of existence should find their justification in the nature of existence…*- Whitehead, Alfred North *Religion in the Making* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2001), 85.

And the nature of our existence is revealed less by what we say or think about ourselves than by empirical observation of what we do in our lives.

We Are What We Eat

Through the work of Faith in Place, a faith-based non-profit in Chicago, we have discovered that religious practices around food provide a medium for the translation of belief into action as do few other subject areas. What we eat is an intimate part of the physical reality of our day. But food is also a cultural medium- a durable remnant of culture that survives dislocation more than many other cultural characteristics. And food is a religious medium, with sacred meals and religious restrictions on dietary practice being a common phenomenon in many faiths.

One outreach that Faith in Place has designed is the Eco-Halal project. This effort has sought to give application to the larger meaning of Islamic scripture on dietary law, by using the dietary restrictions of Islam to open a larger conversation on ecology. Through providing a meat product that can be reliably demonstrated to meet the highest standards of Islamic slaughter (*zabiha* is the word for this), Faith in Place met a need in the Muslim community, and created an opening for conversation.

But the effort didn't stop at a literal reading of Islamic law. The Muslims associated with the project have taken the larger view that the purpose of Islamic scripture on food and diet is to encourage a practice of eating that is respectful of the communities of farmers, animals, consumers and the earth. The meat that Eco-Halal has made available comes from animals that are also organic or naturally raised (without hormones or antibiotics), grass-fed and allowed room to walk, raised by local farmers, and paid for at a rate that allows a fair wage to the farmer and to all other workers in the processing chain from farm to table. By providing this service, Faith in Place has allowed a conversation to begin about the larger meaning of being a Muslim and eating within the parameters of God's good creation. This is the approach toward practice that Faith in Place takes as its mission in interacting with people of every faith.

Oh taste and see, the psalmist says, *oh taste and see that the Lord is good*.[6] This passage implies much about the manner in which the goodness of God is manifested among us. The bounty of the earth in producing the food that sustains us might be an example of that dependable goodness. But the dependability of the earth in producing our food has been compromised by human agency.

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[6] Psalm 34:8, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

An Attitude Toward the Earth

In the three Abrahamic traditions there is an understanding of the human on the earth in a special position. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures refer to this position in Genesis 1:26 and 1:28 as "dominion." But they do so in the context of establishing humankind in the image and likeness of God. Therefore the dominion that humans hold over the earth might be understood to resemble, in an ethical sense, the dominion of the Creator over the Creature. It is not one of slavery, of exploitation, of using up, but one of love and care and responsibility.[7] In the Islamic tradition, likewise, the Quran lends support to the idea that the role of caretaker for the earth - of steward for the fertility of the earth - is given into human hands as a dignified gift and a noble responsibility.[8]

There is an attitude toward the earth expressed in the Psalms that resembles the attitude being discussed here. Psalm 65 says:

You visit the earth and water it,
You greatly enrich it;
The River of God is full of water;
You provide the people with grain,
For so you have prepared it.
You water its furrows abundantly,
Settling its ridges,
Softening it with showers,
And blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty;
Your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
The hills gird themselves with joy,
The meadows clothe themselves with flocks
The valleys deck themselves with grain,
They shout and sing together for joy.[9]

In this Psalm, there is a reverence for the gift of nature, and a gratitude for the bounty of the earth. The older Hebrew Scriptures place even more directly into the hands of God the job of sending the rains. The prophet Hosea, for example, expresses the view that the love and duty that we owe to God is to be repaid by the fertility of the earth:

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[7] Bunge, Marcia, *Biblical Views of Nature: Foundations for an Environmental Ethic,* in *The Care of the Earth, An Environmental Resource Manual for Church Leaders* (Chicago, IL: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1994), 19.

[8] "Have you not seen that it is God to whom all the beings in the heavens and all the beings in the earth bow themselves down - and so too the sun and the moon and the stars and the mountains and the trees and the beasts?" Quran 22:18.

[9] Psalm 65:9-13, NRSV.

> I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon. His shoots shall spread out his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.[10]

A feeling of gratitude leads to a practice of respect. These scriptural passages express a reverence toward the earth as a place of demonstration of God's generosity. Taken a step further, we may see the earth as the body of God. In such a view, the earth itself takes on the holy attributes of the One who created it. If we truly believed it to have these attributes, we would act with respect for creation as that holy body, and we would carry that attitude toward every living thing on the earth, perhaps especially toward our human brothers and sisters.

But the way that we grow food violates this practice. We expose the most vulnerable members of the food labor force, migrant workers, to toxins in doses that far exceed safe levels, if, indeed, any level is safe. We force these laborers to live and work under inhumane conditions. And the conditions we impose on the earth are no better.

