

Reconciliation Through Eating

NORMAN WIRZBA



*I*n what are surely some of the most succinct expressions of God's transforming presence, the Gospels tell us that Jesus was known (and despised by religious leaders) as the fellow who "welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Lk 15:2). Although John the Baptist ate no bread and drank no wine, Jesus was the Son of Man who came eating and drinking, prompting people to say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Lk 7:34; Mt 11:19). The kingdom of God is a place where people come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and eat (see Lk 13:29). In the New Jerusalem, the place where we will live eternally with the God who has chosen to dwell with us, people from all the nations will gather around the tree of life to be healed and fed by its fruit (see Rev 22:1-2).

That eating mattered to Jesus should not surprise us if we understand that eating is the daily enactment of our dependence on other people, the land and ultimately God. Every time we take a bite, we bear witness to a bewildering array of relationships that connect us to earthworms, raspberry shoots, water, sunshine, farmers, cooks and friends. When we eat well, these relationships are honored and nurtured. When we eat poorly, we demean and degrade the sources of nourishment that make living a possible feast. Jesus cares about eating because it is in the growing, preparing and sharing of food that we bear witness to God's desire that all creatures taste life fully.

It is easy for many people, especially when walking through a well-stocked grocery store with its attractive displays, to take eating for granted and to assume that food is of little significance for Christian faith and life. We might recall Matthew's Gospel, in which Jesus says, "[D]o not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (Mt 6:25). God knows that we need to eat. Our task is not to worry but to trust that God will provide.

Although we should certainly care about the fact that well over a billion people still do not have enough to eat, it is tempting to assume that this distinctly Christian concern about eating ends when food has been adequately distributed and shared. This is a serious mistake. Jesus' admonition is directed to the ways in which worry dominates and distorts our relationships with the world and each other. Clearly life is more than food. We can, if we are not careful, turn eating

into an idolatrous affair by making food our obsessive focus. But there is no life without food. God created a world in which every creature lives by eating. God daily sustains creatures by providing them with gifts of decomposition, photosynthesis and digestion, which are essential for the eating we enjoy. On the first Sabbath sunrise, God looked out on the world and pronounced it good. Seeing the creatures eat, he also made it delectable. That Jesus ate with sinners is both a practical and a profound action because it shows us how God relates to us, how we are to relate to each other and how we need to relate to the food itself. When our relationships in these three areas are properly configured, creation is nurtured and reconciled, God is glorified and heaven is tasted.

Appreciating the Christian significance of eating is difficult because for many of us, food has been reduced to a commodity. It has become a product much like any other, which means that our thinking about it centers on questions of availability, brand, convenience and price. When we consider how many "foods" now come wrapped in a highly stylized marketing plan, it is difficult to see past all the contrivance and find the hands of God. If we eat one of the many varieties of Doritos® tortilla chips, for instance, we are told that "a powerful crunch that unlocks . . . bold and unique flavors" will give us "immersive and memorable experiences." When we learn that many foods are making us fat and sick—rates of obesity, cholesterol, diabetes, acid reflux, hypertension, anorexia, heart disease and cancer are all on the rise—we might think that eating is a dangerous affair that, if we are not careful, can kill us.

Scripture does not present food to us as a product or enemy. Instead, as in this passage from Psalm 104, it describes food and drink as God's precious gifts, given for the health and enjoyment of all creatures.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
 they flow between the hills,
 giving drink to every wild animal;
 the wild asses quench their thirst.
 By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
 they sing among the branches.
 From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
 the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.
 You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
 and plants for people to use,
 to bring forth food from the earth,
 and wine to gladden the human heart,
 oil to make the face shine,
 and bread to strengthen the human heart. . . .
 O LORD, how manifold are your works!
 In wisdom you have made them all;
 the earth is full of your creatures. . . .
 These all look to you to give them their food in due
 season;
 when you give to them, they gather it up;
 when you open your hand, they are filled with good
 things.
 (Ps 104:10-15, 24, 27-28)

To believe that God created the world as an act of love is also to believe that potatoes, apples, milk and cheese are God's love made touchable, fragrant and delicious. To be faithful to this hospitable God is to participate in and extend the divine hospitality that welcomes, nurtures and delights in the world.

