HOLY EATING
A MEDITATION ON EMBODIED HOLINESS

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> O the depth of love divine,
> the unfathomable grace!
> Who shall say how bread and wine
> God into us conveys!
> How the bread his flesh imparts,
> how the wine transmits his blood,
> fills his faithful people's hearts
> with all the life of God!
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> —Charles Wesley, "O the Depth of Love Divine"

Prelude

Moses ascends the mountain toward a strange image. Flickering and devouring some mountaintop vegetation, a flame draws his attention. The flame is both wild and welcoming—strangely enveloping a tree, but without destroying it. As he encounters the flame, he learns that God is in this place, *the* all-consuming fire, resting on this tree, on this mountain.[1] This is the same God who will be seen by the recently liberated Israel as a fire consuming the mountaintop, who will consume Israel's sacrifices in flame, who will descend as fire on Mount Carmel to engulf Elijah's altar. This God is certainly not tame. And yet, this divine fire can consume *without* destroying, can rest upon and envelop a tree to no detriment to the tree itself. In fact, it is precisely by consuming-but-not-destroying that God meets with Moses.

Eating Creation

We are creatures of the earth, formed from dust. One of the startling claims of the gospel is that God wants us to share in the life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God's own life—our dust and all. Throughout the history of God's people, we have attempted various means of giving our lives, and the earth in which we live, to God. In some ways, this story of Israel and the Church is an epic of eating. The desire to taste and see if the fruit was really all that bad lead to alienation from God (Genesis 3), and now through Christ the desire to taste leads to reconciliation with God (John 6:25-40; 1 Corinthians 10:16-7). Salvation and sanctification involve our whole being, and in a particular way our eating.

Our Western culture also gives a lot of attention to food, in often very confused and confusing ways. We eat as a simple biological necessity, and yet we have an endless array of options that make food seem more a personal choice. Many of us have such an abundance of food that much of it ends up in the trash, yet we're at a loss for how to share food with those who are poor and vulnerable. The shopping aisles are lined with foods that have no nutritional value and are bought purely for the pleasure of tasting, yet we're also driven towards a body image that

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[1] Consider Katherine Sonderegger's reflections in *Systematic Theology,* Volume 1: *The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 81–92, 210–23.

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is achievable only through cycles of dieting and portion control. We want good food that is healthy and delicious, yet we don't want to give time to cooking and preparing quality meals. We want food that is good for us and our environment, yet we don't know the famers and producers that prepare the food—many times we don't even know what the original form of the food is and the processes it goes through. What is food? And how ought our theology shape our eating?

My guiding conviction in what follows is that *food is a way God mediates or communicates God's life to us*. This may seem like a radical claim. It means both that food is a way God sustains and provides for us (consider Genesis 1:27-30) and that food is a way God is personally present to us in fellowship and in giving life to us (consider Exodus 16:4-5, 15; Deuteronomy 8:3-10; Isaiah 25:6; Matthew 6:11, 31-33; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 15:23-24, 24:30-31; John 2:1-11; Revelation 22:1-3). Because all creation is filled with God's creative presence and God is the provider and sustainer of our very being, God uses food as a way of granting this life—life that is of God—to us. In this light, food is not simply a biological or economic fact—though it is always these things too—but is also a form of fellowship. Eating is a way of loving God and creation.[2] This essay consists of a series of propositions that follow from this guiding conviction, with some exposition of each.

Excursus: Mediation, Participation, and Divine Presence

Because my conviction that food is a way God mediates or communicates God's life to us is so central to what follows, it deserves some further clarification up front. On the one hand, I want to allow that there are multiple equally appropriate ways of conceiving God's self-mediation through created realities and do not believe this claim need be restricted to one particular perspective. On the other hand, apart from some account of what *I* intend by this phrase, it might be too ambiguous or amorphous to serve the critical function it does here. For those less concerned with the metaphysics that might serve to elucidate the kind of divine mediation I'm envisioning, I believe the remainder of the essay can be read fruitfully apart from this excursus.[3]

In one respect, my guiding conviction is trivially true. All things, simply by virtue of being the good creatures of God, communicate and mediate God's life—for God is in all that God creates, and all creatures are in God. We don't have to be "panentheists" to think this way (though there are myriad forms of panentheism, some with quite respectable pedigree).[4] Most of

