The Spirituality of Feasting:
An Exercise in Practical Theology

Karla Reinhardt Falk

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Theology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Theology) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

January 2022

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Karla Reinhardt

Entitled: The Spirituality of Feasting: An Exercise in Practical Theology

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Theology)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

Dr. Richard Bernier, Chair

Dr. Lucian Turcescu, Examiner

Dr. Marie-France Dion, Examiner

Dr. Christine Jamieson, Thesis Supervisor

Approved by Dr. Lucian Turcescu, Graduate Program Director

Dr. Effrosyni Diamantoudi, Dean

ABSTRACT

The Spirituality of Feasting: An Exercise in Practical Theology

Karla Reinhardt Falk

The memory of the simple pleasures of good food and drink shared with loved ones around a well-laid table produces a numinous moment: the feast and its lingering after-effects are more than the sum of its parts. Food, already a multi-faceted topic, invites an interdisciplinary approach. Food and theology must, by extension, include a multi-disciplinary investigation. Conceived of as an exercise in practical theology, the theologies of feminism, embodiment, hospitality, and crossover approaches like liturgical anthropology all combine to describe how the basic elements of a shared abundant meal create a transcendent moment. In this moment we can experience God's overwhelming love for humanity, begun in creation and brought to fulfillment with Christ's death and resurrection. This abundant love is well represented at the shared feasting table. Food is good to think; feasting is good to experience God's love.

Contribution of Authors

This Research/Creation thesis integrates the act of cooking feasts with auto-ethnographic and ethnographic reflection on the meaning of everyday action on theological thought—and reciprocally, of theological thought on everyday action. My cooking experiences have been built over my lifetime, which I have developed into a spirituality of feasting through the study of food and theology. Ethnography is a tool of both anthropology and of practical theology. To demonstrate the ethnography portion of the thesis, Ethan Volberg (Vancouver, British Columbia) and I have created a documentary film of four feasts held over eight days. This film is submitted along with the following written portion of work as my research/creation thesis.

A Liturgy for the
Preparation of an Artisanal Meal

Is it possible that a meal might be
so infused with holy artistry,
so thoughtfully prepared
with intent to convey
comfort and delight,
as to make the one who consumes it remember
again, even for a moment,
that there is a God,
and that his care for them is tender?
Then let us set about to make that meal, O Lord.

Let us ply our culinary craft
as a poet might approach her masterwork,
weighing each word and phrasing
with deliberate intention, shaping the design as a whole,
while working nuanced echoes
of some major theme into
the finer details.

Let us thoughtfully consider
and carefully construct
the layered experience of those
who will consume what we create,
so that its pleasures and surprises
will unfold sequentially to the eyes,
the nose, the tongue, as a poem
composed of taste and texture.

Let us labor with attention paid
to the tinglings of heat and spice,
to the interplay of herbs and oils,
to the mingling of things sweet and tart,
salty and sour. Let us paint in
pleasing combinations of colors
arrayed upon the plate, in complimentary
arrangements of line and form, in a
medley of aromas blending into one
bouquet. Let us play with a glad cascade
of sumptuous and savory flavors.

Let us stretch our artistry, O Lord,
using every means at our disposal,
to craft a meal that might awaken in the souls of those who share it
a yearning hunger which might only be finally satisfied
by the Bread of Life,
and the Wine of God,
at the time of the world's remaking.

Let us make this day a meal
that would point to that day,
a meal to remind
of the beauty
and the love
and the promise
undergirding all creation.

Let us make a meal to remind
our pilgrim guests
that life will not always be so burdened,
that their days of exile will end,
and that they will feast at last joyfully
in the city of their hope,
at the table of their God-King,
at the wedding feast of their Prince,
at the dawning of a golden age,
untouched by mortal sorrows.

If such a meal can be made by these hands
in this kitchen, O Lord,
then let us breathe here
the breath of your Spirit,

and let us set about
to make that meal.

Amen.[1]

[1] Douglas Kaine McKelvey, Ned Bustard, and Pete Peterson, *Every Moment Holy* (Nashville, TN: Rabbit Room Press, 2017), 25–29.

Introduction: Aperitif

\ə-ˌper-ə-ˈtēf\
: *an alcoholic drink taken before a meal as an appetizer, borrowed from French apéritif, … "aperient, stimulating appetite," going back to Old French aperitif "aperient," borrowed from Medieval Latin aperitīvus, … "to open".*[2]

: *liquid courage; the great loosener of tongues which opens the heart to relaxed fellowship.*

Think about the last time you ate a truly amazing meal. Probably you had people you loved around the table with you. The quality of the food and drink combined with the skill of the cook created a lasting memory. Where you ate played a role in creating this memory: maybe you dined at a candle lit table set with beautiful linen, china, and crystal or you were in a garden lush with greenery, while the fresh air heightened your senses. The setting, the food and drink, and the hospitality made you feel special and cared for. In the warmth of table companionship, you shared about your past, your joys and concerns in the present, your hopes and dreams for the future. You came away from that meal and noticed something out of the ordinary had occurred. The meal produced a memory and a reaction that was more than the sum of its parts. Simple in themselves, food and friendship were experienced around the table, but the feast had a numinous quality. What if reflection on this numinous experience reveals how God is present and participating with humanity?

The thesis offers a spirituality of feasting, described through practical theology. I define a spirituality of feasting as finding God's overflowing love through relationships built around an abundant table. The abundance of food and drink at the feasting table is an embodied experience of God's grace, defined as an unmerited love (Rom. 3:23-25; Eph. 2:8) that is wide and deep, more than we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:18-20). The practice of feasting offers an opportunity to reflect on a material bodily experience, which is both individual and corporate; the food and drink, the skill of the cook, the hospitality of the host, and the depth of friendship discovered through eating and drinking are simple in themselves but add up to an experience more than the sum of its parts. Choosing to find God in this experience is what makes feasting spiritual. To be clear: the experience of feasting in and of itself is not what is spiritual. It takes the practitioner of feasting to do the work of theology: "Theology does not change nature as such, but rather transforms its reception, through spiritual consciousness…Food ceases to register as fuel or as a commodity. Eating becomes a sharing in and a sharing of the blessings of God."[3] It takes the intention of the participant to put on the glasses of revelation and see their practices in a spiritual and theological light.

Food has fascinated me since my childhood. I love to read recipes, to research cooking methods, to source and shop for ingredients, to set my *mise en place* in order with my chef's knife before I set skillet on flame. I love to gather people around my table, to pour good wine, to celebrate life together. I love the ordinary daily meal and those special occasions when we feast. It is feasting especially that brings joy. These experiences are the driving force behind the thesis.

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[2] "Aperitif," in *Merriam-Webster*, September 7, 2021, "Aperitif." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aperitif. Accessed 7 Sep. 2021.
[3] Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 33.

The thesis begins in section one with method, or to use a cooking metaphor, this is the *mise en place* where the feast is prepared. I begin by defining spirituality and describing the method of the thesis. The structure of the thesis is found through the hermeneutical lens of practical theology, which I employ for five of its categories: 1) the use of ethnography as a tool for investigation of practice, and an insistence on 2) embodiment, 3) interdisciplinary study, 4) historical setting, and 5) current social context. Food and theology provide grounding for this work, dealing as it does with a theological application of food.

The main body of writing I conceive of as a feast in five courses, where each of the categories of practical theology are considered in turn as they relate to food and theology and a spirituality of feasting. The first course in this feast is ethnography, which in the thesis is accomplished through a film of four feasts over eight days, filmed in the early summer of 2021. The second course is how embodiment summarizes eucharistic eating, how it is related to the concept of grace, and how an embodied practice can be better understood through *habitus*, from Pierre Bourdieu.[4] Our current *habitus* reveals sin in the world. The third course describes how appropriate it is for food to be considered as an interdisciplinary pursuit, both in terms of anthropology and theology. The fourth course uncovers some of the historical context for food and theology, covering topics such as feminism in scholarship, the agri-eco revolution begun around the same time, and another smaller discussion of how sin in the world intersects food and theology. The historical context for a spirituality of feasting includes an investigation of early Christian worship and the Hellenistic associative meals, a vegetarian excursus, the early Christian practice of Love or Agape Feasts and its resurgence in post-Reformation German communities, and today's response to these findings in the Dinner Church format. The need for fasting is also addressed in this section. The fifth course looks at the present socio-cultural context in a discussion of postmodernism and its unique challenges to faith. For dessert, I end with a look at the theology of hospitality and a call for Protestant feasting.

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Reprinted (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008).

Chapter 1: *Mise en Place*

\ mē-ˌzäⁿ-ˈpläs\
: *a culinary process in which ingredients are prepared and organized (as in a restaurant kitchen) before cooking, borrowed from French, "setting in place, positioning"*[5]

: *a meditative time where intentions are considered, and prayerful observations are made.*

Method

This section sets the thesis in place, it introduces the method of the thesis, and it defines several concepts key to this study, including defining what is done in a spirituality of feasting.

Spirituality

For practical theologian Marie McCarthy the core definition of a spirituality is to study the "deepest desires of the human heart for meaning, purpose, and connection, with the deep life lived intentionally in reference to something larger than oneself." [6] Scholar of wine and theology, Gisela Kreglinger, offers a definition using Christian language:

> Christian spirituality is a strain of Christian theology that pays attention to the way we live life in light of our Christian beliefs and our understanding of God. Its emphasis is on the lived experience of the Christian faith. It seeks to avoid the abstract; instead, it seeks to stay grounded in the everyday and the personal as much as possible.[7]

A further explanation which gets at the worshipful aspect of spirituality is theologian Norman Wirzba's definition of a spiritual exercise:

> The aim of a spiritual exercise is to develop in people the habits that will enable them to live a more ordered, measured, reflective, free, attentive, available, and responsible life…it is helpful to characterize eating as a spiritual exercise…what I mean is that the careful attention that promotes thoughtful eating, particularly eating that is informed by the Eucharistic table, will also potentially lead eaters into an understanding of food as ultimately rooted in the grace of God.[8]

The practitioner and the theologian are one and the same in this conception. The embodied experience of a spirituality is important because a spirituality cannot be studied without being practiced. McCarthy believes that engagement on the personal level produces a shift for the theologian, or to use Bernard Lonergan's terminology, spiritual engagement is situated in the horizon of conversion. McCarthy writes: "It effects a vertical shift in horizons in which our being becomes being-in-love and in which the criteria for all our attending, understanding, judging, and

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[5] "Mise En Place," in *Merriam-Webster*, n.d., "Mise en place." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mise%20en%20place. Accessed 8 Sep. 2021.
[6] Marie McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward, Stephen Pattison, and John Patton (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 196.
[7] Gisela H. Kreglinger, *The Spirituality of Wine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 1.
[8] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 28–29.

responding become the criteria of love."[9] This has been my experience with feasting; when I have intentionally hosted and cooked a feast that I mean to feed my guests spiritually as well as physically, my reflection on the experience has produced a horizon of conversion. The thesis is a communication of that horizon of conversion. [10]

Feasting is a spiritual exercise where shared food and drink in abundance[11] give the practitioner an experience of the grace of God and the eschatological hope of the feast that is to come. Robert Farrar Capon brings this idea to life:

> The dinner party is a true proclamation of the abundance of being—a rebuke to the thrifty little idolatries by which we lose sight of the lavish hand that made us. It is precisely because no one needs soup, fish, meat, salad, cheese, and dessert at one meal that we need so badly to sit down to them from time to time. It was *largesse* that made us all: we were not created to fast forever. The unnecessary is the taproot of our being and the last key to the door of delight. Enter here, therefore as a sovereign remedy for the narrowness of our minds and the stinginess of our souls, the formal dinner for six, eight, or ten chosen guests, the true *convivium*—the long Session that brings us nearly home.[12]

Leon Kass includes the intention of the host and diner, quoting Karen Blixen from "Babette's Feast":

> To those who open themselves to its possibilities, festive dining can indeed become a kind of love affair, which simultaneously fulfills the appetites of body and soul. Though the experience may be rare, gracious dining can be graced by the arrival of powerful insight and overflowing humanity… 'Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude.'[13]

What Kass calls "overflowing humanity" I would instead interpret as an experience of God's love, but his insight that the expectant and hopeful may experience grace through festive dining is apt. These two quotes are of a genre repeated in many other devotional works. I include them here because the poetic nature of their words brings us closer to catching the spirit of what is at stake, which is nothing less than the fullness of our spiritual endeavor to know God through faith. Feasting is but one path to the fullness of this spiritual endeavor.

Practical Theology

> *Practical theology juxtaposes concrete situations of witness, celebration and service with the findings and formulations of the biblical, historical, and philosophical subjects in the theological corpus. It does this not in order to correct according to*

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[9] McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era," 204.

[10] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Method* (Toronto: Published by University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1988), 123–27.

[11] Abundance is always relative to each practitioner's cultural experience and preference, socio-economic situation, and the availability of food stuffs. Abundance in Canada will look different when comparing regions or even neighbourhoods within a city and it will certainly look different when compared with regions on a different continent, Africa, for example.

[12] Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection*, 1st Harvest/HBJ ed, A Harvest/HBJ Book (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 171.

[13] Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 192.

> *some canon of relevance, nor in order to be corrected according to some canon of orthodoxy. It is more an exercise in creative imagination, the interplay of idea and action, with all the ambiguity and inconclusiveness which this implies.*
>
> *Alastair Campbell* [14]

This study of feasting as a spirituality is also an exercise in practical theology. Theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore offers this succinct definition: "Practical theology refers to an activity of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday."[15] This definition suits the thesis as a catchphrase, but it needs a bit more unpacking, by Miller herself:

> Practical theology is a general way of doing theology concerned with the embodiment of religious belief in the day-to-day lives of individuals and communities. It engages personal, ecclesial, and social experience to discern the meaning of divine presence and to enable faithful human response. Practical theology is seldom a systematic enterprise, aimed at the ordering of beliefs about God, the church, or classic texts. More often it is an open-ended, contingent, unfinished grasp or analysis of faith in action. It focuses on the tangible, the local, the concrete, and the embodied.[16]

The implication of practical theology for the thesis is that this study is open-ended to engage further discussion and is dependent on further practice. Following theologian L. Shannon Jung, I am not so concerned with correct doctrine as I am with hoping to be a "channel of transformational insights."[17] This is my first attempt at a spirituality of feasting, and I proceed with humility. My choice of practical theology is for the method it offers. Practical theology expects an 1) interdisciplinary and multivalent approach;[18] 2) an historical grounding;[19] 3) as clear as possible awareness of the socio-cultural context of both the practice and the practitioner;[20] 4) an embodied *habitus* at the core of its study;[21] 5) and the anthropological tool of ethnography.[22] I will approach a spirituality of feasting from these five categories, grounding the

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[14] Alastair Campbell, "The Nature of Practical Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward, Stephen Pattison, and John Patton (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 85.

[15] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Introduction: The Contributions of Practical Theology," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm), Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 5.

[16] Miller-McLemore, 12.

[17] L. Shannon Jung, *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 45.

[18] Miller-McLemore, "Introduction: The Contributions of Practical Theology," 4. Elaine L. Graham, "On Becoming a Practical Theologian: Past, Present and Future Tenses," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (August 31, 2017): 4 of 9, https://doi.org/ 10.4102/hts.v73i4.4634.

[19] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm), Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 5.

[20] Edward Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward, Stephen Pattison, and John Patton (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 120–21.

[21] Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," 5–6.

[22] Mary Clark Moschella, "Ethnography," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm), Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 9.

study in existing food and theology discourse and the implication for a spiritual practice of feasting. Although I will describe each of these five in turn, they are not discrete or separable; instead, they overlap considerably. A demonstration is the following definition of practice.

Practice: Defining Spiritual Feasting

Elaine Graham gives us a definition of practice:

> as a working definition, we might therefore characterize practice as 'purposeful activity performed by embodied persons in space and time as the subjects of agency and objects of history.' Purposeful practices are the bearers of value; cultural norms are reproduced and handed down but there is also scope for creative re-rendering. Pastoral practice constitutes the *habitus* of faith; it is both inherited and indwelt but also infinitely more creative: a performative practical wisdom (*phronesis*) which we inhabit and re-enact.[23]

Graham's anthropologically driven definition overlaps categories of history, context, embodiment, and habitus, all intertwined with value and faith. The study of food is, by its nature, overlapping and interdisciplinary, as I will explore soon. Practices around food are culturally reproduced, creatively engaged, and habitual. A spiritual practice of feasting, then, is one that needs to be aware of its own traditions, one that transmits values, and one that embodies faithful responses to the current situation of the practitioners.