FOOD SHAME

It had been another tough day. When Matthew arrived at his office, he opened an email that turned his day upside down. Thinking he was going to put the finishing touches on an overdue report, he instead discovered that a branch office was in crisis mode. He spent the day putting out fires he didn't start.

Matthew was supposed to be home by four so that he could prepare dinner for the kids before the night's soccer practice. That didn't happen. Running late, he entered the drive-thru and picked up an order of chicken nuggets, fries, chocolate milk and apple wedges. They all ate in the car on the way to the practice field. His wife was not happy to see the fast-food bags—again. But she is really busy too. In his defense, Matthew showed her the uneaten apples as a sign that he was trying to make the best of the situation.

This scenario is hardly atypical. America has been dubbed the "fast food nation" because relatively few of us have the time to make good eating a priority. Drive-thrus at the many fast-food chains have a steady stream of vehicles. Grocery-store managers who order tens of thousands of different food

products know that convenience is a high priority for consumers, so they stock multiple kinds of prepared and processed items—"foods" that can be prepared quickly with the push of a microwave button. Dining room tables are stacked with stuff rather than meals, because very often we have to eat on the run, at the desk or in a car.

Time isn't the only major factor shaping the way our nation eats. The other is cost. Although we expect serving sizes to be large, we also expect the price to be cheap. Owing to the distortions of our industrial food system, it is often cheaper to buy a hamburger than a head of broccoli, a bottle of soda than water. All our cheap food, however, comes at a very high price. The cheap sticker price at the store does not reflect the costs associated with herbicide- and fertilizer-laden soils, poisoned and depleted waters, the burning of vast quantities of fossil fuels, abused animals, abused farmworkers, poorly treated and compensated food-service providers and the myriad diet-related diseases that are causing healthcare costs to skyrocket. Our demand for cheap food is slowly degrading and destroying all life on our planet. The generation demanding it, however, actually spends the smallest percent of income on food that the world has ever known.

A lot of this convenient, cheap food tastes pretty good. Sodium, sugars, fats and artificial flavorings have been generously added to give us a temporarily satisfied feeling. But if we could get behind the slick packaging and enticing presentation, we would discover that we have much to be ashamed about. To be *ashamed* means that we know we have done wrong before

another. It means that we have not treated others in a way that honors their integrity.

But many of us are not ashamed about our eating. We are not in a position or we do not take the time to learn how our desire for convenience and cheapness is so destructive of the sources of life. Today's average eater is likely the most ignorant eater in history. How many of us grow any food at all? Relatively few people know where their food comes from or understand the conditions necessary for it to be safely, sustainably and nutritiously produced. Our food industry doesn't want you to know.

I regularly teach a class on eating and the life of faith. At the opening of each class, I ask a student to give a short report on a favorite food. I ask them to research where the food comes from and how it is produced and marketed, and to assess its nutritional value. Almost without fail they begin their presentations by saying, "Well, I won't be eating this anymore!" They also report on how difficult it was for them to learn about the food. When companies are called, they rarely give straight or helpful answers. Websites are full of misinformation. Food companies don't want you to understand the food. They want you to think that eating their product is fun or sexy or performance-enhancing. Think about the ever-popular and even iconic Twinkie, one of America's best-loved snack cakes: President Clinton put one in a time capsule! What's it doing in our stomachs?

The shame of our eating becomes clearer when we consider the chicken nugget that millions of children like to eat. To get on a kid's meal menu, it has to be cheap. To make it cheap,

the chicken-producer has to be paid the smallest amount possible. To raise chicken most efficiently, the chicken-producer has to find ways to get more chickens into his or her barns and then get them to butcher weight as quickly as possible. To do that, it is best to genetically alter chickens so that their breasts become huge really fast, since Americans crave white meat. Today's engineered, confined chicken reaches full size in nearly half the time of traditional breeds. The enhanced breasts of these birds become so burdensome that many chickens' legs break under their own crushing weight. It is also important that their diets be supplemented by antibiotics, because cramped chicken houses are breeding grounds for disease. Room for the chickens to roam is not critical, since their breasts are so large that walking is difficult. Small spaces also make it easier for them to be caught by the poorly paid and often undocumented migrant workers, who cram them into the cages that will deliver them to a slaughterhouse where they will be disassembled on a factory line.