The Burden of Knowledge

There is an old story in an old book. It is the story in the book of Genesis in which God places Adam into the garden and commands him to eat of every tree except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There are few to whom this story is unfamiliar once Eve enters it:

> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'you shall not eat from any tree in the garden'? The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened , and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened…."[11]

The encounter in the garden tells us something about faith and about who we are as humans in the world. It is a story of relationship, and of the loss of innocence. What Adam and Eve gain in the story of the fruit of the tree is the ability to know right from wrong. What they lose is permission to remain in paradise. They are

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[10] Hosea 14:4-6, NRSV.
[11] Genesis 3:1-7 NRSV.

expelled from the garden, and the way behind them is blocked by an angel with a flaming sword. But they can no longer pretend that they don't understand the difference between the acts that augment their relationship with their creator, and those that are at cross-purposes with it.

The knowledge of good and evil is, as far as we know, a human characteristic. The subject of food provides ample substance to aid in our understanding of its application. For example, there is a list, commonly circulated, of the fruits and vegetables that contain the highest levels of pesticide residue. This list is used to help guide consumers toward the foods which they might make greatest effort to seek out in their organic form, and which can be safely eaten in their conventional form[12]. But this list is not consistent with the list of fruits and vegetables that do the greatest damage to farm workers. For example, broccoli is among the 12 foods consistently having the lowest pesticide residue (see Appendix A). However, broccoli is on the list of the top ten crops for accidental poisoning of farm workers.[13] Knowing that the food is relatively safe might allow us to decide to eat it. Knowing its cost to other people robs us of our innocence and requires a different decision.

This is the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is the thing that we know, and cannot, therefore, pretend not to know. It is the thing we can no longer act in innocence from, because we have eaten of the apple. It has to do with the relationship we can no longer comfortably deny.

Knowing the Price that is Paid

The manner in which we produce our food illustrates the burden of knowledge plainly enough. There are always accidents. In September of 1996 there was an accident near Bakersfield, California. A crop dusting plane was spraying a cotton field with Lorsban when the wind shifted and the spray drifted over a neighboring vineyard where some farm laborers were at work. Twenty-two of them were poisoned including three pregnant women. One of the ingredients in Lorsban causes a range of neurological damage including birth defects in

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[12] A version of the list is attached as Appendix A, obtained from the Environmental Working Group website: http://www.foodnews.org/walletguide.php, accessed 11/25/2003.

[13] Reeves, Margaret, Ann Katten and Martha Guzman, *Fields of Poison 2002, California Farmworkers and Pesticides,* Californians for Pesticide Reform, at 5, obtained from the Pesticide Action Network website: http://www.panna.org/resources/documents/fieldsOfPoison2002.dv.html, accessed 11/25/2003

humans[14]. The scale of this accident, and the level of its reporting, were both unusual. But things like it happen on American farms with fair regularity.

Recent studies by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation show that use of pesticides in California, the largest food-producing state, have grown steadily in the years between 1991 and 1998. Carcinogenic pesticide use has grown 127% in these years.[15]
While use of the most toxic pesticides declined slightly during this period, the declines were due mostly to an anticipation of the international ban of methyl bromide in 2005 (originally 2001). The United States government is now pushing for a further delay of this effective date of the ban.[16]

Methyl bromide is one among many toxins currently used to grow food for human consumption. It is used mainly by the growers of four crops: strawberries, ornamental plants and flowers, grapes and almonds. Methyl bromide is applied by being injected into the ground. A tractor does the injecting, but it is followed by human beings who lay tarps down over the freshly injected field, immediately behind the tractor, and who shovel the treated soil over the edges of the tarps to keep them from blowing away. In an interview a worker employed in this task reported that "If you're not fast enough, you get hit in the face with little blasts of poison…."[17]

The poisons most typically used on food are nerve poisons, and many of them are acutely toxic. Safety restrictions in their application often go unheeded in the farm fields, particularly where large migrant populations with limited English skills, and perhaps limited literacy are at work. In California alone, thousands of cases of acute toxic poisons have been reported over the last several years, and given the circumstances of food production and migrant populations it can be

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[14] Pesticide Action Network North America Updates Service, *Farm Workers Poisoned in Pesticide Drift Accident,* September 12, 1996, obtained from the Pesticide Action Network website: http://www.panna.org/resources/documents/fieldsAvail.dv.html accessed 11/18/2003

[15] Kegley, Susan, Stephan Orme and Lars Neumeister, *Hooked on Poison; Pesticide Use in California, 1991-1998, at 7,* obtained from Pesticide Action Network website*:* http://www.panna.org/resources/documents/hookedAvail.dv.html accessed 11/17/2003

[16] Andrew Revkin, *At Meetings, U.S. to Seek Support for Broad Ozone Exemptions,* The New York Times, November 10, 2003. Methyl Bromide is not only highly toxic and a danger to farm workers who work on or near its application, it is a major contributor to ozone depletion. International consensus was reached in favor of a ban, but the current administration seeks a 10,000 ton exemption to the effective date - an exemption that exceeds all other requested exemptions combined by 4,000.