Robert Mager proposes that practical theology is both science and art, following Anselm's dictum of "faith seeking understanding," and suggests that "applied to practice, this means that theology should not only be concerned with what people actually do (description) and what they should do (prescription), but also what they could do (reflection), with vision and insight, that is, with the exploration of possible meanings and models of existence."[24] Mager's definition brings to mind an aspect of discourse in food and theology. Theologians bring Christian ethics to bear when *describing* where our global food situation is currently and points out the yawning gap between where we know, as stewards of the earth, it should be. Food and theology offer many suggestions for *reflection*, aimed at *prescribing* practical changes in behaviour from the level of ecosystems and agriculture to spiritual health and wellness. Historically, this is where food and theology began, and its application to feasting is short and to the point: choose food that you know has been farmed sustainably that has not travelled far to get to you, as much as you are able. This is the starting place for what you serve at a festal table. Who is at the table is equally important because a spiritual feast must be eaten in community.

The practice of feasting itself is simple and is easily portable between cultures.

What to eat. Festal food is very different in each cultural context. In the cultural mosaic of Canada, a feast may include food from any number of cultural backgrounds: from Canada itself,

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[23] Elaine Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward, Stephen Pattison, and John Patton (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 110.

[24] Robert Mager, "Action Theories," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm), Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 5.

Europe, Africa, Asia, or South America. A feast for immigrants may follow stereo-typical food culture lines, like Italians eat pasta, Germans eat pork, or Chinese eat dim sum. What is served is not actually important, except it must be abundant, to set it apart from daily eating. There are two items that I believe must be present at a feast with spiritual intent, which are bread and wine, for obvious eucharistic reasons (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). Note that bread is culturally interpreted and will look different in France than it does in Egypt, for example. The wine should be one that is enjoyable for those present and drinkable and with the chosen menu, so will follow personal preference.[25]

I feel strongly that a spiritual feast is one made by the hands of the practitioners. Although there is room for prepared food ordered in or food eaten in a restaurant (perhaps in a closed room), I have found that there is a layered depth of meditation and prayer when I cook for a feast and there is fellowship gained in cooking a meal with others. It is an expression of *agape* love for my guests: I spend several days thinking about them when I cook a feast; it is an opportunity to use my gifts and talents to demonstrate God's overflowing love. To ask my guests to receive this gift is another part of the exercise. If we are able to receive simple gifts of food and drink and table fellowship with open hearts and gratitude, we are one step closer to understanding that God wants us to receive God's gift of love—God's Son—in the same way.

On the menu, a symbolic food choice is lamb, although this is a cultural and preference decision. Taken together, the Passover lamb in Jewish tradition (Ex. 12) and the Christian extension of the symbol with the representation of Christ as the Lamb who was slain (Rev. 5:12, 13:8) constitute one reason to include it on the menu. Another is the difficult pericope of John 6:53-58, where Jesus asks his disciples to eat his body and drink his blood, which many theologians link with the passages in Revelation and interpret, through the Johannine "bread of life" discourses, as a description of abiding in Christ. Méndez-Montoya quotes Graham Ward (of the school of Radical Orthodoxy) who asks us not for a physical understanding of the Jewish question "How can this man give us his flesh to eat" but a hermeneutical question instead, "in what manner do we understand the offer?" Ward claims a reciprocal relation of abiding. "I eat the flesh of Christ. I take his body into my own. Yet in this act I place myself in Christ—rather than simply placing Christ within me. I consume but do not absorb Christ without being absorbed into Christ." Méndez-Montoya interprets Christ's offer of his flesh as a sign of participation in God's life and God in human's life.[26] I suggest that lamb is a worthy choice at a spiritual feast.[27] A more straightforward argument is made for fish as a symbolic food, referencing the feeding of the multitudes (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14).

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[25] Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*, 1. paperback ed (New York Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). In this history, Sack outlines why some Protestant North American groups refuse wine and use grape juice instead. In the present study, wine is assumed but there is room for cultural interpretation of a spirituality of feasting.

[26] Angel F. Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 132–33.

[27] For further exploration of John 6 see Meredith J. C. Warren, *My Flesh Is Meat Indeed: A Nonsacramental Reading of John 6:51-58* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). Warren's exploration of the shocking cannibalistic imagery of the pericope in John compared to Hellenistic literature of the era is fascinating.

Intention of host and cook.[28] The host, who might be the same as the cook, chooses guests carefully and spends time to consider how best to lavish generosity on the guests. This does not require a large budget. To lavish generosity might look like an abundant potluck table filled with each guest's contribution. Attention is given to what the guests like to eat, their food restrictions in terms of allergies, etc. The host and cook pray for the guests before they arrive, as they arrive at the door, and after they go, asking that the table fellowship will prove to be an occasion where guest and host alike discern a movement of the Holy Spirit already active in their midst.

Setting the scene. A formal feast is usually prepared in advance, including the banquet room. Candles, agreeable music, tablecloths, perhaps even unscented flowers are arranged. A welcome procedure is planned, which may be as simple as providing a place for the guest to hang their coat and offering a glass to drink while the rest of the guests arrive. The intention is to make the guest feel welcomed and comfortable.

Actual feast. The host welcomes everyone to the table, giving a short description of why they are there—to experience the overflowing love of God through abundant food and drink shared with friends. Table grace is said or sung. A toast may be given. This may be the only eucharistic moment of the occasion. Sometimes an explicit reference to Communion or The Lord's Supper is made, to a larger or smaller degree, depending on the nature of the feast. Some feasts may follow a spoken or sung liturgy. Some feasts may be quite relaxed without a liturgy or song. At some point in the meal, the host brings up a conversation that touches on the deep desires of the people at the table and links them with their journey of faith.

In other words, hosting a "spiritual" feast is not much different from hosting a really great dinner party, except for the intention to pray for the guests, the eucharistic moment, the possible inclusion of liturgy, and the pointed discussion. The final step is reflecting on the experience and seeking moments where something new about God[29] was revealed because "theological reflection on experience can make both experience and theology come alive in a new way."[30] A spirituality of feasting points to the experience of God discovered in abundant good food and drink shared in table fellowship.

In Defense of Food[31]

When describing the content of this study, many have expressed surprise that there are theologians who study food. So, before an in-depth study of feasting, a word in the defense of food. One might ask why food is being written about in an academic setting and in connection with theology. In an interdisciplinary spirit and to begin an answer, anthropologist Warren Belasco asks a further question: "Why this reluctance to address the wider meaning of our food

[28] Another word commonly used to describe a person in charge of the cooking is chef. Technically, chef refers to a skilled *professional*. While a home cook may be very skilled, they may not be professional.
[29] A good way to start may be an adapted Ignatian prayer of examen.
[30] Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward, Stephen Pattison, and John Patton (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 139.
[31] Michael Pollan and Penguin, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 2009). I use Pollan's title for this section deliberately, to demonstrate the current popularity of food in journalistic discourse, another layer of interdisciplinary study around food.

behaviours? Why is food taken for granted in academia?"[32] Belasco's answer points to the philosophy of dualism that has pervaded scholarship, with the ascendent focus on the spirit and intellect. He also notes that a Victorian ideal of public and private spheres has hampered food studies as food was considered a private, female realm and not for public discussion. Feminism has done much to open avenues of questioning in food study. More recently, the food industry has worked through marketing to "obscure and mystify the links between the farm and the dinner table."[33] Food has become an abstraction and Belasco points out that one consequence of this is that people do not eat together regularly or as socially as they used to. All these points made food a less than savory academic pursuit.

Theologians agree. L. Shannon Jung in *Food for Life* comments that "food doesn't seem to be on the table for theological discussion" and asks how God got dissociated from food in the first place?[34] Norman Wirzba focuses the de-contextualization of food, meaning how we have become divorced from how food is grown through the industrialization of farming and the marketing practices that currently operate in North America. He argues that these lead to a spiritual impoverishment where food is concerned but that we can begin to break free from this poverty through engaging eating as a spiritual exercise.[35] Part of this spiritual exercise is to eat together, taking Jesus' example: "The ministries of Christ demonstrate that the path to full or abundant life is not a magical path. It is a practical journey that begins with eating. The gospels frequently show Jesus eating with people because table fellowship is among the most powerful ways we know to extend and share in each other's lives."[36]

Academia has changed. Food studies have mushroomed since the 1990s, evidenced by journalists like Michael Pollan,[37] courses of food studies at universities, journals and scholarly works dedicated to food. Even popular culture depicts chefs heroically in television shows such as "Chef's Table." Food in the Christian sphere has blossomed also. Devotional books abound with topics such as feeding the soul or finding meaning in life through actual food or food as a metaphor. A representative example is Kendall Vanderslice's *We Will Feast*.[38] Vanderslice shares about her life's journey through and with food and scholarship, worship in a church setting through food, and her own theological investigations of food. Sustainable food as creation care has been highlighted by Fred Bahnson[39], Norman Wirzba,[40] and Jennifer Ayres,[41] to name a

[32] Warren James Belasco, *Food: The Key Concepts*, The Key Concepts (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2008), 2.
[33] Belasco, 4.
[34] Jung, *Food for Life*, 37.
[35] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, xvi.
[36] Wirzba, 147.
[37] Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, Edition with a new afterword (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006); Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2013); Pollan and Penguin, *In Defense of Food*.
[38] Kendall Vanderslice, *We Will Feast: Rethinking Dinner, Worship, and the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019).
[39] Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation*, Resources for Reconciliation (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2012).
[40] Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015); Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[41] Jennifer R. Ayres, *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013).

few. Daniel Sack wrote a history of food in Protestant North America.[42] The art of eating spiritually is not a new topic. Robert Farrar Capon's homiletic *The Supper of the Lamb*[43] first published in the 1960s was a precursor to modern theologians such as Angel Méndez-Montoya, L. Shannon Jung, and Norman Wirzba. The spirituality of wine is investigated by Gisela Kregliner.[44] In fact, there are so many resources available, it is more a question of being selective.

All of this is to say that food and feasting are valid theological entry points because there is a host of questions, relationships, and doctrines that can be touched on through food.

There are three food and theology authors whose works are influential in the thesis. These theologians highlight two food-based acts. First, original sin was accomplished with a disobedient eating. The fall creates a broken world, extending to matters of food. Second, the new covenant in Christ is the redemptive counterpoint, which is demonstrated in the Eucharist or worship based on eating. All these theologians discuss how eating can be a spiritual act and highlight eucharistic eating or feasting. They also describe hunger or desire for food as a God-given gift, encouraging readers to seek God and act justly. Each food theologian layers onto these bases their particular interest.

Dominican Friar and professor Angel Méndez-Montoya draws together the themes of Trinitarian *perichoresis* and human desire as motivating forces, which he describes as a theology of "hybrid discourse of divine and human desires."[45] He has coined the term "alimentary theology": "because food matters, theology's vocation is to become alimentation: a theology not only concerned *about* food matters, but also a theology envisioned as food."[46] He writes how a theology of food is developed from Biblical texts and builds on these themes from contemporary literature. Méndez-Montoya points to the wisdom of God being ingested by believers in a banquet setting.[47] Protestant L. Shannon Jung focuses on how eating should be seen as a redemptive, shared activity and highlights some of the reasons food has been off the table theologically. Jung points to the redemption of negative food experiences. He calls the Church to redeem the act of eating, to believe that food is a gift and eating is a blessing. He advocates a relearning of feasting for the sake of a better understanding of God's goodness.[48] Protestant professor Norman Wirzba focuses on how eating can and should define a Christian differently, to God's glory, beginning with sustainable gardening through to sharing food thoughtfully in community and as missional outreach.[49] His passion is focused on sustainable agriculture, and this is what informs his spirituality of eating. He also emphasizes the *perichoresis* of the Trinity as a model for how Christian love should be shared, thus building faith. The abundance of food shared is a model for Christian agape love outpoured. Chapter two investigates the themes shared by these three authors to build a spirituality of feasting.

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[42] Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*.
[43] Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb*.
[44] Kreglinger, *The Spirituality of Wine*.
[45] Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food*, 35.
[46] Méndez Montoya, 3.
[47] Méndez Montoya, 96–108.
[48] Jung, *Food for Life*, 51–53.
[49] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*.

Chapter Two: A Feast in Five Courses

Feast: \ fēst\
***noun**: 1 a) an elaborate and usually abundant meal often accompanied by a ceremony or entertainment: banquet. b1) something that gives unusual or abundant enjoyment, b2) abundance, profusion.*
2 a periodic religious observance commemorating an event or honouring a deity, person, or thing.
***verb**: intransitive verb 1) to take part in a feast 2) to enjoy some unusual pleasure or delight.*
Transitive verb 1) to give a feast for 2) Delight, gratify.[50]

: *an opportunity to find God's overflowing grace outpoured through an abundant table fellowship.*

A spirituality of feasting is a tangible and concrete embodied experience which offers practitioners an opportunity to analyze their faith in action. It takes the personal experiences of cooks, hosts and guests, each of whom has their own socio-cultural context, and asks them to reflect on their relationship with God through the act of feasting together.

One: Ethnography

Ethnography is a tool used both in a study of spirituality and in practical theology, borrowed from anthropology. [51] It is the field study of people and culture and accomplishes "the complex tasks of observation, description, dialogue, and interpretation."[52] The term is used in varying ways. "For some, it means quasi-objective research with interviews, questionnaires, and participant observation. For others it means immersion in a community on an extended basis as a member."[53] Theologian Mary Clark Moschella, for example, places the work of ethnography in the gaps and connections between theology and practice. For her, it is a tool to assess the distance between what people preach or theologize and what they practice in their lived faith.[54]

Another view: "Ethnography is a practice of prayerful attentiveness to human beings in their spiritual lives. When the work of ethnography is approached in this way, it is a spiritual practice in itself that may become an act of primary theology."[55] Here is another example of a multi-valent understanding that the practice of theology and food engages. If ethnography is considered as a prayerful practice, it can help practical theologians learn *from* as well as *about* the practice of faith. In the present study of the spirituality of feasting, I employ ethnography as immersion in the practice of feasting, to understand the practice from the inside out. I observe participants (my guests) and myself so I can learn experientially from the experience of feasting together.[56] For this study, I have created a film of recorded interviews with my guests and myself in a documentary film.

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[50] "Feast," in *Merriam-Webster*, n.d., "Feast." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feast. Accessed 8 Sep. 2021.
[51] Paloma Gay y Blasco and Huon Wardle, *How to Read Ethnography*, transferred to digital print (London: Routledge, 2009), 1.
[52] Clark Moschella, 1-2.
[53] Miller-McLemore, "Introduction: The Contributions of Practical Theology," 11.
[54] Clark Moschella, "Ethnography," 1. Meanwhile the composition of the thesis is for me, the theological testing of the field experiences gathered over my lifetime.
[55] Clark Moschella, 4.
[56] Clark Moschella, 2.

Creative Representation: Documentary Film

A feast has overlapping layers of research, planning, purchasing, food preparation, cooking and baking, serving, eating and drinking, and cleaning. The opportunity for reflection and meditation during the preparation of a feast is but one demonstration of "food is good to think." My personal experiences of cooking feasts are the creative work of the thesis, which are summarized in a documentary film that I co-created with Ethan Volberg. The film documents four feasts in eight days and investigates what it means to eat together and experience something greater than the simple parts that make up the meal. The "field experiences" in the film are interviews with me and my guests at my table. The interviews give short insights into my thoughts on the theology and spirituality of feasting, as well as the work that goes into cooking a feast. Although the medium of film is not the writing of ethnography, nor does the thesis attempt a quantitative or structuralist ethnography, the thrust behind the film is to gather and report the field experiences of cooking and eating feasts. It is more in line with the spiritual practice of ethnography as theology. The application of these experiences and the writing about them in this document asks a theological question: how does food-and-theology explain the numinous experience of feasting? It is helpful to remember that "[e]thnography, then, is never just recollection: it is a reflection on, an examination of, and an argument about experience made from a particular standpoint."[57] Through this film, I adapt an ethnographic approach to theology, and I employ the questions ethnography asks to serve as analysis of the cooking of feasts.

Asking questions of experiences is critical. As Jung points out, "Experience is not yet theology; we have to test our experience and discover its content."[58] One useful ethnographic exercise is that of comparison and context.[59] In answer to questions of context and comparison in the filmed cooking of feasts, I draw out the following observations and corresponding questions.