Very little, if anything, in this process honors or treats these chickens as gifts of God. Industrial methods of chicken production require that they fall within a *logos* or production system that stresses efficiency, uniformity and profitability. If we had the mind of Christ, however, and saw these creatures as having a role in God's new creation, we would think about what we can do to make sure that our relationships with chickens contributed to their nurture, health and even delight. Because Christ is the one through whom and for whom the whole world is created, chickens are part of his

renewing ministry that leads all creatures into the fullness of life. Inspired and shaped by Christ's reconciling life, we must concern ourselves with the well-being of animals, working to make sure that they can live the life God intends for them. When we treat chickens the way God expects, which means that we devote ourselves to their care, shame disappears to make room for celebration.

EATING JESUS

Just as Jesus was known as the one who welcomed sinners and ate with them, the early Christian community that formed in faithfulness to him was known for its glad and generous eating. Speaking of the Christian followers formed at Pentecost, Luke records that "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people" (Acts 2:46-47). We could say that Jesus had inspired them to eat in ways that bore witness to God's continuing presence.

Distinctly Christian forms of eating occur when Christ is present within us, enabling us to see, engage and taste the world in ways that are pleasing to him. As the apostle Paul put it, we should no longer consider others from a self-serving point of view. Instead, we should be so attuned to Jesus' way of being that we can say, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Intimacy with Christ, which is necessary for this kind of fidelity, can develop through the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper. Here Christians eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus so that he can nurture us into the life that bears witness to him. If we are what we eat, then eating Jesus should make us more like him.

Christians are not cannibals, of course. Luke's Gospel records that at the last Passover meal he ate with his disciples, Jesus gave thanks for a loaf of bread, broke it, gave it to them and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance in me." Similarly, he took a cup, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:19-20). At the Lord's table, Christians eat bread and drink the fruit of the vine so that Christ is drawn into the stomach and heart of our lives, energizing us for the life he makes possible. By remembering Jesus in our eating, we draw near enough to him that our thinking and feeling are transformed. Remembering is not the same as recalling a historical curiosity. It is, rather, inviting Jesus into our lives so that he can work within us the salvation that he incarnated.

John's Gospel describes this inner transformation in graphic terms. After describing himself as the "bread of life," Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. . . . for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" (Jn 6:53-56). To eat and drink Jesus is to abide with him. It is to live because of him. When Christ abides in us—by

our eating of him—our relationships with others are inspired and directed to take on his characteristics of attention, care, nurture, healing and reconciliation. These are the defining characteristics of Christ's life. The *Logos*, through whom the world is created and by which it is made fully alive, enters into us so that we can participate in genuine life.

For much of the Christian tradition, the Eucharist has been understood as a sacrificial meal. This is important because the high point of Jesus' ministry is his offering of himself to the point of death on a cross. The cross is not only an emblem of our violence and shame; it is also where God reveals definitively that true and abundant life consists in the complete and costly giving of oneself to another. The form of life that succeeds by grasping or hoarding or profiteering—abundantly on display in today's food production system and in fast-food eating patterns—is precisely the kind of life that Jesus came to correct through his own example. There is no resurrection life without the self-giving that the cross reveals.

The Eucharist, in other words, is not an occasional nibbling session in which Christians recall the violence done to their Lord. It is the table where we go to die ourselves. It is the regular time when we learn to put to death all the self-serving impulses that distort and degrade the world around us. Here we learn to live the baptism in which we die and are buried with Christ, so that we can also be raised with him into the newness of life that glorifies God rather than ourselves (see Rom 6:3-11). We die to sin so that we can be alive to God.

John's Gospel described this sacrificial movement using a

Pass.
link to
line of
what
writing
bread
of
life
in
the
Eucharist

metaphor well known to farmers and gardeners: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). Jesus is not simply talking about seed. He is talking about the movement and fertility of life itself. God creates a world in which each creature can be a *giving* member to the whole. There is no life in isolation, fragmentation, alienation or withdrawal. This is why Jesus continued by saying, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn 12:25). Witnessing to Christ's transforming presence and giving glory to God means offering ourselves to nurture others. At the Lord's Supper, Jesus nourishes us so that we can nourish the world around us.