[17] Karliner, Joshua and Alba Morales and Dara O'Rourke, *Lethal Injection, TriCal Inc. and the Poisonous Politics of Methyl Bromide*, Political Ecology Group and the Transnational Resource and Action Center, March 31, 1997, at 4.

assumed that many cases go unreported as well.[18] Many of these incidents occurred when farmworkers were poisoned by direct application of pesticides, many others occurred from "drift" - the application of pesticides on neighboring fields.[19] Case studies of poisonings of this type reveal wide variation in the application of good safety practices, and the availability of safety equipment and instruction for farm workers.[20] While each pesticide has a required "re-entry" period - a period of time during which workers may not re-enter the area of application, the combination of drift and lax enforcement result in high numbers of poisonings.

These cases of accidental poisoning are not limited to the fields of California. University studies in Minnesota have found clear links between agricultural chemicals and birth defects. In some cases the affected population experienced defects, particularly partial limb deformities, at twice the levels of the general population.[21] Health effects on migrant populations, particularly undocumented, vulnerable, migrant populations, are more difficult to track.

Agriculture is a business like any other, and economics plays a role in human safety decisions. A 1997 release in the Federal Register, for example, granted a waiver to the U.S. rose industry on the mandatory re-entry period requirement. That is, when certain chemicals have been applied there is a mandatory waiting period before any human can go back into the greenhouses. Generally, this period is from 24-48 hours and is long enough to allow the chemicals to dry on the plants. But because of pressure which U.S. rose growers are facing from their Colombian competitors, they sought and received a limited waiver which would allow them to send workers back within eight hours, while the pesticides are still wet, to allow harvest at peak bloom time. The EPA acknowledged in granting this waiver that they believe underreporting of injuries to be common. They acknowledged that it is difficult to insure that workers keep on the required safety equipment because greenhouses are so hot. The temperature in greenhouses, the release pointed out, can be controlled. [22] But it didn't point out that temperatures in greenhouses are already being controlled - for roses, not for workers. The exemption expired in 1999, but in 2000, Roses, Inc., one of the companies filing for the original exemption, applied to be exempted again.[23]

From roses to broccoli, to grain to meat, modern agriculture takes a huge toll on its workers. Faith in Place began its Eco-Halal outreach with food because it is

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[18] *Fields of Poison 2002,* at 5.
[19] *Fields of Poison 2002* at 5.
[20] *Fields of Poison 2002* at 11.
[21] Garry, Vincent F., Dina Schreinemachers, Mary E. Harkins, and Jack Griffith, *Pesticide Appliers, Biocides and Birth Defects in Rural Minnesota*, available at http://ehpnet1.niehs.nih.gov/docs/1996/104-4/garryabs.html, accessed 11/25/2003.
[22] 62 Fed Reg 51993 (Oct. 3, 1997).
[23] 65 Fed Reg 36134 (June 7, 2000), with a request for comment.

such a central part of the human experience. Eco-Halal focused on meat because the meat processing industry is the single most dangerous industry in which to work.[24]

The most cursory research can show that the modern agricultural industry is not only hard on people, it is hard on the planet. Topsoil losses in the United States strongly outpace the ability to regenerate through proper soil management - by a factor of seven to one.[25] Soil losses since the onset of industrial agriculture in the United States are alarming. Great Plains productivity dropped by two-thirds in the first 30 years of breaking soil. Since 1950, a full one-third of U.S. farmland has been abandoned because of erosion.[26] The great fertile center of the country, the Mississippi River Valley drains both soil and fertilizer (as well as toxic runoff) down to the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in an enormous dead zone in the mouth of the river running far into the gulf.[27] Abundant life turns into death through careless management, or management for the short term.

At its most basic, this method of growing food and flowers, requiring massive inputs of fossil-fuel derived chemicals both as fertilizer and pesticide, is simply inefficient. Given current estimates for the depletion of fossil fuels (both oil and gas extraction are peaking now and will fall to zero over the next 50-60 years)[28] producing food without regard for the natural productive and regenerative capacity of the soil is a temporary solution with drastic long-term consequences. We cannot continue to produce food at this cost.

These are just a handful of examples from a hugely destructive industry. Every type of food production world-wide from fishing, to fish farming, to large-scale commodity production and mono-cultures of grains, vegetables and even trees, causes similar damage. The cases reported here are a drop in an ocean of suffering and harm.