1. My feasting experiences are in a Protestant North American context (socio-historical setting). My guests have either a Catholic or Protestant background or a non-religious background.
    a. I think that understanding feasting spiritually is portable across cultures. How will it be expressed in the Middle East compared to Europe? In Africa compared to Asia?
2. My education has led to an interest in making environmentally sustainable choices, which in turn causes me to choose local produce over imported, and organically grown produce when possible (my emphasis on healthy food, a demonstration of my level of education or perhaps my social class).
    a. Does choosing sustainable food matter? In our discussion of food and theology, we will see it does matter to some. Is it possible to engage food and theology without a conversation around the problems of modern agri-business? Can a spiritual feast still be undertaken without choosing sustainable food?
3. My family of origin values hospitality (identity).
    a. What about people who do not have this kind of family tradition? Can identity still be built around a table for them?

[57] Gay y Blasco and Wardle, *How to Read Ethnography*, 9.
[58] Jung, *Food for Life*, 33.
[59] Gay y Blasco and Wardle, *How to Read Ethnography*, 4.

4. Deepening friendship through shared table fellowship is meaningful for me and my guests (anthropologists examine how humans make meaning, theology situates that meaning in a spiritual realm).
    a. There are people who do not find meaning in eating around a table. Is a spirituality of feasting universally accessible from a personal interest or engagement point of view?

These observations demonstrate some of the context of the four filmed feasts but also of my experiences of feasting. There are more questions to ask, because finding the gaps between theology and practice means to ask questions. People of faith attempt to practice what they preach, but they are not always consistent. It is these moments of inconsistency that can be very revealing. In a feasting example, the Biblical ideal Jesus presents for table fellowship is inclusive of those outside our accepted circle—in Jesus' example, the tax collector and the prostitute. Many church groups are dedicated to including or serving society's outcasts and there are many eating-based missional practices that strive to follow Jesus' example. However, in "the dinner party for six, eight, or ten," the host normally invites people known and loved—people of a similar demographic. Herein lies a tension that must be thoughtfully considered: it may pain us in some way to have "the other" around the table yet all people seek to be fed through being known and loved. How we choose to be fed and to feed others is a balance to be discerned through prayer.

Another question arises from the ideal in food and theology to honour creation by choosing sustainable food (see below). That may not be possible for every home cook due to their location (not being close to a farm, or having access to a garden or farmer-sourced produce) or budget (organic food options are costly if they are purchased at a grocery store). These are tensions which reveal inconsistencies between the theological ideal and the practiced reality. It is important to be aware of these gaps and reflect on them with an eye to ensuring a practice of integrity.

Two: Embodied Theology

> *Bodies are the places and the means of God's creating and sustaining love.*
>
> *Norman Wirzba* [60]

> *The quite tangible way that food becomes enjoyed and embodied reminds us of God's grace, nurturing and sustaining us.*
>
> *L. Shannon Jung*[61]

Dualism in scholarly discourse since the Enlightenment is one of the reasons that Belasco credits for keeping food off the academic table.[62] In a dualist worldview we elevate the soul and denigrate the body. In line with the value practical theology places on finding meaning in the gaps between practice and theology, Méndez-Montoya proposes that "embodiment insists on the

[60] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 175.
[61] Jung, *Food for Life*, 107.
[62] See above, *In Defense of Food.*

in-betweenness, which is always mediated by the body,"[63] and he points to the problems of a dualist worldview.[64] Wirzba reminds us, following Jürgen Moltmann, if we think salvation is for an immortal soul only, then we have no hope for a resurrected body, which invalidates the need for an incarnational Christ (John 1:14). Yet the biblical message is clear:

> Flesh is the thing God loves. Flesh is what God constructed 'in his own image' and 'with his own hands.' If the flesh of our bodies, indeed the flesh of the whole creation, is what God loves, then its end cannot be destruction or annihilation but rather reconciliation and peace (Col. 1:20).[65]

Acknowledging the value of bodies—historically, in the present, and eschatologically—teaches us that a dualist worldview is more than unhelpful, it is inaccurate within a Christian framework. Embodied theology envisions a holistic world undivided by sharp mind/body duality. Orthodox theologians have long supported this view. Alexander Schmemann, for example, offers a eucharistic theology where there is no separation of spiritual and material: all the world belongs to God, stimulating the Christian's deep belief of God.[66]

In postmodernist thought (see below), we have shifted away from dualism. Jung, writing in 2004, notes that theologians did not write about the incarnation, claiming or proclaiming a bodily presence of God, in the 1960s and 1970s. However, since the mid-1980s the body was resurrected and God's incarnate presence became a topic in theology, thanks to the work of ecological and feminist theologians.[67] As we will see below, especially feminist scholarship asked different questions than systematic theology, allowing previously "base" aspects of existence to enter theological debate. Embodied theology is embraced by food and theology not in small part because of the intimate bodily nature of food. Eating food is the act of ingesting creation. At a carnal level, we participate in creation when we bite and chew our food. At a cellular level, we participate in creation when our bodies digest the nutrients of our food and transform them into blood, organs, bones, brains, and energy to make these bodily parts function. If God is fully present in creation, immanent and ubiquitous, both at a carnal and cellular level as the creator of the world, then when we eat, we participate with God in creation.

However, "embodied" can be used to mean different things. As Bonnie Miller-McLemore points out, many theologians today use the term "embodied" to mean that a body is culturally embedded or to refer to cultural constructions of bodies. I affirm Miller-McLemore: we must not forget the actual corporeal body when theologizing,[68] and in this context, theologizing about food. Our bodies are places where theology can be experienced, as James Nelson declares:

> We are not simply asking what theology has to say about the body, as if theology were conducted from some superior vantage point by discarnate, disembodied

[63] Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food*, 61.
[64] Méndez Montoya, 53.
[65] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 218–19.
[66] Aleksandr Dmitrievič Šmeman, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd rev. ed (Crestwood (N.Y.): St. Vladimir's seminary press, 1973).
[67] Jung, *Food for Life*, 107.
[68] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology: What Happened to the Body?," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 5 (October 2013): 743–58, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-013-0510-3.

> spirits. We are asking what it means that we as body-selves participating in the reality of God and as body-selves reflect upon—theologize about—that reality.[69]

Embodied theology is confident in this reality because of the doctrine of Incarnation. Food-and-theology is incarnational also. For Méndez-Montoya, John 1:14 "The Word became flesh…" is the key to unlock the relationality between God and humanity. "Christ's flesh aligns itself with human flesh. In the flesh, Christ blends God's desires with the desires of humanity…God is not indifferent, but shares divinity within and at the core of the human flesh."[70] Wirzba declares that the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ teaches us much because the way we relate body to body is ecologically and theologically significant.

> To live is to be in a body in a place joined to all the bodies of creation. It is our life, but it is also the life God chose for himself in the body of Jesus. Embodiment is not alien to God, nor is it a reality only temporarily (and thus begrudgingly) assumed. Bodies are the places and the means of God's creating and sustaining love.[71]

What a body does is meaningful for both the body and God. We see that our everyday body and actions are culturally situated and mediated. Elaine Graham points to a growing trend in practical theology investigating everyday narratives and practices of faith, "read inductively for what they reveal as enactments of theological worlds or truth-claims," calling this a shift to the "hermeneutics of lived religion"[72] Theologian Maaike de Haardt considers the everyday or the quotidian experience to be a place where theology can be discovered.[73] Food is an everyday experience we cannot live without. John Koenig describes how Paul declares in 1Corinthians 10:31 that "all eating and drinking by Christians must be seen as worship, offered up 'to the glory of God' Thus even the everyday meals shared by believers…profoundly symbolize their new formation in Christ."[74] Further, the small habits that food theology prescribes, such as saying grace, are but one aspect of an everyday theology.

Feasting is incarnational because it is a fully embodied experience, and it is enacted and performative. Feasting is a language of incarnation that God uses as an embodied faith-filled practice. There are several intersecting and overlapping subthemes of embodiment within this conception of a spirituality of feasting. They are 1) an understanding of a theology of grace, 2) the centrality of eucharistic eating, and 3) the framework of *habitus*.

Grace

> *To be God is to return good for evil: that is God's glory. What God requires of men [*sic*] is that they give Him His glory. Reason cannot, because it is blinded by legalism.*

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[69] James B Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publ. House, 1979), 20.
[70] Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food*, 36–37.
[71] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 175.
[72] Graham, "On Becoming a Practical Theologian: Past, Present and Future Tenses," 6.
[73] Maaike de Haardt, "Visual Narratives: Entrance to Everyday Religious Practices," in *Religious Stories We Live By: Narrative Approaches in Theology and Religious Studies*, Studies in Theology and Religion (STAR), VOLUME 19 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2014), 209–17, http://0-search.ebscohost.com.mercury.concordia.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=672368&site=eds-live.
[74] John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 17 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 53.

> *Only faith gives God His glory; for faith is the correlative of grace, and God's grace is His glory.*
>
> *Martin Luther, quoted by B.A. Gerrish*[75]

As mentioned at the outset, I define a spirituality of feasting as finding God's overflowing love through relationships built around an abundant table. The abundance of food and drink at the feasting table is an embodied experience of God's grace, defined as an unmerited love (Rom. 3:23-25; Eph. 2:8) that is wide and deep, more than we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:18-20). But what does it mean to embody grace? I engage with a Lutheran theology of grace for this study and particularly with Jung's definitions of grace as they pertain to food and theology.

Grace is a well-defined Reformation and Protestant doctrine. B.A. Gerrish in his study of Luther's theology comments that "Grace, as the Protestant understands it, is *nothing but* undeserved pardon, but surely no Protestant has ever denied that pardon renews and transforms the sinner."[76] We see immediately that grace involves the doctrine of sin because humanity is gifted with this undeserved pardon, what some Bible translations call unmerited favour. Luther was clear that grace is revealed only by the Gospel and grasped by faith. This experience of revelation is not found in study alone. The Spirit not only reveals but necessarily creates even the faith by which grace must be grasped,[77] and as a result, we experience transformation.

Kirsi Stjerna gives us a summary of grace in Lutheran teaching as it has evolved since the Reformation and offers some questions to ask of the Lutheran conception of grace. To begin, "there is no encounter with grace without the Word. Grace is realized and experienced in human life via the Word, is effected by the Word, and is explained in and with the Word."[78] The rallying Reformation cry of *Sola Scriptura* is heard loud and clear. Food and theology also affirm that Scripture must be central. Jung suggests that because we begin with experience in food and theology, this has the potential to mute the

> prophetic voice in Scripture. We can wind up simply saying that God endorses gourmet dining. However, Scripture itself is experiential and calls us to pay attention to the destructive forces of injustice and evil. Scripture calls us to the misappropriation of material goods and privileges, to care for those who are disadvantaged—the poor, victims of injustice, those who cannot help themselves.[79]

The scriptural focus is important because otherwise, food and theology would simply be food activism. It is the scripturally based Christian ethics that are at the core of why food theology preaches and practices the way it does. However, as Stjerna warns, there is a "danger that excessive Word-centeredness may foster an unnecessary imaginary gap between matter and

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[75] B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford, Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1962), 169.
[76] Gerrish, 135N.
[77] Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther*, 1962, 91, 140. Unlike Catholic or evangelical Protestant theology, Lutheran theology understands the capacity for faith not as a human property or potential that somehow survives the Fall, but rather—as a matter of spiritual necessity—a gift of God's Spirit. That is, from a Lutheran theological perspective, for the sake of faith and salvation God must do it all.
[78] Kirsi I. Stjerna, "Grace Only? Or, All Is Grace?," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 54, no. 3 (September 2015): 264, https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1111/dial.12187.
[79] Jung, *Food for Life*, 136.

spirit, the tangible and the reality of God's grace."[80] We have seen how a dualistic view is problematic, and Stjerna's warning is apt. Lutheran theology emphasizes the sacraments, including the preaching of the Word, as a means of grace. God's redemptive motion is conceived of as downward, from heaven to earth, rather than a human movement seeking to ascend to God. Word and sacrament combine as an in-breaking of the New Creation in an intellectual but bodily experience of hearing the Word mingled with water of baptism and bread and wine of communion. However, the rationalist movement of the seventeenth century has shaped Protestant theology significantly. For example, in nonsacramental evangelical experience the primacy of the mind is demonstrated by an emphasis on the decision the believer makes to follow Jesus, daily personal Bible reading, and praying with words alone. Such practices tend to overwhelm tangible and material ritual practices, as James K.A. Smith observes (see below, *Dinner Church*). But embodiment need not be far off when we speak of grace. Jung is clear that:

> Food is revelatory of the goodness and joy of the earth; it is also how we come to taste the language of grace and love; it is how we come to know community. Food opens up in us the visceral channels of knowledge. It enables us to experience love before we have a name for it. God comes to feed us, to fill us, to love us. We know grace first through our bodies.[81]

This study is an exploration of how we can understand grace more viscerally, to help close the gap between matter and spirit. A practice of eucharistic eating offers us this possibility. As we will see, the sacrament of communion or the Eucharist is close to the heart of a spirituality of feasting. Monica Hellwig cautions us in our understanding of grace in the sacraments.

> The definition of sacrament, when not carefully considered, may suggest that grace is some sort of substance, stored by God and bestowed by him on those who do what they have been told to do to earn it. But grace is not a substance. It is a relationship with God and with his creation. As such it is not something that can be handled or seen, but it can be seen in its operation or effects. Another way of speaking about the relationship with God, which we call grace, is to speak of charity….divine charity, that sharing in God's own love, which is also meant by the relationship we call grace, is by nature non-exclusive. It is practiced (expressed, exercised) by openness to the unexpected, the hitherto unseen demands of others' needs, to those that are beyond the acceptable boundaries of society and culture[82]

Hellwig's emphasis on grace as relationship is affirmed by Lutheran theology: "Grace is understood as the healing of the relationship, and grace is experienced in the certainty promised with the offering and receiving of the declaration of forgiveness."[83] Jung describes this relationality as a mystery:

> There is a mysterious component to the way that food establishes and is a product of relationality. Food and eating reveal that we human beings are strangers to ourselves; we do not know the involuntary processes that are integral to our lives. Likewise, food and eating reveal the strange graciousness and approachability of others who are

[80] Stjerna, "Grace Only? Or, All Is Grace?," 264.
[81] Jung, *Food for Life*, 45.
[82] Monika Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 2nd ed., rev.expanded (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 53–54.
[83] Stjerna, "Grace Only? Or, All Is Grace?," 264.

> remarkably trustworthy. We can sense that we have been graced from beyond ourselves and also within ourselves.[84]

Further to relationality, the sacraments remind us that salvation is not for one worshipper but for the whole Body of Christ. Church communities have the powerful responsibility to mediate God's grace and God's redemption.[85] Although reflection on a spirituality of feasting may begin with the individual, shared table fellowship must include a community.

The Lutheran conception of grace is, although Trinitarian at its base, utterly Christocentric in delivery. "Grace alone is explained from Christ alone, and Christ alone warrants the grace alone gift-reality (that is, only because of Christ, "grace only" suffices)."[86] Why this emphasis on the Christ in the Word? Gerrish notes that "Probably the unity of Scripture rests upon three facts in Luther's mind: its *author* was God, the Spirit; its *content* is Christ; and its *message* is justification by grace."[87] In food and theology, God's incarnation is a revelation of grace:

> The goodness of food, an incarnation of God's grace, can remind us of the grace of Jesus Christ. Good food and delightful meals can remind us of the many ways God's grace becomes incarnate in our lives. Furthermore, sharing such food can be a gracious sharing, an act of compassion to others because of the compassion that we have received from God and God's people.[88]

Stjerna suggests that a Lutheran theology of grace, strictly Christ-centered and scripture focused, may benefit from ecumenical interchange. She points to Catholic theologian Karl Rahner's theology of grace as a possible way to add breadth to the Lutheran conception of grace. Karl-Heinz Weger summarizes Rahner's philosophical and anthropological approach to theology, which Rahner terms transcendental anthropology.[89] The transcendental quality of grace in Rahner's conception is that it exists *a priori* (transcendentally) as an offer for everyone, whether it is accepted or not. The offer is that God himself supernaturally dwells at the "very centre of the existence of every man [*sic*];" humanity is called to a state of grace. In this way, all human experience is also an experience of God and at the same time an experience of grace. "For Rahner,…grace is first and foremost a self-communication by God in his Trinitarian reality."[90] Following this, salvation is "not based on truths communicated by God (however necessary dogmatic formulae may be). Man [*sic*] is sanctified and saved because, in Christ, he shares God's life."[91] John P. Galvin summarizes Rahner's notion of God indwelling humans:

> By self-gift or self-communication of God, we mean simply that God offers himself in unsurpassable proximity: the giver is himself the gift. God does not merely give us finite gifts, nor merely communicate to us truths about himself. He offers us a presence which surpasses his relationship to us with its nature, this divine self-gift takes place on a personal level, not in the objectified manner in which sub-personal reality might be conferred on the beneficiary of a bequest. A full personal relationship with God is established only in one who responds positively to the divine offer, with at least implicit

[84] Jung, *Food for Life*, 50.
[85] Jung, 119.
[86] Stjerna, "Grace Only? Or, All Is Grace?," 264.
[87] Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther*, 150N.
[88] Jung, *Food for Life*, 106.
[89] Karl-Heinz Weger, *Karl Rahner, an Introduction to His Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 86–87.
[90] Weger, 88, 109.
[91] Weger, 98.

