

Book Reviews

Andrew Francis, *What in God's Name Are You Eating?: How Can Christians Live and Eat Responsibly in Today's Global Village?*, Cascade Books, Eugene, Oregon, 2014. 168 pp. \$20.00. ISBN: 9781620325735.

In *What in God's Name Are You Eating?*, Andrew Francis connects the urgent crises that our planet faces (climate change, famine and overproduction, mass poverty, etc.) with some of our most basic personal choices—the ways in which we nourish ourselves. As he puts it, “The key issue in reading this book is to realize that *everything* you buy, prepare, and cook for your family and others and then put in your mouths raises sustainability issues” (29).

To support his argument, Francis expounds on the depth of present worldwide problems, links these to unsustainable patterns of food consumption in the global North, and provides his readers with theological reflection and suggestions as to how we might eat responsibly. Happily, he still finds time to dwell on the joys of eating together. (The word “company,” he likes to point out, comes from the Latin term for sharing bread together.)

What I appreciate most about this book is that it de-trivializes what we put on our plates. By sharing a variety of stories (both critical data—which reflect the earth story—as well as personal narratives), Francis restores an awareness of where our food comes from and the ways in which global issues and the habits of eating are closely interrelated. We can't underestimate how critical this work is. The technologies of food production and the obscuring power of corporate advertising and news media disconnect most of us food consumers from food producers and the very land itself.

Will it surprise many of Francis's readers to find that their food patterns are directly contributing to some of the most urgent problems threatening creation today? Given the urgency of these matters, Francis does not mince his words when he addresses his audience: “The very fact that you are holding this book in your hands shows that you are part of a Western privileged elite with enough leisure time and health to read rather than be scratching for subsistence, every hour of every day” (10). And a little later, when writing about world hunger: “People are starving while you read this book, or while [you] eat your next meal and discuss the merits of my narrative with your friends” (24). The tone is confrontational, but it does raise important questions: not simply, How many people starved while I was writing this review? but also, Why do these particular privilege and power inequities exist and persist, and what might I do to resist them?

Francis relates these issues to religious traditions, pointing to the centrality of

sharing meals, of hospitality, and of feeding the hungry in the Old and New Testaments. He points out that following Jesus in our ways of eating today does not mean adopting “the diet of a first-century Mediterranean peasant,” which is neither sensible nor possible for the majority of world Christians. Rather, he presents our food choices as acts of faith and argues that each Christian, no matter in what context they live, “can allow Jesus’ values in his respect for the planet, his advocacy of ‘care for the neighbor,’ and his reliance on sharing food to shape the way we grow or produce, shop, then cook and share our food” (45).

An extensive list of seventy-five practical suggestions near the end of the book provides readers with potential starting points in adopting what Francis calls “a Jesus-shaped diet.” Many of these suggestions will likely be familiar (eat less meat and dairy products, eat local whenever possible, eat seasonal, buy fair trade, compost, grow your own food). As the book was written with a broad audience in mind, and practical steps are very different in different locations, it is understandable that the level of its suggestions remain rather general. Francis is to be commended for doing what many justice-oriented books fail to do—offering his audience practical starting points that can serve as trajectories for additional individual research.

Personally, I was encouraged by Francis’s call to commit to making changes—even if we start small, and perhaps for a limited period of time (like Lent). Such changes can then grow into more permanent features of our lifeway and be followed by other changes. I have been a vegetarian for over half of my life. In reading *What in God’s Name Are You Eating?*, I have decided to more consistently adopt a vegan diet to further reduce my carbon footprint.

Francis is right—those of us who have the ability to choose what we eat enjoy an immense privilege, and if we are to take seriously that Jesus said, “I came that the world might have life—in all its fullness” (John 10:10, author’s paraphrase), we “can do no other than change our ways that the world might have life—and not our leftovers” (32). Although he writes from an explicitly radical Anabaptist vantage, Francis’s short text is an important read for a wide church audience. I hope many do read it, and then eat and drink accordingly.

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Ragan Sutterfield, *Cultivating Reality: How the Soil Might Save Us*, Cascade, Eugene, Oregon, 2013. 121 pp. \$12.80. ISBN: 9781597526562.

Though Ragan Sutterfield never says it in these words, *Cultivating Reality: How the Soil Might Save Us* is about the practical and spiritual implications of eating, whether the food eaten is a nuked Pizza Pop on the run or a leisurely family break-