While the data on food production and its human and ecological consequences may be scientific or sociological, the problem is, at its root, a religious one. "Oh taste and see," the Psalmist urged. There is nothing about the monster of modern food production that leaves room for such a sacramental view. The goodness of God is buried under chemical drift and petroleum inputs, salinization from over-irrigating and the loss of fertile soil, acre by acre by acre.

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[24] See, generally, Schlosser, Eric, *Fast Food Nation* (New York, NY: Perennial, an imprint of Harper Collins, 2002), and particularly chapter 8 "The Most Dangerous Job."
[25] Kimbrell, Andrew, Ed., *Fatal Harvest, the Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture* (Sausalito, CA: Foundation for Deep Ecology, 2002), 54.
[26] *Fatal Harvest*, at 224.
[27] *Fatal Harvest*, at 241.
[28] Bruce Robinson, Australia's Oil Vulnerability, citing: ASPO Statistical Review of Oil and Gas, Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Oil Depletion, Uppsala, Sweeden, 23-25 May, 2002. Edited by K. Aleklett and C. Campbell, www.isv.uu.se/iwood2002

It is not too much to suppose that most American consumers, and therefore most Americans of faith, are simply unaware of the context in which their food is being produced. But there is a religious responsibility to be aware of it. We are no longer allowed to live in paradise. By tasting the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve made a decision about how the rest of us are required to live. We must know what is done on our behalf. The information is available and we must make it part of our religious responsibility to find out. We may not commit the sin of choosing to ignore the consequences of our living on the earth. What is done for us, although it is done out of our sight, is done by us.

If the human experience leads us toward a desire that the fact of our existence be justified by the nature of our existence, then it is incumbent on us to know what the fact of our existence is. We need the data on which our lives are constructed. We cannot make ethical decisions by denying the information that would alter them.

The manner in which the world produces food is as appalling as the issues around that food's distribution. Farmers and farm workers are systematically poisoned. Soil is rendered infertile through the very act of fertility. And all of it washes down to the sea, killing the delta on its way. We cannot proclaim the love of God with the same mouth that eats this food. We cannot call ourselves true practitioners of faith and eat this food, if there is any alternative to eating it but starvation.

Practices of Faith

If we are to practice our faith in the knowledge of consequence, we must find different ways to grow our food at far less cost to the earth and to our brothers and sisters. A practice of faith "addresses fundamental human needs and conditions through concrete human acts."[29] In the fields where workers are routinely sprayed and exposed to poisons, fundamentally different practices are called for. We are faithful people everywhere we go, and we are responsible for actions taken on our behalf, or from which we benefit. If the Earth is God's holy body, and those who labor to grow our food are our brothers and sisters, the children of a common creator, then we are led to practices that are fundamentally different from the practices being carried on now.

Broken for You

Faith compels us to understand the sacramental nature of the ongoing sacrifice of people and ecosystems, and to require an alteration in the work that is done for us. We must alter these practices as a community, and not as individuals within it. A practice of faith that truly recognized each meal as a sacramental meal would require exposure of the conditions under which the ingredients were produced, the economics of their sale, and the cost they have exacted from the

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[29] *Practicing Our Faith* at 6.

earth and the people in the production chain. We would not put in our mouths the wages of sin and exploitation. We would take to heart the message of the sacrament of eucharist "broken for you" and we would understand its application to every bite.

We would demand that our every sacramental meal honor the body of the earth, the holy body of God by being drawn in a sustainable way from Creation - by honoring the systems of God's creation and growing within them. We would trust to the providence of God that by remaining within the parameters of natural production enough food would come forth to feed us and all of our brothers and sisters, and we would insure that the health of farm workers was protected.

Understanding the whole earth as the Body of God requires a different understanding of honoring the body. As the book *Practicing Our Faith* describes it:

> The Christian practice of honoring the body requires that we view the world through the lens of Jesus' wounded but resurrected body. His broken body brings into focus the bodies of the sick and the wounded and the exploited. His resurrection shows us the beauty God intends for all bodies. As we love and suffer, as we seek God and each other, with our bodies, we remember that every body is blessed by God, deserving of protection and care[30].

If we expand this understanding of honoring the body to include the whole earth, and we admit that we stand in the knowledge of the practices that harm and break that holy body, then we are called as religious people, Christian or Muslim or any other faith, to demand a change. We would reject foods grown with toxins, reject trade practices and labor practices that injure the earth and our brothers and sisters. And when we lift the bread to our mouths, bread made from locally grown organic wheat, with all farmers and farm laborers paid a living wage and all bakers and delivery people paid a living wage, the very act of eating it would be drawn into our practices of sacrament. The act of placing the bread on the tongue would draw us into full communion with everyone and every living thing - with the whole holy body of the Earth, God's creation. And as a community of people of faith we would be nourished and restored, as the earth would be nourished and restored, by our practice of faith.

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[30] *Practicing Our Faith* at 27.