It is tempting to confine eucharistic eating to a ritual realm. When this happens, the table around which Christians gather stays in a sanctuary. This is a serious error. The life and ministry of Jesus is not a pious idea. It is an economic revolution that has multiple practical effects, such that the tables in our kitchens and the dining tables in restaurants and cafeterias become places of eucharistic eating. Recall that the members of the early Christian community who gladly and generously ate together were also known to sell their possessions, give to those who had need and hold things in common. In a line that ought to astound us, Luke wrote, "There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34). To eat in such a way that we abide in Christ and Christ abides in us means that we will give ourselves—our attention, our skills, our energy and our possessions—to others so that we all flourish. Eucharistic table

manners result in sacrificial forms of living, in which meeting the needs of others is the defining concern.

We become agents of the "good news" that has been "proclaimed to every creature under heaven" when we become the kinds of eaters the Eucharist makes possible (Col 1:23). Eucharistic eating does not only transform the eating we do with people that happens at a particular table, as when we learn to become more attentive and hospitable to each other. It transforms the *entire* act of eating, which means it changes the way we go about growing, harvesting, processing, distributing, preparing and then sharing the food we daily eat.

EUCCHARISTIC EATING IN ACTION

What would self-offering look like if we tried to realize it in today's industrial food system? To answer this question, we need to make an important distinction between self-offering and self-imposition. Out of a well-meaning desire to do good or simply get by, we may too easily impose a plan on others that we think will be to our mutual benefit. So a farmer may, for instance, look at a field and determine that he or she should grow a lot of potatoes. Growing a lot of potatoes is good, because then there is more food to feed the world. To maximize yield, the farmer will also use synthetic fertilizers and a regular cocktail of poisons to deal with potato plant pests. This scenario follows the *logos* of industrial potato production.

What is missing in this *logos* is the desire first and always to *attend* to the land. In an industrial system, land is simply viewed as a resource to satisfy aims that may or may not be

good for the land itself. Here land is reduced to whatever human ambition imposes upon it. Little thought is given to how the imposition may result in considerable harm to the soil, water, plants, animals and humans that nourish themselves in this toxic site. Attending to the land means keeping a variety of questions in mind: how much soil is being eroded or degraded with this agricultural technique? What is the quality of the groundwater in the area owing to the steady stream of fertilizers and herbicides? Are the microorganisms in the soil healthy and thriving, and so daily contributing to the fertility of the soil? What is the nutrient quality of the potato that is grown in industrial conditions? Are the workers in the fields safe and fairly treated and compensated? Answering these questions requires clear and detailed vision. You have to get close and stay there to determine what is really going on.

During the civil rights movement, it became apparent that genuine reconciliation between people would not be possible unless whites and blacks physically *relocated* so as to be in close and sustained proximity to each other. People need to dwell in ways that allow them to see each other's pains and joys, limits and potential. Although legal integration of school districts is possible through the efforts of people who may not deeply know or care about each other, the reconciliation that defines a beloved community is not possible from a distance or via a bureaucratic *logos*. Community presupposes people who are ready to offer themselves to each other so that personal desire is overtaken by a desire for the other. Following the apostle Paul's formulation, community means holding the needs, de-

sires and joys of others such that my own needs, desires and enjoyments make no sense apart from the life we live *together*. Only then can people become the sort of community that functions like an organic body—no member or part alone, but all working together to be a healthy whole.

Reconciliation with the land requires a similar kind of relocation. For much of human history, we have not really attended to or known the land that nourishes us. In our hubris and neglect we have thus exhausted, degraded and destroyed much of it. In our ambition we have ruined where we are and then moved on to "virgin territory" or "greener pastures." We have not settled our land in ways that indicate our respect and care for other creatures. Nor have we given due consideration to the limits and potential latent within every habitat. The history of American settlement witnesses to a *logos* of exploitation in which the machinery of bulldozers, guns, dynamite, dams and poison have imposed our will on the world.

Put in more theological terms, we have failed to appreciate that creation forms a vast and indescribably complex and organic whole. Humanity is only one member within this creation. It does not all exist for our exclusive benefit. As God reminded Job, the earth is full of creatures that are of no use to us but are of intimate concern to God: "Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?" (Job 38:41). It contains creatures like the mighty Leviathan, which can kill us but is a particular delight to God: "I will not keep silence concerning its limbs, or its mighty strength, or its splendid frame" (Job 41:12).