> faith, hope, and love. (Theologians frequently reserve the term 'divine indwelling,' as alluded to in John 14:23, for this intensified relationship in which God's presence within us has elicited a positive response on our part.)[92]

Rahner's theology offers Lutheran *sola gratia* a fuller Trinitarian conception and the emphasis on the indwelling of God in humanity. These ideas are not missing from Lutheran theology, which builds its Trinitarian theology around Christocentric witness, but Rahner's thrust is different. Rahner's metaphysical thinking suggests that there is a divine spark in humanity which grace can fan into flame with the power of the Holy Spirit. Following indwelling and Trinitarian ideals, and situating a theology of grace in eucharistic eating, Méndez-Montoya writes that,

> The kenosis of the eucharistic gift is a self-immersion of Christ with the Holy Spirit into finite humanity and materiality. In the Eucharist, divinity takes the risk of becoming food because of a desire to indwell (or abide) in the beloved, just as food becomes a part of the eater. But in this kenotic giving there is not only a self-immersion of the supernatural in the natural. This *convenientia* [from Aquinas] of the Incarnation as well as the eucharistic feeding allows the elevation of the human condition to the supernatural: a tendency or forward direction toward a deeper reality of intimacy with God as in the beatific vision and the final destination at the eschaton.[93]

Méndez-Montoya upholds the self-sharing gift of God with humanity through alimentary theology. This is the kind of knowledge that is fundamental to a spirituality of feasting: to know that God through Christ abides in us because of overflowing grace and to experience that grace at the table laid abundantly and shared in Christian fellowship.

How do we engage with grace? Knowledge of grace should produce a transformation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer persuasively argues that what we often practice in our faith is "cheap grace" because there is no discipleship in it. Costly grace is marked by the incarnation and is sought again and again through the disciplines of repentance and confession and the sacraments of baptism and communion.[94] Jung agrees that "we are a 'cheap grace' culture." In the context of food and theology, this refers to all the ways we are complicit in degradation of eating.[95] We can move beyond complicity in broken food systems and degraded eating in accepting grace (discovered through Scripture and through a movement of the Holy Spirit) and then allowing that grace to transform us. Rahner, through Galvin, teaches that "acceptance and rejection of grace are thus not limited to acts with visibly religious content. They take place in any true exercise of our freedom, even if the specific act seems to have nothing to do with God. The fundamental way in which the offer of grace is accepted is genuine love of neighbor (see Matthew 25:31-46; 1 John 4:7-21)."[96] Stjerna agrees that "grace is more than an abstract word—grace is embodied in

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[92] John P. Galvin, "The Invitation of Grace," in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 66.
[93] Méndez Montoya, The Theology of Food, 144. Méndez-Montoya is affirming the nature of transubstantiation withing the framework of eucharistic eating. Protestants may have a hard time swallowing this ideal. However, being open to other points of view will hopefully aid in an ecumenical effort, especially important in this study of the spirituality of feasting.
[94] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 2018, 3–14, http://www.myilibrary.com?id=894520.
[95] Jung, *Food for Life*, 108–9.
[96] Galvin, "The Invitation of Grace," 69.

human action, per Christ's own model."[97] Inclusion of those in need of grace around the table is one way to communicate God's love for humanity.

Galvin suggests that in Rahner's conception, an experience of grace is equated with an experience of the Holy Spirit. "Since divine self-communication has the transforming effect on human consciousness, it is possible and legitimate to speak in a certain sense of experiencing grace."[98] Luther himself points to the revelation of the Spirit. Rahner holds the tension between the experience of grace not being exactly like other types of experiences but believes that grace is not restricted to special moments either. It may be difficult to discern where exactly grace appears; but that is the nature of grace since it is operative in all we do.[99] Rahner claims a mysticism of everyday life, discovering God in all things through the "sober intoxication of the Spirit."[100] and "There is no single human action in which God does not communicate himself to us, in which, in other words, his grace is not, either reflectively or unreflectively, at work and aspects of revelation are involved."[101] There is an outpouring of God's abundant grace in all that we do. In the context of this study, all that we do, includes feasting which demonstrates the working of God's grace. God's grace in Jesus Christ transforms our everyday eating and drinking. Now every meal is an expression of grace for all who need grace – that is all of us! God corrects our senses so that we see, taste, consume, and comprehend not only food but divine grace as well.

Eucharistic Eating

> *Theology is sacramental, incarnational and enacted: it is talking about God as embodied in faith-filled practices.*
>
> *Elaine Graham* [102]

The doctrine of original sin is food-based; it is through disobedient eating that sin enters the world. It is fitting, therefore that the redemption of that sinful food act is mirrored by another food-based act, the Eucharist. The meal variously called the Eucharist, Communion or the Lord's Supper is the central worship practice of Christians. New Testament descriptions of the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23-26; Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; John 6:35-53), as interpreted by the early church and developed over two millennia have created a basis for worship that is food-based. Méndez-Montoya fleshes out the relationship between the doctrines of sin and eucharist: "From the perspective of the eucharistic feeding, the sin of the first Adam is unmasked in Jesus, the second Adam's, crucifixion, so that, by finally knowing sin as a refusal of God's love-as-nourishment, the partaker of the Eucharist can be radically healed, transfigured into the resurrected body of Christ."[103] Méndez-Montoya in the same breath highlights the experience of the partaker of the Eucharist in the worship act and its theological significance looking backward in time. But the Eucharist also looks forward in time. The doctrine of the Eucharist remembers the salvific work of Christ on the cross and points to eschatological hope of

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[97] Stjerna, "Grace Only? Or, All Is Grace?," 267.
[98] Galvin, "The Invitation of Grace," 69.
[99] Galvin, 70, 73.
[100] Weger, *Karl Rahner, an Introduction to His Theology*, 95.
[101] Weger, 108.
[102] Graham, "On Becoming a Practical Theologian: Past, Present and Future Tenses," 4.
[103] Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food*, 109.

the future full redemption of the world when Christ comes again.[104] Christian past, present, and future are communicated through the elements of bread and wine. God's saving grace is lavished upon the communicants as they eat and drink.

By extension, all eating can have a spiritual and eucharistic dimension. Wirzba defines eucharistic eating as remembering that Jesus abides in us, which inspires us to deep fellowship (*koinonia*) with others. Jesus abiding in us transforms us and reorders our desires to continually look outside of ourselves, to overcome exploitation, and to be attentive to the needs of others. "Eucharistic eating has to do with learning to abide with Jesus so that our abiding with others can take on a Christological form. In other words, eucharistic eating alters the relationships that make up our lives, gives them a self-offering character, and in doing so changes the practice of life itself."[105] According to Jung, the:

> Eucharist calls us to remember that God pervades the world, that grace is ultimately the force driving the world…if we are to believe that God is immanent throughout the universe, then the church will have to incarnate the Eucharist in its life. One way of doing this is to relearn how to feast in appreciation of God's goodness—that is delight. The other is to share the feast in mission—to proclaim the goodness of God in effecting our redemption and the redemption of the world. The Eucharist is finally the feast of the world's redemption, that is performative with a vengeance. We who share the Eucharist are to share the story of redemption and to live out the redeemed life.[106]

The application to feasting is layered. Our reflection starts before we take a bite: eating from a spiritual point of view is Incarnationally and Christologically centered, hence eucharistic eating. To have this worldview, we must reorder our desires to engage in practical behaviours that aid in the ongoing redemption of the world. Feasting is an opportunity to declare that even though the world is broken because of sin, we can be a part of the ongoing redemption of the world through careful and considerate eating habits: saying grace or developing a thankful mindset, finding *Imago Dei* on the faces of those who work to bring food to our tables, choosing food that honours good stewardship of creation. These choices sound simple, but their implications are far reaching. If we do not choose thus, we run the risk of denying eucharistic truth, as Jung reminds us: if we think of eating and drinking as only personal satisfaction, choosing not to see our bodily relation to creation and to others, we will miss the opportunity to experience the fullness of revelation, that is, for human bodies to be a means of grace. [107]

The choice is ours to engage a shared, reflective eating practice. It is for this reason that Dorothy Bass observes that "practices related to food, undertaken over time and in the company of wise and seasoned practitioners, have the power to form and even to transform persons and communities—a power acknowledged not only within Christianity but also in other religious traditions." [108] How we view eating is an important first step because it drives our habits. It is nothing short of transformation: "Eating at the eucharistic table we are asking to be

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[104] Méndez Montoya, 135.
[105] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 155, 158–60.
[106] Jung, *Food for Life*, 53.
[107] Jung, 39.
[108] Dorothy C. Bass, "Eating," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm), Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 6.

transformed—given a life-enabling, blood infusion of sorts—so that whenever we eat, those we eat and those we eat with will have been welcomed and cherished as manifestations of God's love. This is no mere theoretical act. It is an economic and political act because it entails that all our relationships be inspired by attention and care."[109] The importance of our habitual reflection and our habitual practices cannot be understated.

Habitus

> *Faith and truth cannot be separated from practical action, which is the very vehicle and embodiment of the Word made flesh.*
>
> *Elaine Graham*[110]

Practical theology emphasizes the concept of *habitus* developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu conceives our everyday actions as practical knowledge, developed by our social situation in culture (Bourdieu focused on "class condition") and, at the same time, that these actions are responsible for constructing our culture. His in-depth and nuanced work highlights that what we do with our bodies is contrary to what intellectual idealism says about why we do what we do. For a full understanding, Bourdieu believes, that "one has to return to practice, the site of the dialectic of the *opus operatum* and the *modus operandi*; of the objectified products and the incorporated products of historical practice; of structures and *habitus*."[111] Practical theologians offer their own summaries and uses of *habitus*. Ted A. Smith posits that *habitus* are both structures produced by the physical reality of class condition, and they perpetuate both the *habitus* and the class condition.

> But *habitus* do not simply and smoothly reproduce the class relations that produced them, as if they were algorithms spinning out fresh copies of themselves in endless loops. *Habitus* function instead as 'schemes of thought and expression' and 'systems of durable transposable dispositions' that are incorporated in the lives of individual agents. They are deeply embodied know-how, 'values given body, *made* body,' through a process of 'transubstantiation.' *Habitus* live more in the body than in the consciousness—and so they are both more powerful and open-ended. They limit action, to be sure. But they also provide the raw materials for new actions. They become 'the basis for the *intentionless invention* of regulated improvisation.'[112]

Smith uses *habitus* because it offers a tool to analyze how the relations between race, class, gender, and citizenship perpetuate themselves in the everyday. The implication for practical theology is both at a high level looking at structures in culture as well as at the low level of individual actions. They must both be studied for a more complete understanding of any given society.[113] Fulkerson acknowledges the value of seeing how *habitus* shapes theological work because practice "entails pre-reflective bodily knowledge and skills, including enculturations to which virtue ethics fails to attend, Bourdieu's *habitus* adds the affective, bodied wisdom to the formative, lived character of faith. *Habitus* allows for new ways to think about continuity in

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[109] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 178. Wirzba uses "those we eat" to mean animals, giving them a place of honour in creation.
[110] Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," 113.
[111] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 52.
[112] Ted Smith, "Theories of Practice," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm), Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 5.
[113] Smith, 5.

change as improvisation and adds the category of bodied practices to the concept of social memory and tradition."[114] Clark Moschella applies the idea of *habitus* to ethnographic study as "the sum of the unspoken and yet firmly entrenched rules or patterns that govern the way a group of people practice their faith."[115]

What does *habitus* teach us about the core understanding in food and theology of incarnational, grace-infused, eucharistic eating? It reveals the gap between where eucharistic eating points people and what they actually do. Theologian James KA Smith shares a personal experience that illustrates this point. He became interested in "good" eating, meaning a focus on sustainable agriculture and consumer practice because of a Christian stewardship worldview, especially through reading Wendell Berry. He found himself very aware of a gap between his *habitus* and what he had come to think of as his intellectual perspective on good Christian food practice. One day while reading Berry's anthology, *Bringing It to the Table*, he was

> suddenly struck by an ugly irony: here I was reading Wendell Berry in the food court in Costco. There are so many things wrong with that sentence, I don't even know where to begin. Indeed, 'the food court at Costco' might be a kind of shorthand for Berry's picture of the sixth circle of hell. So how might one account for this gap between my thought and my action—between my passionate intellectual assent to these ideas and my status quo action? Why do I *believe* Michael Pollan but still pull into the drive-through at McDonald's?[116]

I believe all of us sit at this crossroad. Studying *habitus* gives us a bird's-eye view to our own behaviour, personally and culturally, and reveals where work is still needed. Smith goes on to describe that although he had intellectually accepted what, in this study Wirzba, Jung and Méndez-Montoya point to as a Christian perspective on eating, for Smith his habits were still in the realm of what he calls "secular liturgies." Smith advocates for an approach to Christian education he terms "liturgical anthropology," which takes the ideas of Bourdieu's *habitus* and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's embodied anthropology to create a Christian lens to focus on the gap between belief and action. Smith's liturgical anthropology is aimed at Protestant educators at the university level to provoke a horizon of conversion for teachers who pride their intellect above all else. Smith wants Protestant America to realize that they are bodily creatures, where everything they do can and should be considered a work for God (liturgy meaning work of the people), and that there are startling gaps, once this is realized, between what we intellectually know and what we habitually do. Smith casts his work as liturgical, because, following Alexander Schmemann, he believes that at our core, we humans are worshipping creatures. Smith believes that when we see how *habitus* is understood in a spiritual frame, there is less difference for the body between what is done in a shopping trip to the mall compared to what is done in a typical church service. Both can be conceived of as worship,[117] both have the power to transform.

The theological upshot of Smith's thesis is that Christians need to be aware of what they do and why they do it. The outcome of greater integrity between faith and action follows the idea of

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[114] Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," 6.
[115] Clark Moschella, "Ethnography," 3.
[116] James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies, v. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2013), 8–9.
[117] Smith, 1–28.

habitus: it creates both society and personal practice. I agree with Smith that the world belongs to God, but this is easy to miss if we are not attentive to God. Bass reminds us of the way that *habitus* is both created by us and creates our worldview.

> Developing a practical theology of eating is not only a matter of deciding what we *should* do and then setting up rules to make sure we do it. Discerning a life-giving way of life at table also entails recognizing God's presence in the meals we already share. Such recognition will involve us in saying "grace" again and again. By this I mean not only repeating table prayers, though this is a good and important act. I mean also inviting one another to relax into the gracious love of God, trusting that Jesus, who ate with tax collectors and prostitutes, would and does gladly eat with us.[118]

We need to put on the glasses of revelation to find God in the world.

Sin in the World, Part I

Take an example of how people choose what they eat. When deciding which food to consume, there are many little decisions to make informed by social class or income level, ethnic background, level of education, and personal preference, all aspects of *habitus*. There are the overarching societal structures that are in place that also inform those decisions, such as the economic systems of food production in the West, which leads to the regular habit of buying food at a grocery store, preferably one that is less expensive. Take an average city-dwelling, practicing Christian as an example. The Christian believes in the value of living their faith as fully as possible in their life. They have read the Bible and want to answer the call to care for the needy and creation. They have read Wendell Berry and Norman Wirzba and are convinced that sustainable agriculture is the best possible future.