[2] Consider Angel F. Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 48–65.
[3] The background thinking that informs my judgments in this respect is shaped by my sympathies with the longstanding tradition of Christian Platonism (embracing people as diverse as Irenaeus, the Cappadocians, Augustine, John of Damascus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Aquinas). I prefer to avoid making that conceptuality central because I don't believe Christian Platonism is the only metaphysical position compatible with the propositions I put forward here.
[4] For representatives of diverse versions of panentheism, see Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke, eds., *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on*

what Hans Boersma calls the "Great Tradition" of Christian thought holds that all finite reality exists only through participation in God, and therefore to the extent that they display the goodness conferred on them by God, all creatures mediate God's life in a manner that is proper to their finite nature.[5] The mediation of God's life, however, is not a kind of brute fact established simply by the order of creation but is fulfilled in the reconciliation of all things to God in Christ. Because in Christ we receive the Spirit who is drawing all creatures into the new community of creation (Col. 1:15–20; Rom. 8:11), the reconciliation established between God and humanity also enables new relations amongst persons and between human and non-human creatures. In this way, the mediation of God's life in and through creatures is perfected by the Spirit's outpouring. Creatures mediate God by God's own perfecting action.

But there is a more particular sense in which *food* mediates God's life to us. From the trivial sense alone, we can already see *that* food mediates God's life, especially as it is drawn into the fellowship shared in the Spirit. However, what is unique about food is the way that it is the nodal point of a nexus of human relationships, not least the physical means by which our life is sustained. When we eat, we perform certain relations to other persons (even if we eat alone) and relations to non-human creatures. Therefore, food is *always* an instance of intimately encountering what is other (by communion with other persons and by ingesting what is eaten), proximately the created other but also the divine Other in whom each creature participates.[6] When we eat rightly—as reconciled persons in the economy of God's grace—our eating performs holy relations among creatures and between creation and God. Because such holiness is only given by God and is given in a unique way through the act of eating, food is a way God mediates God's life to us.[7]

Because food is a way God mediates God's life to us, meals are an occasion to recognize that our physical bodies are part of our ongoing relationship with God; so in meals we learn to receive our bodies and their nourishment as gifts, and to offer them to God and one another in return.

God's Presence in a Scientific World (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), especially Part III. For a modest, constructive, and evangelical form of panentheism, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation*, Vol. 2 of A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 226–49.

[5] The phrase "Great Tradition" is used throughout his book—*Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011)—to designate the Christian-Platonist synthesis that was maintained until the late middle ages. For more detailed analysis, see his *Nouvelle Théologie & Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[6] For sustained reflections to similar effect, cf. Simon Oliver, *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 148–53.

[7] I'm not claiming that "food" mediates God's life—the primary agent in God's self-mediation is always God. I am claiming, rather, that food is a unique medium of God's self-mediation.

Perhaps we are unlikely to think theology is relevant to eating because eating is so … physical. Isn't theology about spiritual things and not physical? We need to resist that line of thinking because it's a form of the ancient heresy known as Gnosticism, which is a strong form of dualism that separates the spiritual from the physical, makes the spiritual more valuable, and views salvation as an escape from our physical body to exist in a disembodied spiritual state. Our resistance to the bodiliness of eating may be more benign, in that we just may not be sure how to interpret bodily processes theologically. What does chewing, digesting, and evacuating have to do with relating to God?

But as Christians, we have the resources to view the body and physical world as good — even very good (Genesis 1). In fact, the way God creates humanity is by getting personal with dirt, touching and forming it and breathing life directly into it (Genesis 2:7). In the Genesis 1 account, God doesn't keep humans in the garden but tells them to fill the earth and care for it (1:28). And then, anticipating humanity's bodily needs, God explains that all over the earth there is food that God has given us (1:29). So food is a gift from God, a way God grants life to our earthy bodies—and remember: all life is from God (Job 27:3; Acts 17:28; 1 Timothy 6:13).