Creation exists for our health and nurture, but it is not made for our exclusive enjoyment. When we become attentive, we quickly learn that there is much within it that can harm or even kill us. Not everything that looks good is edible. We have to be careful and knowledgeable. We also have to be respectful. We have to learn that sometimes it is best to let creatures and their places alone. Above all, we need to make ourselves students of the places where we live, which will instruct us in the ways of faithful living. That is where self-offering begins. ✨

To gain a sense for what is practically involved, we can turn to The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. Begun over thirty years ago by plant geneticist Wes Jackson, The Land Institute is working to develop an agriculture that nourishes rather than depletes the land. Its mission statement reads: "When people, land, and community are as one, all three members prosper; when they relate not as members but as competing interests, all three are exploited. By consulting Nature as the source and measure of that membership, The Land Institute seeks to develop an agriculture that will save soil from being lost or poisoned while promoting a community life at once prosperous and enduring."

To get to the heart of Jackson's thinking, we have to appreciate the complexity of the responsibilities that accompany our membership in the world. He argues that with the birth of agriculture ten thousand years ago, humanity began its assault on the land, thus putting all future memberships in peril. Readers of Scripture are inclined to see the invention

of the plow as a sign of peace and prosperity, and perhaps even to make an appeal to the prophetic declaration that in the peaceable days to come, nations will "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks" (Is 2:4). The truth of history, however, is that till agriculture has decimated and compromised much of the earth's soil. Turning the soil upside down has exposed it to wind and water erosion. Tearing apart its root structures has compromised the soil's ability to hold moisture and maintain a rich microbial life.

This is why Jackson and his team of scientists at The Land Institute are developing a perennial, polyculture form of agriculture. If we are to have an agriculture that does not exploit the land, it needs to grow perennial plants, which have deep root structures that hold soil and water together. We need to move away from vast fields of monoculture in which commodities like corn, wheat and soy are replanted year after year. A monoculture system depends on the plow and the heavy use of synthetic, fossil-fuel-derived fertilizers and toxic herbicides. Instead, we must move toward fields that grow multiple kinds of plants together, such as nitrogen-fixing legumes with nitrogen-needing grains. Such combinations provide pest protection and nutrient enhancement. The key to it all, says Jackson, is learning how creation grows without poisons and artificial fertilizers. We must make nature "the source and measure" of our membership with the land, as The Land Institute's mission statement reads.

Making natural systems agriculture a reality will require a massive shift in government policy. For that to happen, food

consumers need to demand from their elected officials policies that put the health of land and people above the massive profits by a handful of agricultural companies. Advocates like Jackson, Wendell Berry, Herman Daly and Fred Kirschenmann have been arguing that we need to scrap today's Farm Bill, which keeps our fields in land-destroying monoculture. We need to replace it with a Fifty-Year Farm Bill that promotes an agriculture that runs on sunshine (rather than fossil fuel), builds soil fertility, preserves clean water, eliminates massive animal confinement operations and protects plant and animal diversity. We need to understand that a farm bill is really a food bill, and thus also an energy bill and a health bill. When we recognize how the wars of our world constantly center on the desire for the resources drawn from land and water, it is not a stretch to say that our farm bill is also always a defense bill.

The Land Institute teaches that whatever farming we develop in the future must fit the ecosystem in which it occurs. That means that in Kansas, we must learn to farm like the prairie. We must become students of prairie ways of sustaining plant diversity and plant growth, ways that over the centuries have built fertility rather than diminished it. When we do this, we demonstrate that we have relocated our vision and desire so that our agricultural practices develop in response to the needs and potential of the land and are not an imposition upon it. As members of the land, rather than bandits of it, we learn the skills and disciplines that promote mutual flourishing. By taking the time to understand where

we are and how best to live gently and gratefully there, we participate in God's gardening ways, which give and ennoble life. We discover the world to be beautiful, fertile, dangerous, mysterious, fragrant and delectable. And so we come to share in God's Sabbath joy.

SAYING GRACE

When I was growing up, my family would pray this German blessing before each meal: *Segne, Vater, diese Speise, uns zur Kraft und dir zum Preise*. It can be roughly translated as, "Bless, dear Father, these thy gifts, given for our strength and for your praise."

It may be tempting to dismiss our ritual action as the pious relic of a bygone era. But what if saying grace at mealtimes is an essential expression of our creaturely dependence, and therefore also a declaration of our responsibilities to God, each other and the land? Might it not be an indispensable reminder to receive land and life as precious gifts to be nurtured, shared and celebrated?