But they are, without giving it too much thought, still finding the cheapest chicken thighs the big box grocery store can offer. Or, maybe they are choosing less processed food, but they are seeking the cheapest produce, which usually means it has been imported from half a world away, leading to questions about economic sustainability on the part of the farmers in far-away lands, the import/export practices of a nation, questions of pollution because of the importation of the food, and questions of seasonality and freshness of food. These choices may be part of good stewardship of finances, which is a different discussion. But chances are good that the strawberries we buy in the northern hemisphere in February, for example, do not taste very good (greenhouses aside, to a certain extent). They've been picked far before their ripeness is achieved, sprayed with chemicals to prevent mold, kept at temperatures that prevent ripening, and then transported half a world away to arrive in prepackaged waste, and after all of the labour and effort and expenditure of dollars and fossil fuels, may end up in our compost pile, if composting is available in your city, because they don't taste the way we expect a strawberry to taste, unless we add sugar and cook it. It is possible and perhaps even probable that a Christian has not thought about the connection between their Christian faith and their food buying habits. They are only thinking about how strawberries on Valentine's Day would be a nice treat for their beloved.[119] But as food and theology preach, fully embracing eucharistic eating means that we must repent of (that is, turn from) our old habits regarding food because they represent a distorted view of God's good purposes for food.

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[118] Bass, "Eating," 5.

[119] Have I done this? Yes, I have! I stand in the gap, the same as others.

In his writing on a theology of hospitality[120] John Koenig focuses on biblical examples of eating, drinking, and hospitality. Luke-Acts is highlighted because, more than in other books, Jesus describes the kingdom of God as table fellowship. "If we were to ask Luke for a single word to describe what people do in their meal encounters with the divine, he would probably answer, "Repent!" But this single word is no simple answer."[121] Koenig offers Luke's examples of repentance, which are pertinent to our discussion of food and theology:

- A fundamental change of heart and mind characterized by feelings of remorse and the confession of guilt (Luke 15:17-19; 17:3-4; Acts 2:37).
- Forsaking destructive behaviour (Luke 3:8-9; 16:3; 17:3-4).
- Functions as a prelude or doorway to faith (Acts 19:4; 20:21) and the forgiveness of sin (Luke 3:3; 17:3-4; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 13:24) and the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 19:5-10).
- Repentance is not a one-time event (Luke 17:3-4) and occurs when one receives a new knowledge of God which overpowers ignorance and penetrates the heart with its truth (Luke 3:1-18; 24:32; Acts 2:37; 3:17-19).

Theology of food is clear that local action is crucial. We are invited to engage a new *habitus*, one influenced and ordered by the Christian worldview of Christ's sacrificial gift that we might be gifts for each other in community.[122] To create a new *habitus* informed by eucharistic eating might look like a modern interpretation of religious dietary law "prayerfully chosen—for instance, not eating chickens that were unjustly raised and processed, or eating close to the source of local supply,"[123] choosing to buy those strawberries *only* in the early summer when they grow naturally in northern climates. For the city-dweller, there are options such as community supported agriculture baskets or finding the local family run grocery store that buys directly from the farmer. It also requires choosing a discipline of eating seasonally. The message of food and theology is to be aware of your *habitus*, be aware of your ethics and values, and do everything in your power to act with integrity, *habitus* informed by and following faith. This does not sound very different than most food activist advice. The reason for this, as we will see, is that food and theology is heavily influenced by stewardship of creation.[124]

The application to a spirituality of feasting is basic. A feast is a meal set apart from quotidian eating, so engaging in best practice is essential. When you create a feast, do what you can to be involved in sustainable agriculture. Seek out food direct from a farmer's market and find the honourably raised chicken, pig, cow, lamb, or fish. Eschew overly processed food and make it from scratch yourself. Your feast may not turn out like the commodified and artful version of whatever dish the *Food Network's* latest hot chef has made, nor should it. I believe that it is the accumulation of these small behaviours that can and do make societal change.[125] This

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[120] See below, section "Theology of Hospitality" in "Chapter 3: Dessert."
[121] Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 114.
[122] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 153.
[123] Jung, *Food for Life*, 111. There is an interesting problem brought up by insistence on locally produced food. What about food that can only grow in climates vastly different than Canada, for example, anything tropical. Each person must wrestle with these questions, investigate the possibilities (greenhouses?) and come to their own conclusions.
[124] See below, section "Historical Context" in this chapter.
[125] There is, in the popular imagination, a statement from cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." It is

summarizes the idea that James Smith, following Bourdieu, articulates: "what appear to be 'micropractices' have macro effects: what might appear to be inconsequential microhabits are, in fact, disciplinary formations that begin to reconfigure our relation to the wider world—indeed they begin to *make* that world."[126] Engaging the message of food and theology to choose sustainable food is one of these micropractices. Regular spiritual feasting is an opportunity to engage in worshipful *habitus*:

> Christian worship is *more* than its content and means more than it says. Worship that intends to be formative—and more specifically worship that intends to foster an encounter with God that transforms our imaginations and hence sanctifies our perception—must be attentive to, and intentional about, the aesthetics of human understanding. Christian worship needs to be an incubator for the imagination, inviting us into "the real world" by bringing us the aesthetic olive leaves from the kingdom that is coming, helping us to then envision what it would look like for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We will absorb this eschatological vision of shalom in ways that elude our awareness, and the Story will be incorporated into our bodies on an aesthetic register. Thus the whole of Christian worship must embody this guiding Story in multivalent ways so that it becomes part of our background and thus sanctifies our perception. Christian worship should send us out with new knowledge and information, as well as a renewed feel for the world, a transformed "practical sense."[127]

To get a practice into our bodies, for worship to be formative, it needs to be done regularly. "In worship, texts and symbolic actions are inscribed on human bodies…the body remembers long after the mind may be dimmed…The body comes to understand, however inchoately, what it is to be created and redeemed in the image of God. Hence the psalmist's phrase 'O taste and see' exhibits an inner connection between a sensate bodily action and discernment."[128] Practicing spiritual feasting is formative in this way: the aesthetic sense that our body has to eat and drink and share table fellowship invites us into God's "real world," God's kingdom revealed on earth, and helps us to absorb the eschatological vision of shalom that may pass our intellect by, but which our body knows and understands.

A way to get at this aesthetic sense is to ask the same question Graham Ward had about the difficult pericope of John 6: the question may be "what does feasting mean?" but it is also "*how* does feasting mean?" Smith avers that aesthetic truth works at a foundational level of consciousness, seeping into that "subcortical core of our being…the truth of the aesthetic encounter is not merely an 'event,'…it is a truth that we absorb in a way that governs and conditions" how we understand the world through our bodily desires.[129] It is simple but powerful; the shared act of eating and drinking re-orients our desires, allowing God's incarnational truth to seep into our core, to help us sense that God is with us. Koenig reminds us

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not clear that Mead ever wrote this quote in publication, but it has captured the spirit of what many activists embody. Garson O'Toole, "Never Doubt That a Small Group of Thoughtful, Committed Citizens Can Change the World; Indeed, It's the Only Thing That Ever Has," accessed September 30, 2021, https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/11/12/change-world/.

[126] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 143.

[127] Smith, 177–78.

[128] Don E. Saliers, "Worship," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm), Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 8.

[129] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 136.

that the result and fruit of repentance is joy.[130] We gather to feast, and we experience joy through the Holy Spirit in our table fellowship.

Three: Interdisciplinary Approach

> *So while food studies is now "respectable," it is also inherently subversive. To study food often requires us to cross disciplinary boundaries and to ask inconvenient questions.*
>
> *Warren Belasco* [131]

We have already seen how the categories of eucharistic eating overlap with embodied theology and a theology of grace. Both a study of practical theology and the study of spirituality require an interdisciplinary method or approach. Likewise, food matters include a wide range of overlapping topics. Practical theologians note a postmodernist academic spirit of *bricolage*, defined as an "enquiry which proceeds by piecing together fragments, eschewing elevated theoretical schemes, aware of the provisionality and fragility of knowledge."[132] Adopting a *bricolage* approach is often dialectical in nature and the questions it pursues often do not find theological meaning on one side or the other of the dialectic but instead find meaning by "enduring the gap between them."[133] Food and theology are overlapping and interdisciplinary in nature, and so stand in the gap of various disciplines; the questions asked in food and theology pursue theological meaning in those gaps. As we saw in the discussion of what the theology of grace means for the *habitus* of eucharistic eating, there are many gaps to investigate.

Observations about food demonstrate its overlapping nature. The biology and chemistry of plants and animals work together in an ecosystem which farmers steward to produce food. Humans are omnivores, that is, generalists, indicating a breadth of food experience. Food is sold in the marketplace (economics), which people of all social classes in all cultures on earth buy to feed themselves and their families. Of great importance to the modern food experience is the way that agribusiness has used biology and chemistry of plants and animals for the purpose of creating larger profits, not healthier or more sustainable food. Wirzba summarizes: "Food is an ecological and social reality. It has deep cultural significance."[134] The moral and ethical issues around agribusiness are immense. Food anthropologists quote Wendell Berry: "To eat responsibly is to understand and enact, as far as one can, the complex relationship between the individual and the food system."[135] Food theologians quote Berry as well:

> To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.[136]

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[130] Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 115.
[131] Belasco, *Food*, 6.
[132] Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," 106.
[133] Smith, "Theories of Practice," 8.
[134] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 23.
[135] Wendell Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating," *Journal of Gastronomy* 5, no. 2 (1989): 125–31, in Belasco, *Food*, 10.
[136] Wendell Berry, "The Gift of Good Land" in *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (New York: North Point Press, 1981), 281, in Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 1.

All the actions around food from farming practices to how food gets to the market to the recipes families make together, which have been developed over time in particular ecosystems, are culturally informed and defined, based on how cultures developed over time in particular places. Religion prescribes diets, as in Jewish or Islamic dietary law or Hindu vegetarianism. Even design plays a role; food is beautiful to many, demonstrated in the decoration of dining rooms and kitchens, or how artists, fine-dining chefs for example, create little edible works of art. Food matters are inter-related (see figure 1), each part related to the other and each facet begging questions of another. To understand food well, we require an interdisciplinary approach.

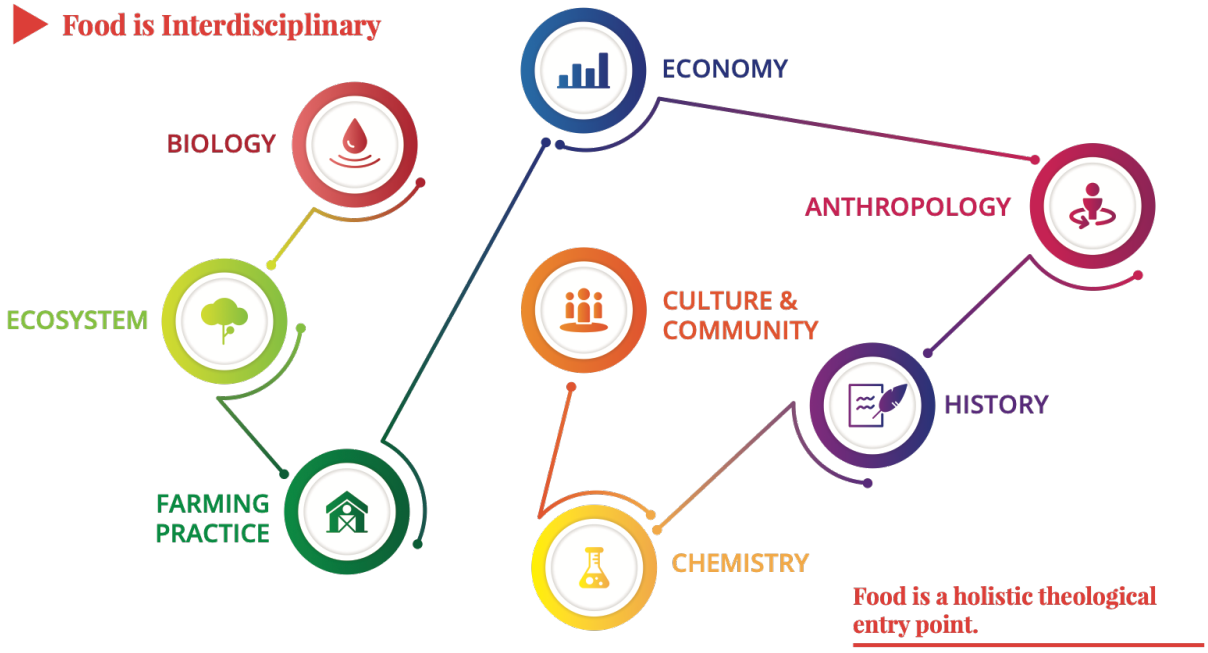

Figure 1 by Céline Singh

If theology asks how we can better understand God, one way to answer that question is to look at how the world works and to find God in it. Food covers quite a lot of arable soil in this pursuit. Anthropology regards food as "a means of communication. Because of food's multi-sensorial properties of taste, touch, sight, sound, and smell, it has the ability to communicate in a variety of registers and constitutes a form of language."[137] Wirzba, reading Massimo Montanari, also notices how food as language has the ability to communicate group distinctiveness, gender roles, class divisions, power relations, and diverse regional differences.[138] This language of food has overlapping components. First, it is related to the interwoven web of food spheres of life that it touches. The habitual ways that food is brought to the table, including farming practice and the sale of food, and the consumption of food are recognized as culturally embedded, described as

[137] Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 3rd ed (New York: Routledge, 2013), 10, https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.4324/9780203079751. Quoted from Roland Barthes' essay "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption."
[138] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 170.

"foodways" by anthropology.[139] More than that, "food communicates class, ethnic group, lifestyle affiliation, and other social positions. Eating is usually a social matter, and people eat every day. Thus, food is available for management as a way of showing the world many things about the eater."[140]

"The eater" sounds clinical and distant and is appropriate to anthropology. But in theological terms, "the eater" is more personal; the eater is you and me. We are human bodies, flesh and blood, loved by God. A theological approach to food as language looks to these spiritual realities. Food, in this sense, is actual comestible but also spiritual sustenance received around a table. Food is a language that God speaks to communicate God's goodness. Belasco notices that food enchants, and he marvels at the "almost magical way that food reveals identities and creates relationships."[141] This is part of God's food language. Food expresses a relationship, Jung comments, and points to a covenant relationship between God and humanity, implicit in creation and discovered through supportive, encouraging human relationships. Eating together builds solidarity in the covenant community, reminding us that "Christ is bread for all peoples and welcomes all to the table equally.[142]

Jung points to a re-enchantment of the world. For him, realizing that eating together is a means of grace was his horizon of conversion.[143] Philosopher Charles Taylor has extensively considered how the modern Christian faith has become disenchanted,[144] and I find his assessment motivating. Seeking the re-enchantment of the world, to find the "magical" places that produce awe may not look as it did in the Middle Ages. In today's postmodern age, I suggest that because science has demystified our understanding of creation, we must actively seek those "magic" or spiritual moments where God moves in other ways. Finding God in our foodways and in relationships forged around the table aids in the re-enchantment of Christian experience and not just because to dine well together produces an almost magical experience. Anthropologists quote Claude Lévi-Strauss in declaring that "food is good to think." Food *is* good to think: the thesis aims to provoke a deeper understanding of how God is present in the world and with humanity through thinking about the experience of feasting.

Food theologians agree that an interdisciplinary approach is needed. Mendez-Montoya refers to anthropologists in his introductory chapter and defends an overlapping approach to food and theology.[145] Practical theologian Dorothy Bass believes that the benefits gained in thinking theologically about food will spill over into other areas as well:

> Because food is so central to a way of life, practices of life at table soon prove to implicate every other important Christian practice as well. Hospitality, community, economics, testimony: all of these practices and more—never fully realized, but

[139] Counihan and Van Esterik, *Food and Culture*. This reader outlines the various expressions of foodways from many different points of view.
[140] E. N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture*, Second edition (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 171, muse.jhu.edu/book/28733.
[141] Belasco, *Food*, 13.
[142] Jung, *Food for Life*, 123.
[143] Jung, 43.
[144] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
[145] Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food*, 1–10.

> persistently present as vision, command, and hope—have influenced how Christians eat together.[146]

Earlier, I quoted Belasco's reasons that food has escaped scholarly notice. It is these very themes of dualism, feminism, and a suspicion of big business that combine with a desire to put faith into action that have produced a theology of food. As figure 2 indicates, there are several underlying theologies that combine to produce a theology of food. To unpack these ideas further, let us consider the historical grounding of how food and theology came together.