In our eating we continually learn to recognize the goodness of our bodies as gifts of God's creative love. As one hymn says, "Gifted by thee, turn we to thee, offering up ourselves in praise."[8] Meals are an occasion to recognize that our life is a being-gifted-by-God—which is to say that all that we are is through God's giving. We receive our bodies and their nourishment as gifts of life, and with our bodies we turn to God, "offering up ourselves in praise" to "the Gracious Donor of our days."[9] When we eat well together, we celebrate the bodily life we share and the presence of God through our material nourishment.

Because food is a way God communicates God's life to us, meals are an occasion to be gathered together to receive and share God's generosity with one another; so eating with God forms us into appreciative and generous people rather than primarily consumers.

It is hard to imagine a strong community that doesn't eat together. Churches have potlucks, fellowship, and meals on holy days. Families often share regular meals together. Friends keep in touch at cafes and diners. And couples learn intimacy through dinner dates. When someone finds a favorite dish or a surprising new flavor, one of the first things they do is share it, either by telling others how good it is or by literally offering others a bite. Eating is a public and shared activity, and when it is shared well it is a happy and joyful time. When we eat food we love with people we love, we tangibly experience the gratuity and superfluous excess of God's creative love. And so we delight in this gift of life and, caught up in the abundance we receive from God, we share with one another.

When we practice eating as a gift of grace, we become appreciative eaters rather than consumers. Food, like so many other things, has become a money-laden commodity, and so we have unfortunately come to identify the value of food with a price tag. Purchasing something

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[8] Robert L. Edwards, "God Whose Giving Knows No Ending," Hymn #529 in *Sing to the Lord* (Kansas City, MO: Lillenas, 1993).
[9] Ibid.

gives us the sense that we deserve it, and by paying the assigned "value" we sense that the product is ours "by right" and not by gift.

The value of food is much more than monetary. The value of food derives from its role in practices and actions that construct meaning. By eating with God, the meaning constructed in meals is not just what we "make up" but is a meaning received by God's action. God is always the host and so even the food we "buy" is eaten as a gift received from our generous host. God is a welcoming host (Luke 14:16-24; John 2:1-11) who gathers us together at the table. Consequently, we learn to view and use food in a mode of appreciation and generosity. We appreciate that God has invited us to dine in the divine fellowship and receive the abundance of God's life. And we are moved along by this generosity, recognizing that God gives food not just so that we consume and fulfill our own desires but so that we commune by sharing food in fellowship with one another.

Eating Devastated

Eating is one of our most consistent and direct ways of interacting with non-human creation. Consequently, how we eat influences how we relate to creation more broadly—and vice versa. In our Western, industrialized, and technological world, this often means we are further and further removed from non-human creation.

Our food comes in plastic packages—or from a restaurant or fast food checkout — and bears little resemblance to its original form. Most of us rarely interact with the farms, farmers, and butchers that produce the food. And these sources of our food are so far removed from us, both geographically and technologically, that we probably wouldn't be able to interact with them even if we wanted to. For those of us who live in cities, this means that most of our world is humanly constructed and mediated, removing us from direct contact with the rest of creation.

It is easy in this situation to think of non-human creation through the lens of all our other cultural productions, which are now proffered as consumables. If food is simply a "consumer good" waiting on the shelf for our use and indulgence, and food is a primary occasion for our interaction with non-human creation, then we will likely come to see all creation as some kind of grand "consumer good." Creation is there for our use and abuse, for the excesses of our self-indulgence. Creation, rather than being recognized and celebrated for its diversity, is made fungible through economic mediation.

By recognizing food as a way God mediates God's life to us, meals are an occasion to receive non-human creation as a means of God's grace and a good in itself; so good eating helps us cultivate the earth through deeper intimacy with creation rather than distance.

God is present in all creation. As John Wesley said:

> God is in all things, and … we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; … we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical atheism; but … survey heaven and earth, and all that is therein, as contained by God in the hollow of his hand, who by his intimate

> presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of universe.[10]

And as God is present to creation, loving and abiding in it, creation is therefore good in itself. If we eat creation as simply another fungible product, we run the risk of using it as if it is separate from God, which is indeed a kind of practical atheism. Instead, we should seek to receive our food as an expression of God's abundance and love, and as an object of that love in its own right.