To say grace is to offer thanksgiving to God for the food we are about to eat. Thanksgiving is a complex act. It presupposes that we know what we are being thankful for. It assumes that we find what we are about to eat of value and thus worthy of thanks. It entails the kind of humility in which people readily bow their heads before raising their forks. None of this can be taken for granted in our industrial, fast-food world.

It is becoming common knowledge that much of the food on our plates travels hundreds or even thousands of miles to get there. The transcontinental head of lettuce grown in Califor-

nia but eaten in Boston or New York not only travels through the clouds of our atmosphere. It also makes its way through a vast cloud of consumer ignorance, in which eaters have no idea where the lettuce came from, how the land it grew on was farmed, what toxic inputs were used and how the farmworkers were treated. The lettuce simply arrives, shorn of its ecological and cultural contexts. If one were to express gratitude for it, what exactly would one be saying thank you for?

When food registers primarily as a product or commodity, the focus of our thinking goes straight to the sticker price. The scope of our concern might include taste and nutritional content, but because we are so ignorant about food's agricultural and economic contexts, we don't really have much patience or appreciation for its gracious life. What I mean by food's grace is an experience known to every farmer and gardener: food is an inexhaustible mystery. Life is a fragile and vulnerable gift we hardly understand, much less control. Although we prepare the ground, plant the seed and then nurture the plant, a good harvest and a delicious meal depend on so many gifts from God that we can hardly enumerate them. Soil decomposition, photosynthesis, hydrological cycles, plant and animal health, pollination, pollinators and animal reproduction: it is easy to take these gifts for granted. It is dangerous, too, if we begin to think that nothing we do puts these gifts in jeopardy.

When we sit down at the table and fill our plates, how many of us take the time to carefully consider the wonder and the fragility of what is there? The Shakers had the practice of ob-

erving a time of silence before eating. This is important for us, too, so that we can calm our minds, tame our egos and then mindfully receive the gracious gift of food. Are we not startled by the fact that God created a world that tastes so good? Are we not perpetually amazed that a grain of wheat can be transformed into the many kinds of breads and cakes and cookies that make our life a joy? Saying grace matters because it opens our imaginations (and our stomachs) to the marvelous creation that makes our eating and fellowship possible and a potential delight. Since our mouths enable us to eat *and* kiss, should we not prepare and devote our hearts for eating much like we prepare and devote our hearts for kissing?

Every bite of food is an introduction to God's particular joy in a creature's being. Being trained at the eucharistic table means learning to savor each morsel as a delectable manifestation of God's love. Appreciation of this sort takes time and preparation to develop. The taste that genuinely savors the world as God's own simply cannot be rushed. We need the daily reminder of saying grace before every meal.

Because saying grace is an act of faithfulness before God, it is also a political and economic act. It has to be. We cannot express gratitude to God for the gifts of food if, in our production and consumption practices, we are degrading those gifts. The grateful speech that remembers and names the items on our plate, and that honors the biophysical, farming and cooking processes that made them possible, must not at the same time reflect our destruction of the world. We remember God and creation at mealtimes so that we can become participants

in the remembering of the creation that is too often being dis-
membered by us.

When we appreciate how saying grace strengthens the memberships of creation, we also see that saying grace is a reconciling act. Being reconciled with each other means being in the presence of each other without shame. It presupposes that we have committed to make our lives into an offering of time, energy and skill that serves the need and the potential of others. When we say grace in an authentic way, our presence in the world becomes good news. The creatures we eat and those we eat with can be assured that our desire abides in God's desire that all creatures taste the heavenly delight that daily creates and sustains the world.

6

Bread for the
Whole Body of Christ

FRED BAHNSON



*For many are the trees of God that grow
In Paradise, and various, yet unknown
To us, in such abundance lies our choice.*

JOHN MILTON, PARADISE LOST, BOOK IX

yes, an oil-driven network of which you are a part!
During the flight into Fort Myers, Florida, I looked down on a vast, oil-driven network of fast-food chains, malls and suburbs, little fiefdoms of fancy destined for ruin in the sunshine-powered future. Standing an hour later at the Global Farm sponsored by the Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (ECHO), I felt that the contrast couldn't have been more stark. It was like stepping into the Nigerian village

pare to or son?