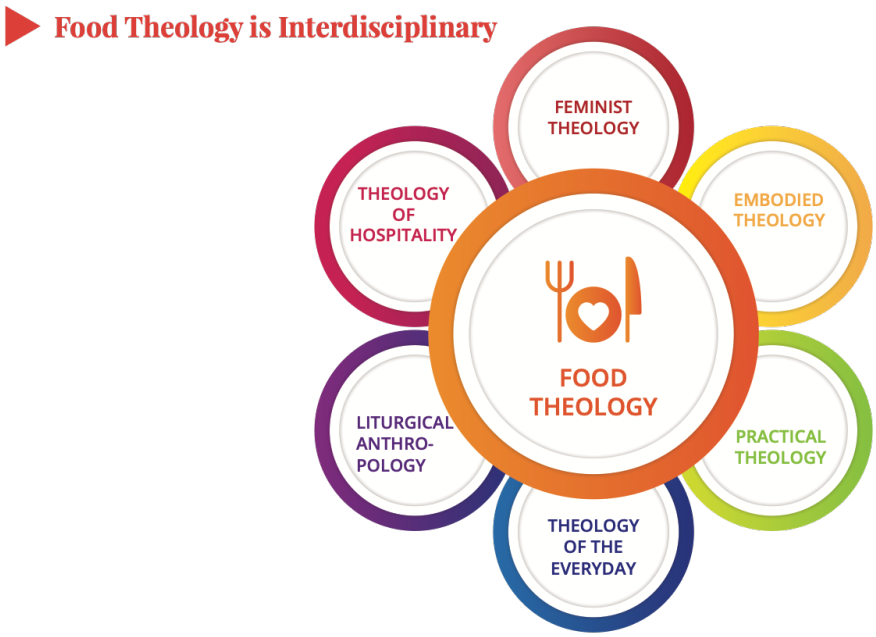

Figure 2 by Céline Singh

Four A: Historical Grounding for Food and Theology

Having an understanding of the history of a theology helps to link "belief with lives in social contexts, thus facilitating a recognition of the complex worlds out of which so-called normative dogma and confessions were and are composed and allowing for attention to the social production of theology."[147] For our purposes, gaining an understanding of the historical factors that prompted the tandem study of food and theology will give us a fuller sense of the theologies that contribute to feasting today.

Feminism

The wave of feminist scholarship begun in the late 1960s and 1970s,[148] including feminist theology, asked different questions than scholarship that came before. The experience of those

[146] Bass, "Eating," 7.
[147] Fulkerson, "Systematic Theology," 5.
[148] Elaine Graham, "Feminist Theory," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Wiley-Blackwell (Firm), Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 2.

who were not male, and slowly by extension, those who were not white males was validated academically. To do theology from a non-male, non-white perspective means to ask questions from those perspectives. The feminist perspective in academics has led theologians like Elaine Graham, for example, to uphold a feminist value of acknowledging Christian history as androcentric and to affirm a diverse and heterogeneous Christian experience.[149] In his theology of food, Jung acknowledges that feminist theology has allowed people to write from their own experiences and points to a clear theology of embodiment.[150] The feminist perspective has allowed Mexican theologian Mendez-Montoya to include a family recipe for *molli* (mole) in his theological account of food. He includes it to demonstrate that the complexity of food and theology is well represented by a complex, nuanced food: *molli*. But further than that, it is the making of this sauce that is rooted in cultural and family identity as well as a shared work. God's overflowing love, demonstrated by the Trinity, points to the love of a family or community who share work.[151]

A feminist perspective also asks questions of all aspects of church life, the role of the clergy being one. It is still debated in many conservative evangelical communities whether women can or should be in pastoral positions. A related question for eucharistic practice in concrete terms is "can a woman preside over communion?" Many denominations have answered in the affirmative. In some communities the role of clergy is criticized for having too much power. Some churches share the pastoral burden across several pastors but still, many churches are led by a one male pastor. Specific to food and theology, groups that meet in more casual worship styles, Dinner Church, for example (see below), often spread the pastoral burden over more than one pastor. A spiritual practice of feasting is subversive because it takes a eucharistic experience out of the church sanctuary and into the home kitchen. The host of the feast is likely the family cook, who is usually female and is probably not an ordained cleric. The moment when bread and wine are shared in remembrance of Jesus in this festal setting may not be mediated by God's ordained but by the communion of saints (understood in the Lutheran sense of the fellowship of believers). Is it still a eucharistic moment? I argue it is a nonsacramental Eucharistic experience, but others may disagree. This is one example where the open-ended discussions raised in the thesis are not solved but left for further probing both in practice and in debate.

Agri-Eco Revolution

Around the same time as the feminist wave, there was a "back to the land" movement, provoking much thought around how agriculture was being done in the wake of the 1950s "Green Revolution"[152] and reconsidering the best practices for Christian stewardship of creation. Wendell Berry is oft quoted by food theologians for good reason. As an enthusiastic participant of the back to the land movement, Berry combines passion for sustainable agriculture and ties it directly to Christian duty.[153] Today's Christian expression of the agri-eco revolution might look like Joel Salatin's Polyface Farm,[154] where Christian doctrine and dogma are combined with

[149] Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," 107. Graham asks for Enlightenment views of gendered scholarship to be revised to challenge conventional values and accommodate diverse and heterogeneous experiences.
[150] Jung, *Food for Life*, 10.
[151] Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food*, 11–44.
[152] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 72, 85.
[153] Wirzba, 55N.
[154] Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, 185–261; Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 25–26.

permaculture technique and an emphasis on local community. For a spirituality of feasting, it may look like churches that meet solely to grow food organically, harvest and cook their homegrown crops, share surplus food with the needy, and eat together in worshipful form. These farm to table churches are explicit that it is Christian ethics that have motivated their behaviour and spirituality.[155] These are examples of Christians who have found themselves at a horizon of conversion and act accordingly. They are, perhaps, radical examples of faith in action. Not everyone has the drive to create or even find a Christian farm to build this kind of community. As for the rest of us, we can read about Christians who choose and advocate for this kind of stewardship and let that influence smaller decisions in our existing lives. The implications for spiritual feasting follow quickly from here, as I have already noted. How do we choose our food? Do we consider how the workers have been treated to bring the food to the grocery, remembering that each human carries the image of God and is therefore worthy of dignified treatment?[156] Do we think about how the modern agri-business production of corn or beef destroy soil, pollute the atmosphere and ground water, and subject living creatures to abusive conditions that deny that creature the essence of their grass-eating, pasture roaming true natures?[157] When we do, can and do we put our money where our mouth is and spend the time to research and purchase sustainable food options in our locales? Beyond questions of personal motivation, a question of socio-economics and food justice comes into play: is it possible for those who have little in North America to make buying organic a priority? Given the drive for higher profits, food has become a commodity[158] (to sell more, product is made ever more cheaply to increase sales),[159] which means that higher quality food costs more and is unaffordable for those who live pay cheque to pay cheque, for example. How do we balance these tensions?

Sin in the World, Part II

From a theological point of view, reflection on how the world is broken is one of the bases of food and theology. Wirzba, [160] Méndez-Montoya,[161] and Jung[162] all reference the doctrine of sin. Wirzba and Méndez-Montoya highlight the creation and fall stories and clearly articulate how eating cannot be divorced from this narrative. The world is broken because of sin and in need of a Saviour. The eschatological distinction of "already/not yet" is apparent: even though Christ has brought a new covenant, the world remains in a state of brokenness, extending even to food matters. To consider food as a locale of spirituality is one way that we can participate in the ongoing redemption of the world, begun with Christ's work on the cross. To eat carefully and considerately together, stewarding the earth (i.e., for city dwellers, making sustainable food

[155] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*. Bahnson and Wirzba highlight several garden and farming communities that operate either as churches or as Christian organizations; "Garden Church," Homepage, accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.gardenchurchsp.org/. This church is an example of a group that farms in an abandoned city lot with the aim of involving homeless people in the meaningful work of growing food. They share worship together as a part of this work.
[156] Ayres, *Good Food*, 68.
[157] Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, 15–119.
[158] Ayres, *Good Food*, 73.
[159] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 89–93.
[160] Wirzba, 75–79.
[161] Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food*, 79–85.
[162] Jung, *Food for Life*, 68–71.

purchasing choices), and giving thanks to God for creation and its provisions are key steps in food and theology.

Four B: Historical Grounding for Spirituality of Feasting

Early Christian Worship

Another aspect of historical grounding for a spirituality of feasting is the recent scholarship into the early Christian worship practices. As Hal Taussig[163] and Dennis Smith[164] have explored, the Hellenistic "association meal" was the sole format of early Christian worship. Although we cannot know exactly what happened at these meals,[165] Taussig and Smith have researched how groups across the Hellenized world met regularly[166] in a ritual format to eat bread and drink wine together, in that order and with specific prayers for each section of the meal.[167] The meal, called the *deipnon*, was usually bread, probably some fermented fish, some vegetables, and, if the day was right, some meat purchased or gifted from the local deity's altar sacrifice.

Excursus: Christian Vegetarianism

The sacrificed meat became an ethical problem for many early church groups as they wondered whether it was right for those who believe in the living God and Christ as Lord to eat meat that was sacrificed to another god. Pauline letters identify several food-based recommendations that clearly reference associative meals.[168] Today's Christian vegetarians sympathize. Christian vegetarianism developed out of the eschatological hope that Christians found by reading the Book of Revelation and Isaiah and Daniel from the Hebrew Bible, where the promised rule when the Messiah comes again is marked by a simple Eden-like existence, and where humans would not be required to kill to eat. Christians thought to prepare themselves for the coming era, despite the New Testament passages that allow all kinds of food.[169] Today, food theologians explore vegetarianism on the grounds that existing factory farm practices abuse animals. They point out that for humans to eat, something must die, vegetable or animal. This is another opportunity to remember Christ's self-giving sacrifice in the frame of eating spiritually. There are many instances of Paul encouraging his far-flung flock to eat in a way that honours Jesus and theologians use this biblical basis in their arguments. Some decide that if the animals are raised in the spirit of God the Shepherd, then Christian meat eating is allowable.[170] Others are clear that Christian ethics leads the virtuous and mature Christian to choose vegetarianism, subscribing to a "protological" point of view that God's intention for the world was vegetarianism, as

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[163] Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).
[164] Dennis Edwin Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
[165] Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 44.
[166] Taussig, 22–23.
[167] Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 27–38.
[168] Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 71–74.
[169] Ken Albala, "Historical Background to Food and Christianity," in *Food and Faith in Christian Culture*, ed. Ken Albala and Trudy Eden, Arts and Traditions of the Table (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 9.
[170] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 130–37.

demonstrated by the prelapsarian Eden.[171] I subscribe to the first position, as is discerned through my menu suggestions, although I believe this is a personal choice.

Early Church Worship, Continued

The second part of the Hellenistic associative meal was called the *symposion*, and it began with a libation[172] and was dedicated to drinking wine together. For some Hellenistic associative groups this meant wine flinging games, flute girls, and other raucous behaviour. For others, it meant an opportunity for philosophical discussion or oratory aided by the expansive effects of wine on the intellect.[173] I, along with others who look at the importance and effects of wine on a meal (Wirzba, Capon, Kreglinger), do not advocate excessive consumption. The joy of wine comes from appreciation for its effects on conviviality (Capon); for another avenue to consider how sunlight is turned through soil and leaf into fruit and then, through skill of vintners, to wine (Wirzba); and for the intensely local experience of terroir and the shared, family effort it takes to bring a bottle of wine to the table (Kreglinger). Taussig and Smith suppose the Christian tradition grew out of the second *symposion* tradition. As the church grew larger, the Hellenized world collapsed and Christianity became the imperial religion by the time of Emperor Constantine, and worship habits changed.[174] There were too many worshippers to fit into a *symposion* dining room. The couches that diners used to recline on, facing each other, turned to chairs facing forward. The serving table at the centre turned to an altar at the front. The elements of bread and wine became not a meal but tokens of the associative meal and symbols for Jesus' body and blood.[175] The host of the associative meal, who may or may not have been the group leader, over time became the leader of the church and eventually the ordained priest.

Love Feasts

Paul Fike Stutzman investigates the Biblical texts of 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Jude; Church Fathers' commentary; and texts from the Didache to shed light the early Church's eucharistic practice. Before the time of Constantine, the eucharist had already shrunk to the token bread and cup celebrated together on Sunday mornings. However, in this era, there was an evening meal called the "Love Feast," where believers gathered in a home or rented space to eat and worship together. Church Fathers preached that believers should avoid the licentious feasting behaviour of non- or quasi-Christian groups, like the Gnostic sect of the Carpocratians, who also met for "love feasts" of a different nature. The Christian Love Feast focused on spiritual inbreaking of the Kingdom, characterized by righteousness, peace, unity, and joy. It followed the format of foot washing as a discipline to emphasize humility, confession to God for purity of believer, praying together, sharing the Eucharist (for the baptized only), eating together potluck-style, and greeting each other with a holy kiss, as a symbol of peace between believers. Leftovers were gathered and shared with the needy. Following this, scripture reading and singing continued the

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[171] Christopher Southgate, "Protological and Eschatological Vegetarianism," in *Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology.*, ed. Rachel Muers and David Grumett (London; Gordonsville: Bloomsbury Academic Macmillan [distributor, 2012), 247–52, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10427149.
[172] Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 74–75.
[173] Taussig, 82.
[174] Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 279–87.
[175] John Raymond Shinners, ed., *Medieval Popular Religion, 1000-1500: A Reader*, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 2 (Peterborough, Ont., Canada ; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1997), 7. The Lateran Council of 1215 identified for the first time the Catholic Eucharistic theology of transubstantiation, noted by Shinners. There was considerable variation in theology up to that time and even after the canon was enacted.

worship. As this tradition began to shift to Sunday morning, the meal and foot washing fell away.[176]

The Love Feast experienced a resurgence after the Reformation in Anabaptist communities, specifically in the Brethren traditions beginning in the early eighteenth centuries. Often these feasts were held beginning on the Saturday before Pentecost.[177] By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, many of representatives of these groups, like the Brethren in Christ, had emigrated to North America. The Love Feast now meant gathering in a large group where, over the course of two days, foot washing, communion, shared meals, and an extended time of preaching and teaching took place. The meals would take place either inside the church, sitting at specially constructed pews with folding tables or in larger buildings like barns, with tables and chairs set up so everyone could eat together. It was considered an expression of "embodied faith…as belief was experienced through the body. The Brethren in Christ looked for spiritual development to bloom from their bodily fellowship and ritual feasting."[178] Heidi Oberholzer Lee notes that pastors warned their parishioners not to conflate the love feast with the Last Supper, emphasizing that Communion was instituted by Christ while the Love Feast, even though it "articulated its 'gustatory theology' through a language of feasting and commensality" was created by humans and was not a sacrament (especially important to a branch of Christianity which is nonsacramental).[179] This is fair warning for practitioners of spiritual feasting as well. The point is not to replace existing Communion worship but to find Christ present in all experiences and to have a worshipful or eucharistic approach to eating and feasting. Agape feasts from this era were also described in spiritual terms, that their souls were fed by spiritual fruit, and that time together was of more importance than what was eaten physically.[180] In the present study of feasting, it is also the reflection of what happens spiritually at a physical meal shared with others that is the key. The Love Feast continued to be celebrated in various forms over the last century, usually with single day meal formats, by members of the Amana Society, Moravians, Glasites, and Methodists. Of these, only the Amana Society, the Moravians, and the Brethren continue the Love Feast tradition to this day.[181]

Dinner Church

As modern Christians look to the early Christian example, many have experienced a revelation. The thinking goes like this: if the early church met in a meal format only, then, in the spirit of the theological question of "what would Jesus do?", why are we not doing the same today? There are churches who have switched to a model of worship, often called Dinner Church, where the meal itself is considered the worship. Research I conducted in 2020 found that most dinner churches are located in America, and all are Protestant (see Appendix One). To my mind this speaks to the problematic historical Protestant tendency to emphasize intellect above all else, as we have seen

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[176] Paul Fike Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast: Broadening Our Eucharistic Celebrations* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 85–125.
[177] Stutzman, 156–80.
[178] Heidi Oberholtzer Lee, "Commensality and Love Feast: The Agape Meal in the Late Nineteenth-and Early Twentieth-Century Brethren in Christ Church," in *Food and Faith in Christian Culture*, ed. Ken Albala and Trudy Eden, Arts and Traditions of the Table (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 3-4, 16.
[179] Oberholtzer Lee, 6-7.
[180] Oberholtzer Lee, 13–18. The typical foodstuffs of German immigrants were heavily influenced by the newly available sugar.
[181] Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 170–73.

in Luther's emphasis on the Word, and a trait found in Protestant emphasis on intellectual worship like preaching and praying spoken prayers.[182] Today's Protestants find themselves in a postmodern world (see below), where ritual has been jettisoned along with institution. Protestant bodies are hungry to know God's grace in a material sense and the visceral nature of dinner church addresses that need. Some dinner churches choose a more defined liturgy, St Lydia's in Brooklyn, NY, for example,[183] while others have a very relaxed approach, the only liturgy being a eucharistic moment and a brief table group discussion of a Biblical passage while eating.