This is part of the practice of "saying grace" for each meal. We say grace because it is a verbal pronouncement on receiving food *as grace*. We receive it as nourishment for life with God, and as a way of receiving God's goodness. However, when we eat and eat and eat in excess, simply because it's there and we like the taste, we negate food as a reception of grace. Rather, we turn it into a mute thing disconnected from God's delight in its own goodness. So, our practice of saying grace is often in conflict with our practice of over-indulgence and under-appreciation.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't enjoy food—quite the opposite. There are good and bad ways to enjoy. Enjoyment that leads to indifference to the good of the other is manipulative and degrading. Enjoyment that leads to fellowship and intimacy with the other is proper. When we enjoy our food as a way of celebrating the goodness of created matter we join in God's own delight for creation. And in this way, we are drawn into deeper intimacy with creation that helps to correct our distance and alienation.

By recognizing food as a way God communicates God's life to us, meals are an occasion to improvise on the love of God that infuses and sustains all reality; so eating allows us to share in God's delight in creation and to be drawn into fellowship with non-human creatures.

Jazz improvisation is a great metaphor for cooking. In jazz music, a theme will be presented and then throughout the song different instruments will improvise on the theme, weaving new elements into the melody, changing the syncopation, or transposing it into a different harmonic register. When we prepare food, we receive the good elements God has created (the theme) and improvise on it, adding elements, finding additional foods that complement the flavors, cooking it in a manner that highlights something unique about that particular item or combination. This is a way to draw out things to enjoy in the material world.

Consequently, cooking and sharing food is a way to receive and improvise on God's creative love. We receive non-human creation as a gift of love and as worthy of love. Creation is a gift of love because it is a way God abides with us, through the created world God shares Godself with us as the overflow of God's triune love. But, food is also a way that creation itself abides with us. All eating is a form of sacrifice, for something had to be killed (either plant or animal). Consequently, eating is a way of receiving the sacrifice of non-human creation as an act of giving—creation shares itself with us through our food.

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[10] Sermon 23 (on Matthew 5:8-12), part I, paragraph 11.

Receiving food as a gift and love helps us see how it is an occasion to be drawn into fellowship with non-human creation. We receive the otherness of creation into our very bodies as nourishment for our lives, and in this way we draw creation into ourselves.

Eating Reconciled

It might sound odd to say that our eating is in need of reconciliation. But as I already argued, every act of eating is a form of sacrifice. We kill anything we eat. We, at least in America, don't think about this because our food comes to us pre-killed. And it's in such tidy packaging that it takes work to remember its original state — i.e., what kind of animal or plant it once was and what form of life it enjoyed.

Now, this sacrifice of itself is not wholly bad. For God speaks of food as a gift to humans and animals (Genesis 1:29). And yet it is hard to doubt that we now exploit and damage the animals, plants, and environments on which we rely for food. Our eating practices have become destructive. Consider recent documentaries, like *Food, Inc*, that reveal horrific treatment of animals, genetic modification of plants and animals, and unsustainable economic practices. In America, our desire for more food at lower costs has led to the exploitation of the earth, farmers, and the global economy. Our "free market" has invaded other countries and subjected them to produce for our insatiable cravings with such low compensation that the locals cannot even afford to buy the food they formerly lived on.[11]

By participating in practices that destroy and exploit the sources of our food, we eclipse the sense of God's grace in our eating; consequently, our fellowship is compromised, between God, one another, and non-human creation.

The classic sin of eating is gluttony. We have so lost a sense of the connection between our eating practices and the good of those around us and the environment that we think of gluttony only in terms of individual physical health. Gluttony, in these terms, is eating more than is good for one's own body. No doubt this is not good.

And yet the Old Testament prophets are consistent, if not unanimous, in their condemnation of gluttony as a social sin. Gluttony is the sin of self-indulgence that disregards the good of those in need (Amos 6:4-7, 8:4-6). Ezekiel even charges that gluttony is the real sin of Sodom: "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49).