Practical theologians note that situating modern practice in historical context is challenging. For example, by definition, situations are a "present moment" so finding the past may be a challenge and it may not honour the past to lift a practice about which we can only know a small amount via historical record (the Hellenistic associative meal) for use in modern time. For example, Dinner Churches today seek to bring equality to minority groups, shown through their explicit welcome of the LGBTQ+ community; their mostly female leadership; and the way they distribute power among a pastoral team and worshippers. These were not concerns of the early church, who demonstrated an interest in maintaining existing power hierarchies to a certain extent: Taussig and Smith note that in the early church of great concern was who got to sit where because it represented hierarchy of status within the community.[184] Early churches did disrupt the norms of the day because there was an equality expected at the table where slave and owner, rich and poor, could dine/worship together at the same table. Women were not excluded from the room, but they did not have a seat on the reclining couches, relegated to the position "at the feet" of the teacher,[185] the same place the dogs cleared the remains of *deipnon*[186] before *symposion* began. We see that systemic and problematic realities like sexism, or even racism, are perpetuated through the present moment.[187]

The Agape or Love Feast is very close to the heart of feasting. It is a time set apart in the church calendar, historically in North America, on Pentecost. It requires specialized set up and cherished food traditions. As with Bonhoeffer's exhortation to faith with discipleship, Stutzman suggests that "celebrating the Love Feast can be a powerful practice of Christian discipleship through which God shapes and reforms the church to embody the disciplines of submission, love, confession, reconciliation, and thanksgiving."[188] The adoption of these biblical themes create a *habitus* for an embodied practice of faith: as the worshipper takes part in the actions, a spiritual growth is experienced and reinforced. A feast that encompasses Love Feast practices fits neatly into the description of spiritual feasting in this study.

Dinner Church, too, gets close to the heart of a spirituality of feasting. To adopt an early church worship format allows worshipers to have a sense of connection with spiritual forebears.

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[182] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Volume 1 of Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 151–89. Smith's discussion here focusses on reinvigorating a material and bodily worship experience as a means to cultivating a Christian *habitus*.
[183] "St Lydia's," 2021, http://stlydias.org/. The "learn" page on this website features a download-able liturgy for Dinner Churches to follow.
[184] Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 30.
[185] Taussig, 48–49, 70.
[186] Taussig, 82–83.
[187] Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology," 120–21.
[188] Stutzman, *Recovering the Love Feast*, 277.

Enjoying a Eucharistic moment that involves not a wafer reminiscent of Styrofoam and a sip of grape juice but is instead a full meal shared around a table with real bread and wine nourishes our spirit in ways a traditional Eucharist points to but does not do. Some denominations may see Dinner Church as a demotion of the adoration of Christ, reducing a cherished worship ceremony to a humble shared table. But this is precisely what Dinner Church wants. Dinner Church groups meet weekly, so the meal they serve is quotidian: soup and bread made from scratch by the worshipping body and shared together in a church hall or other rented space. It is necessary to have simple food that nourishes regularly. We need this too because deep connections to others do not develop without regular contact. We need to be a part of a worshipping body of Christ partly for this reason. God's love is not only evident at a festal table; God's love is poured out for all every day of the year.

Fasting

A feast is a meal that only happens a few times a year because a feast necessitates a fast. Wirzba opens our discussion of fasting: "People should feast so they do not forget the grace and blessing of the world. People should fast so they do not degrade or hoard the good gifts of God. In short, we feast to glorify God and we fast so we do not glorify ourselves."[189] Wirzba ties the idea of feasting to observing the Sabbath. He also avers that the opposite of feasting is not fasting, it is gluttony. For gluttons, the fulfilment of their desires has become an end in itself.[190] It would not be good stewardship of our bodies to eat abundantly every day. But more importantly, when we are gluttonous, our worship is oriented towards ourselves rather than to God. Gluttony is not limited to personal experiences. Demanding festal amounts of food from our earth every day is also gluttonous and is not wise stewardship. It is an unfortunate reality, however. Theologians call out agri-business' destruction of creation and Western consumerism as complicit in disordering the natural rhythms of God's good intention for food. It is a major injustice to creation and a problem for Christian minds to address.[191] Food and theology calls both for systemic change but, crucially, also for a change in micropractices (see above): buying locally and supporting community farmers are first remedial steps against agri-business' disordered globalization.[192]

On the personal level, a fast is crucial because it helps us re-order our desires. The Roman Catholic practice of fasting built into the annual church calendar is well known. The fast in these conditions is to a way to "purify the soul and show God one's sincerity and contrition….[it is] a communal means of atonement"[193] for sin. Protestant fasting is much less well defined. If it is undertaken, it is usually a part of a Lenten experience only. There are some who regularly fast as part of a spiritual discipline or as preparation for times of spiritual discernment.

To fast from food is to be hungry and to be hungry is part of the vulnerable human condition. Monica Hellwig describes how hunger is an all-consuming drive: either we eat or we die. Beyond this basic physical reality, hunger is a dimension of becoming spiritually mature:

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[189] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 137.
[190] Wirzba, 139.
[191] Wirzba, 71–109. Ayres, *Good Food*. Ayres entire work is dedicated to this theme from various angles.
[192] Jung, *Food for Life*, 127.
[193] Albala, "Historical Background to Food and Christianity," 8.

> to be hungry is to know in a dark, inchoate kind of way that we do not create ourselves, but are creatures, receiving our existence as gift. Never really to be hungry is to be in danger of forgetting that our very existence is a gift—in danger of forgetting reverence and gratitude to the source of our being, the transcendent creator.[194]

This is why the fast is essential. We hunger and thirst both for actual food and drink, but also for deep connection with others and for justice in food matters and in problematic social structures. Wirzba notes that fasting leads us to realize the responsibilities of life together,[195] the need for community to build relationship and foodways. We long for Christ to come again to complete the redemption of creation. Hunger drives our desires. Hunger reminds us of our dependence on God and each other. Méndez-Montoya says that fasting reminds us of God's providential care, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3[196] that we should "not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." The fast is required because it has power to turn our *habitus* towards God. Dorothy Bass reminds us that fasting has long been a part of spiritual training and discipline in Christian practice, noting that historically, fasting has been adopted "as a way of heightening awareness of the body's hungers, so as not to be controlled by them."[197] Keeping an annual rhythm of feast days set apart from ordinary eating helps the average Christian to catch a glimpse of the power in such an act. Longing, hunger, and desire for what is reserved for special occasions reminds us of our spiritual reality of living in the "already" of Christ's victory on the cross and hopeful waiting for the "not yet" of Christ's return. For this reason, a spirituality of feasting must only occupy a few calendar days in the year.

Five: Socio-Cultural Context

Every study of spirituality must begin with context, because knowing a spirituality's origins and relations is necessary to a full understanding of the concrete and particular nature of the spirituality.[198] We have already looked at the historical origins and much of the theology that informs a spirituality of feasting. Now we turn to an aspect of North American culture today that has generated much scholarly discussion: postmodernism.

Postmodernism

The nature of postmodernity must be understood both in a study of spirituality and practical theology because it is the context of today's experience. Although practical theology had its beginnings in the quest for universal truth and empirical knowledge of modernism (Schleiermacher[199] is a key contributor to an early understanding of practical theology), practical theologians today find themselves needing to adapt. They have done this by emphasizing context through reflexivity and autobiography,[200] and through a rigorous theological self-criticism.[201]

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[194] Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 6–7.
[195] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 142.
[196] Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food*, 125.
[197] Bass, "Eating," 6.
[198] McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era," 197.
[199] Friedrich Schleiermacher and Terrence N. Tice, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study: Revised Translation of the 1811 and 1830 Editions*, 3rd ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).
[200] Graham, "On Becoming a Practical Theologian: Past, Present and Future Tenses," 6.
[201] Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology," 120.

The postmodern consciousness rejects universal principles and laws and the 'grand narrative' of modernity and embraces an awareness of relativity and particularity. It is earmarked by an interest in holding the tensions of diversity.[202] Believers find themselves in a gap between a rejection of the power of organized religion and a resurgence of interest in the sacred. Believers want to find deep meaning in purposeful Christian action,[203] but feel lost. In spirituality, this vacuum means that "we find ourselves bereft of practices and disciplines that will sustain and nourish us. We find ourselves grasping at bits and pieces of a tradition hoping that the part we latch on to can lead to the same result that once required the whole of the tradition."[204] Practical theologians ask how they can remain true to Christian witness and still respond to the challenges of the present age.

To ask the question from a different angle, Saliers wonders: "How is god perceived and understood within a postmodern conception of language? With the loss of fixed texts and a vocabulary of traditional sacraments, what is able to mediate divine forgiveness or sanctifying grace to worshippers?"[205] The gap between desire for deep spiritual sustenance and abandoned traditions requires a negotiation on the part of the practitioner and theologian. "We need to understand tradition as a living reality, to uncover the original intentions of a tradition and its practices, and to discover the ways and means by which the original intentions can be served in the current context."[206] Using both a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of restoration, the postmodern must discern which traditions have "genuine transformative power" and reclaim these traditions' associated meaningful practices.

Retrieval of these meaningful practices and traditions requires careful consideration and education. A practitioner should be able to defend his or her reasons for choosing one practice over the other, have an awareness of the original purpose and history, and explain how a retrieval helps our current situation. [207] The thesis is the beginnings of an answer to this challenge. Feasting does not abandon eucharistic practice in a corporate worship setting but it offers a retrieval of ancient practice that I believe has genuine transformative power because it is an embodied practice and it offers the possibility of a deep personal connection to others and by way of reflection, to God. As we have seen in our discussion of Love Feasts and Dinner Church, however useful it is to modern spirituality, lifting an experience out of the past to be practiced in the present should be humbly approached with careful research. For example, a spirituality of feasting brings the worship act into the kitchen and the dining room in a way the early church did not intend or imagine and in ways the church today might not favour from a clerical perspective. This is another conversation that must be continued in the practice of feasting using the early church model.

Uncovering a deep meaning considering these discoveries in a spirituality of feasting may involve the following:

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[202] McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era," 194.
[203] Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," 108.
[204] McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era," 198.
[205] Saliers, "Worship," 7.
[206] McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era," 199.
[207] McCarthy, 203-204.

1) Intention: practitioners acknowledge that feasting can be a revelatory experience. They may not experience revelation every time they feast, in the same way that a worshipper in a church service does not necessarily experience a movement of the Spirit every time they sing and pray in a church building. It is the reflexive intention of the practitioner to look for these moments.
2) Time: the modern values of do more, produce more, get it done faster, are still present today. Feasting offers a counter-cultural moment, akin to the "Slow Food" movement.[208] It takes time to prepare a feast and to develop relationships around the festal table.
3) Relationship: fellowship and intimacy around a table is obvious in feasting. But before that, most successful feasts require more than one cook, and all working together. This is particularly true of family feasts. The deep connection to other human beings in a spirituality of feasting reflects *perichoresis* or Trinitarian sharing and love. In addition, in eucharistic eating we value creation and humans, choosing sustainable foodways because of this conviction.
4) Reflection: a practitioner must do the work of theology through reflection. Reflecting on God's abundant love poured out for all as represented in the overflowing cup of wine or the abundance of food and prayerful thanks given to God for the gifts of friendship and food are a good beginning.

[208] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 186–87.

Chapter 3: Dessert

des·sert | \ di-ˈzərt \
: *a usually sweet course or dish (as of pastry or ice cream) usually served at the end of a meal from Middle French, from desservir to clear the table, from des- de- + servir to serve, from Latin servire*[209]

: *a reminder that the sweet things in life are found through spending time together.*

Theology of Hospitality

> *Another way of life at table is both promised and provided by Jesus, who invites sinners to share meals with him, discloses the abundance at the heart of the universe, and finally gives himself to the world as nourishment that will never fail.*
>
> *Dorothy Bass*[210]

A theology of hospitality knows at its heart that God meets people through acts of service in fellowship. John Koenig gives us a theology of hospitality through the biblical example of transformation at the table found in the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible examples of welcoming the stranger. He quotes Henri Nouwen that in biblical examples of hospitality, "ordinary guest-host relationships among humans can take on a sacramental quality…[because of the mutual] giving and receiving in hospitality which emerges when the love of God is allowed to become operative."[211] Believers delight in the guest-host relationship because they expect that God or Christ or the Holy Spirit will "play a role in every hospitable transaction."[212]

The author of Luke and Acts assigns extraordinary prominence to the place of meals,[213] which is instructive for both a theology of food and a spirituality of feasting. Koenig suggests that Jesus' persistent attention to food, drink, and hospitality conveys something important about the reciprocal relationships between God and human beings, as Wirzba, Méndez-Montoya, and Jung corroborate. Underneath Jesus' hospitality imagery is a magnanimous God, who constantly grants far more than humans need or deserve (Matt. 5:43-48).[214] Koenig's analysis reveals that:

> New Testament hospitality, like its Jewish parent, has an inherent passion for the redemption of the material order….God has built a secret abundance into the scheme of things, an abundance that can more than fill our needs when we seek to form partnerships for the kingdom. This thesis has a corollary, namely, that hospitality, as understood in the New Testament writings, presumes a reciprocity between God's abundance and human acts of sacrifice.[215]

The redemption of the material order is of particular interest for a spirituality of feasting. God has woven into the very fabric of our lives a "secret abundance" revealed to us when we seek to form partnerships for the kingdom forged around a festal table. Bonhoeffer also speaks to the reciprocity between God and humans. Referencing Matthew 10:40-42, he holds that those who

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[209] "Dessert," Dictionary, October 13, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dessert.
[210] Bass, "Eating," 6.
[211] Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 5–6.
[212] Koenig, 8.
[213] Koenig, 88.
[214] Koenig, 28–29.
[215] Koenig, 130–31.

bear Jesus words also are bearers of the presence of Christ. Therefore, each service believers do for each other, they do for Christ.[216] We bear Christ's presence, serving each other and thereby serving Christ; we bring Christ to the table and God's abundance is present. Bass agrees: "The Lord's table discloses the abundance at the heart of all that is, inviting us to experience the world and ourselves as God's new creation. Here we may learn to see, even in this hurting world, the abundance of an overflowing cup enjoyed in the presence of enemies (Ps. 23:5); the abundance of a life poured out for the sake of the world; and the abundance of mercy that makes possible a community of hope drawn from every nation."[217]

Protestant Food Experience

Today's Protestant experience with food and church is twofold and both are aspects of a theology of hospitality. First, there is missional outreach with food, which most Protestants could readily identify. Homeless shelters and soup kitchens are common, in clear line with the biblical command to care for the needy.[218] Second, there is the less explicit way that food fills the role of popular religion in Protestant North America churches. Sack suggests that the church-hosted suppers fill a real need in American life for relationship and connection. "The meals are a place where religious identity is shaped, community is built, and memories are created. They may not be religious, but they're not just another meal."[219] Good hospitality offers people the experience of warmth, security and refreshment of body and spirit, a *habitus* that both forms and sustains group identity.

Historically, free food has been a logical enticement to attract new members to church. North American evangelical churches have employed food in this way beginning in the mid-twentieth century,[220] but an earlier example is found in the Love Feasts in the mid-nineteenth century ("worldlings," or non-Brethren, were invited to share food by their hosts who hoped for their conversion).[221] To this day, churches offer snacks and coffee either before or after worship services or during Bible studies, both encouraging attendance and filling the need for connection. Sack suggests that this may be a uniquely Protestant American experience:

> Catholicism has a popular piety deeply rooted in the Mass and in a variety of devotional activities. This piety has given Catholics numerous centers around which to build community. Protestantism, on the other hand, is centered on the Word. As a result, it has a well-developed intellectual tradition but lacks a focus for popular religion. To build that kind of community, Protestantism has turned to informal fellowship activities, organized by the laity around a nonliturgical but still sacral calendar—Sunday school picnics, family nights, and the like. Food provides Protestantism with a popular religion. Protestantism also needs the market appeal of food events more than Catholic churches. While the Catholic church requires people to go to Mass at the risk of their immortal souls, Protestantism needs a different motivator. Food often fills the bill.[222]

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[216] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 159.
[217] Bass, "Eating," 7.
[218] Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*, 99–136. Sack outline show this kind of "emergency food" has in fact become big business for many mainline American evangelical churches.
[219] Sack, 62.
[220] Sack, 82.
[221] Oberholtzer Lee, "Commensality and Love Feast: The Agape Meal in the Late Nineteenth-and Early Twentieth-Century Brethren in Christ Church," 18–20.
[222] Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*, 96.

Protestant Call to a Spirituality of Feasting

Sack is clear that shared food and meals mean a lot in a Protestant setting, a claim supported by my Protestant experience. If food already means much in the Protestant mind, why is the thesis aimed at Protestants? It is because of the intellectual emphasis of Protestant worship. I believe that Protestants would benefit from a bodily, visceral knowledge of grace. Roman Catholic and Orthodox worship offers a more defined bodily experience. For example, the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation aids worshippers in a sense of the material nature of the abundant love God offers. I am not suggesting that Protestants embrace transubstantiation, however I am suggesting that engaging a practice of spiritual feasting offers an intentional practice of reflection on how God's abundant love indwells each believer. Also, North American Protestantism is heavily influenced by Puritanism and Calvinism at the time of initial European immigration to North America, both of which embraced frugality in eating and drinking. Excess food and drink were considered sinful by these groups.[223] Frugality is not the hallmark of today's Protestant experience, caught up as we are in consumerism—hence the calls from many food theologians to eucharistic eating. The Protestant preference for intellectual worship experiences inherited from the Reformation and Puritanism, Love Feasts aside, has made food and feasting less than desirable avenues for theological reflection. However, a spirituality of feasting (and the acknowledgement of gluttony and the practice of fasting) offers the Protestant church an opportunity. Oberholtzer observes that "religious meals can help a church articulate its own standards for holy living in contradistinction to the 'worldly' values held by the surrounding culture."[224] Food and theology upholds this maxim, and a spirituality of feasting provides one way to put it into practice.

A spiritual practice of feasting, then, is one that needs to be aware of its own traditions, one that transmits values, and one that embodies faithful responses to the current situation of the practitioners. Feasting together offers a liminal experience, a threshold, or a half-opened door into holy spaces.[225] Finding those in need of grace, our brothers and sisters in Christ, around the table means experiencing the abundant love of God, poured out for all. A spirituality of feasting could be classified as a group identifier in the sense that I am calling Protestants to a spirituality of feasting, but I believe it is an ecumenical effort that is applicable to all Christians. I have already outlined what a specific practice of feasting entails (see above, *Practice*), and I remind the reader that the suggestions offered here are open to innovation and interpretation in ways that best suit each unique festal table.

There are five times in the church calendar that I encourage Protestants to practice a spiritual feast: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Maundy Thursday, and Easter, and at Pentecost as well, following the Love Feast example. Advent and Lent are traditionally times of fasting, so these seasons are not appropriate for feasting, Maundy Thursday excepted. Some of these feasts already have set menus in the Protestant cultural mind (most North American Protestants do not serve lamb at Christmas, for example). The eucharistic elements of bread and wine will be present for any of these feasts. I believe that songs are always welcome, which could be planned following songs that are normally sung in church in these seasons. Prayer is also always

[223] Albala, "Historical Background to Food and Christianity," 10.
[224] Oberholtzer Lee, "Commensality and Love Feast: The Agape Meal in the Late Nineteenth-and Early Twentieth-Century Brethren in Christ Church," 3.
[225] Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 124. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 63.

appropriate beyond table grace. Each host will decide for themselves and the nature of their guests what is appropriate for each feast. Feasts that include very small children may need to be truncated to accommodate the parental need to care for them, for example. Hosts of feasts with older children present will guide conversation in ways that makes sense to the ages and stages of those around the table.

The pointed conversation and/or liturgy for the feast is what changes. A reminder that in this spirituality of feasting, conversation should flow around the normal sorts of things that everyday people talk about: work, friends, family, politics, things they have seen or heard the past week, both in media and in reality. These natural and normal conversations are part of what builds relationship and intimacy. It is a matter of finding an opening to ask the deeper questions of faith. The question of who to invite is answered by theology of hospitality with the outsider or the stranger. However, sometimes we will only include our family or close friends at these feasts and in these examples, I encourage us to find new ways to see *Imago Dei* in the faces of our siblings or parents. Difficult situations with in-laws aside, this may be the only theological reflection that is needed for some meals, depending on the dynamics of the situation.

Thanksgiving is not included in the church calendar, but I start there because it is a natural transition to the rhythm of feasting. Christians take the opportunity to truly give thanks to God for all the ways God has sustained us over the year. Often people gathered around the table at Thanksgiving are already primed for a pointed conversation. The simple questions of "What are you thankful to God for right now?" and "How does that help build your faith?" are good starting points.

Christmas has its traditional foods, dictated by culture of origin, and built over generations. A question to share here might be "what difference does it make that God sent his Son as a human and as a baby?" Conversation around the Incarnation could follow. A follow up question might be "what difference does this make for our relationship with God?"

Maundy Thursday is one feast that I believe needs a more defined liturgy. This is the day that Christians remember the Last Supper. Reading one of the Biblical texts associated with this episode in the events of Holy Week is appropriate. Some Christians enjoy a Christian Seder, reminding participants that Jesus was Jewish and ate a Passover meal with his disciples that night. However, some feel that since there is a new covenant in Christ, looking to old covenant practice has little to no value. The practice of washing each other's feet, following Christ's example might be included, following the Love Feast example. Singing songs of worship together and praying together beyond the table grace is also appropriate. Following the somber tone of the season of Lent, conversation which shares our loss, mourning, and frustrations at the world's injustices may well be followed with how a Christian worldview changes our actions. While this may not look like joy, I believe there is a place for this kind of feasting: we hold the tension of knowing the Christ has already come but still wait for Christ to come once more.

The Easter feast is the pinnacle for the year. Refrains of "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" make a beautiful toast. The pointed conversation at this feast could be about the hope we have in Christ or about our relationship with God. Here is where I feel that lamb should be on the menu for symbolic reasons, although if we are serious about sourcing food locally, lamb will not be

available until October (as lambs are born in the spring and are too small when Easter arrives). There are options available, such as freezing locally sourced lamb in the fall or choosing sustainably raised lamb from the southern hemisphere (which will be frozen for transport in the first place. New Zealand is famous for lamb exports, for example). Such is the tension of putting food and theology into practice.

Pentecost celebrates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as told in the book of Acts. Love Feasts aside, most Protestants have no experience of a feast on this day, which usually falls some time at the end of May or the beginning of June. A pointed conversation on this day may have to do with how we experience the Holy Spirit, which may look considerably different for a Roman Catholic or an Anglican or a Baptist, let alone a Pentecostal. Inviting as diverse a group of believers as possible to the table on this day honours the ecumenical and multicultural experience that the first believers had on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The theological reflection that the practitioners or worshippers at these feasts take may happen during the feast or afterwards. It is always appropriate, in my mind, to bring theology to the table for discussion, which goes against some hosts' values for table conversation. In terms of reflection, I advocate for study on the part of the practitioner. Some questions to ask in terms of reflection may be about the themes I have highlighted in this study, such as:

- eucharistic eating and what implication it has for our daily or festal food experiences;
- grace and how it might be embodied around a table;
- how habits create and inform culture and in this context, faith;
- the topics of food and theology, such as sustainable food choices, or the habit of saying grace;
- the overlapping nature of food and how God is present in all parts of creation;
- how our history has informed our current practice; or any combination of these, following food's multivalent presentation.

For example, following the topic of embodiment in theology, we might read Saliers: "since the word of God touches human flesh, all subsequent worship-oriented theologies must seek language to account for how human-embodied flesh (in communities and in individuals) can become reflective about God."[226] Reflection could be on the nature of embodiment and why this might be important for us in today's postmodern society and for our faith. However, study need not follow strictly scholarly reflection. There are many resources available for devotional use relating to the topics raised in this study. Further, instead of a theological issue, it might be about a very personal moment where the practitioner noticed God moving. The range of questions is therefore dictated by personal experience and always looking for theological truth.

[226] Saliers, "Worship," 8.

Conclusion

This study offers a spirituality of feasting, grounded by concepts in food and theology and described through the lens of practical theology. A spirituality of feasting finds God's overflowing love through relationships built around an abundant table. The abundance of food and drink at the feasting table is an embodied experience of God's grace, that is wide and deep, and more than we can ask or imagine. The practice of feasting offers an opportunity to reflect on an embodied experience; the food and drink, the skill of the cook, the hospitality of the host, and the depth of friendship discovered through eating and drinking are simple in themselves but add up to a joyful experience more than the sum of its parts. Reflection on how God moves through this experience is what makes feasting spiritual.

Practical theology categorizes five areas that I have employed in this study and their application to a spirituality of feasting are:

1) the use of ethnography as a tool for investigation of practice, used to describe my field experiences of feasting gathered over a lifetime and represented in a documentary of four feasts held over eight days;
2) an insistence on embodiment, with a focus on how *habitus* creates and dictates our actions, which is useful in describing how worship practices both shape our actions and also our faith;
3) choosing to find the overlapping intersections that interdisciplinary study offers. Food is multifaceted and multivalent, an excellent arena for rich reflection;
4) historical setting, which shows us how our current understandings are shaped, in this case through the trends of dualism, feminism, and the agri-eco revolution. It also permits us to rediscover meaningful practices for application today from early Christian worship or from Agape/Love Feasts, for example;
5) current social context, which helps us understand why practices today mean what they do. In a postmodern reality where the "grand narrative" of Christendom is rejected, finding a spirituality of feasting offers a meaningful, embodied practice.

Food and theology challenges us to think eucharistically about eating. This entails discussion of sin in the world and grace, leading us to turn towards sustainable food choices. The values of food and theology, affirmed by Jung, Wirzba, and Méndez-Montoya, and Bass, are choosing sustainable food, saying grace, and sharing food with others. These habits dovetail with a theology of hospitality, where gifts of service and inclusion of the outsider are key practices, based on biblical example. These are habits adopted in a spirituality of feasting. I believe the practice of spiritual feasting is one that will benefit Christians of all denominations, but this study calls on people to engage in material habits that allow an experience of grace. The intention of the practitioner to find an experience of God's grace in table fellowship around an abundant table creates the theological ground for this spirituality of feasting.

> Gathered around a table, inspired by and abiding with Christ, people live out the movements of sacrificial self-offering, grateful reception, and reconciled relationships. If this is true, then it is also the case that people do not ever merely taste bread and wine.

Properly transformed and directed, they also taste heaven. They gain a glimpse of life in its grace, fullness and truth.[227]

Let us pause and drink to that. To a radically, perpetually unnecessary world; to the restoration of astonishment to the heart and mystery to the mind; to wine, because it is a gift we never expected; to mushroom and artichoke, for they are incredible legacies; to improbable acids and high alcohols, since we would hardly have thought of them ourselves; and to all being, because it is superfluous…*Prosit*, Dear Hearts. *Cheers*, [Brothers and Sisters]. We are free: nothing is needful, everything is for joy. Let the bookkeepers struggle with their balance sheets; it is the tippler who sees the untipped Hand. God is eccentric; He has *loves*, not reasons. *Salute*![228]

[227] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 233–34.
[228] Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb*, 85–86.

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Appendix One: Dinner Church Digested

Researched in the fall of 2020 for the term paper for Concordia University's Religious Studies 6015, Dr. Norma Joseph

Church	**St. Lydia's**	**Simple Church**	**Root and Branch**	**Jehu's Table**	**Potluck Church**
City	Brooklyn, NY	Grafton, MA	Chicago, IL	Brooklyn, NY	Madisonville, KY
Denomination	Lutheran	Methodist	Christian Church, Disciples of Christ	Lutheran	Christian Church, Disciples of Christ
Location	Rented Store Front	Rented Church basement		Church	Rented Gym Basement
Pastor's Gender					
Principal	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female
Support			Female		
Founder	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female
Political Statement, in priority order					
First	LGBTQ	LGBTQ	LGBTQ	Black Church	Non-Specified
Second	Anti-Racism	Homelessness	Anti-Racism	LGBTQ	
Third	Homelessness				
Website	stlydias.org	simplegrafton.org	rootandbranchchurch.org	jehustable.org	potluckchurch.com
Sources	DCM	DCM	DCM	DCM	WWF
	WWF	WWF	WWF	DCFB	DCFB
	DCFB	DCFB	DCFB		
Date of Posting (FB)	Sept 7, 2018	Sept 7, 2018	Sept 7, 2018	Sept 7, 2018	Sept 7, 2018

Church	**Southside Abbey**	**Community Dinners**	**Sycamore Creek**	**Table of Mercy**	**Servant's Table**
City	Chattanooga, TN	Seattle, WA	Lansing, MI	Austin, TX	Tulsa, OK
Denomination	Episcopal	Non Denominational	Methodist	Lutheran	Lutheran
Location	Art Gallery	Community Centres	Restaurants	Sustainable Food Centre	Restaurants
Pastor's Gender					
Principal	male	1 male, 1 female	male	male	Lay: 3 male, 2 female
Support					
Founder		1 male, 1 female	male	male	
Political Statement, in priority order					
First	Homelessness	Homelessness	Un-Churched	LGBTQ	Un-Churched
Second	LGBTQ		Single Adults	Food Security	LGBTQ
Third				facebook.com/tableofmercyatx	servantstablechurch.com
Website	southsideabbey.diocet.org	communitydinners.com	sycamorecreekchurch.org		
Sources	WWF	WWF	WWF	WWF	DCFB
Date of Posting (FB)					April 14, 2017

Church	Kindred	Garden Church	Sunday Supper Church	Emmaus Dinner Church	Table 229
City	Houston, TX	Los Angeles, CA	Chicago, IL	Fort Worth, TX	Minneapolis, MN
Denomination	Lutheran	Swedenborgian Church	Non Denominational	Non Denominational	Episcopal
Location	Church				
Pastor's Gender					
Principal	female	male	female	they	female
Support	female	female			
Founder		female			
Political Statement, in priority order					
First	LGBTQ	Sustainable Food	Women	LGBTQ	Un-Churched
Second		Homelessness	LGBTQ		LGBTQ
Third		Addiction			
Website	kindredmontrose.org	gardenchurchsp.org	sundaysupperchurch.com	emmausdinnerchurch.org	table229.org
Sources	DCM	WWF	DCFB	DCM	DCFB
Date of Posting (FB)			Sep 7, 2018		Aug 3, 2017

Sources

DCM: Dinner Church Movement	WWF: We Will Feast by Kendall Vanderslice, 2019	DCFB: Dinner Church Movement's Facebook Page
dinnerchurchmovement.org		facebook.com/Dinner.Church
Date accessed, December 10, 2020		Date accessed: November 24, 2020
		Postings between April 14, 2017 and December 9, 2020

Summary

15 Dinner Churches in Total

Sources		Denomination	Meeting Space
6 DCM	3 found on all 3 sources	5 Lutheran	8 Non-Church Meeting Space
9 WWF	2 found on 2 of 3 sources	3 Non Denominational	4 Church Meeting Space
8 DCFB	10 found on 1 source only	2 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ	3 Unspecified
		2 Episcopal	
		2 Methodist	
		1 Swedenborgian	

Leadership

13 Churches with a single Principal Leader	Supporting	Founding	23 Current Total Leadership
6 Male	3 Female	4 Female	12 Female
6 Female		6 Male	10 Male
1 They		6 no founder specified	1 They
2 Churches with Shared Principal Leadership			
4 male			
3 female			

Political Statement

Primary Political	Secondary Political	Tertiary Political
6 LGBTQ	5 LGBTQ	1 Homelessness
2 Homelessness	2 Anti-Racism	1 Addiction
2 Un-Churched	2 Homelessness	
1 Women	1 Food Security	
1 Single Adults		
1 Black Church		
1 Sustainable Food		
1 Unspecified		