When we recognize that our principal sin of eating is really a social sin—a failure to share with others and care for the source of our food—then it becomes clear how it breaks fellowship. Food is one of our primary ways of fellowship with other people and non-human creation. When our eating reinforces or fosters indifference to others, we fail to live into the

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[11] Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 89-101; and Fred Magdoff, "The World Food Crisis: Sources and Solutions," *The Monthly Review* 60:1 (May 2008).

fellowship God desires. And further, we thereby reject the very gift of God's own self to us through the gift of food.

Gluttony could easily be extended beyond its indifference to the needy other. In gluttony, we place our (insatiable) desires ahead of the rest of creation. That on which we depend for our food is turned into a mute object with no inherent value. And this is a double sin: it is a failure to acknowledge the inherent good of creation and it is to disregard what God delights in.

In Christ, God breaks bread for our sake as a gift of Christ's body and blood; in the Eucharist, we receive God's generosity and offer it to one another as God performs a fraction that results not in destruction but in sharing, so that we might learn to receive ourselves from God and offer ourselves back to God.

As I have emphasized, in our eating we break things. This is a sacrificial breaking, in which the life of one thing is given up for the sake of another. Unfortunately, this sacrificial breaking often becomes destructive. However, in Christ we see a non-destructive form of breaking—a breaking-as-sharing. There's no doubt that Jesus loves to eat. In fact, he practically eats his way through Luke's Gospel. How he eats is central to his ministry.

Two things characterize Jesus' table practices. First, while Jesus had no home of his own he almost always acts as the host at a table. So in Luke 14, Jesus initiates a topic of discussion and performs a healing in someone else's home, effectively assuming the role of host. And then in the feeding of five thousand, he takes the disciples' bread, breaks it, and serves it in abundance of the need (Luke 9:12-17). Before he is crucified, he has a meal with his disciples in which he offers bread to interpret his coming crucifixion: breaking the bread he says, "This is my body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19). And then the disciples recognize him after his resurrection by his hosting and breaking bread (Luke 24:30-31).

Second, when Jesus hosts he welcomes all. Jesus' "hosts" are constantly frustrated by who Jesus is willing to share their table with. Jesus welcomes prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners to the table. As Marcus Borg memorably put it, Jesus' table fellowship reveals that holiness is more contagious than impurity.[12] So, when Jesus breaks bread, it is to host and to share—to transform our patterns of exclusion and alienation into hospitality and generosity. Consequently, in Jesus we see a pattern of breaking that is not a form of violence but rather of self-giving. And this is fulfilled and repeated in the practice of Communion. In Communion, Jesus offers his body and blood for the life of the Church, to form us into his one, holy, catholic, and apostolic body.

And though we often think of Communion as something *we* do, we find in the practice that once again Jesus takes over the role of host. We offer bread and cup — the fruits and products of human labor — only to find that it is actually Jesus who is offering them to us. We eat and drink his body and blood only to find that Jesus actually takes us into his body. So we also call Communion "Eucharist" (from the Greek *eucharisteō*), which means "to give thanks" or

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[12] Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, Revised Edition (New York: Continuum International, 1998), 147.

"rejoice." We receive the bread and cup as an occasion for giving thanks for Christ's action of joining us to his body. When eating is transformed into an occasion for communal identification, receiving, and sharing, our destructive patterns of breaking are improvisationally transformed as the one who was broken for us gives without loss. In the Eucharist we learn to not be discriminating hosts, for the real host is Christ whose very welcoming is the gift of sanctification. We learn to not be ungrateful to the source of our food as we realize we are not creation's lords but its peers as recipients of divine favor.

So we learn that the renewal of good eating comes through the meal Christ offers his Church, but perhaps we still perceive the brokenness of our present economies. When Christ breaks bread for us, there is abundance beyond our myths of scarcity (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:5-15). Which raises the question, central to imagining holy eating: how do we remake our destructive breaking of creation so that we might share in Christ's breaking-as-sharing, his giving-as-abundance? How might we learn to offer ourselves back to the created other in love for creation? How might this be a form of abiding with creation as a way of returning our lives to God?

Eating Transfigured

God shares God's life with us. This is the gospel—that despite our self-destructive and creation-destroying practices God seeks union with us in Christ. Our union with God is our participation in the triune fellowship, so that we are transformed from glory to glory, being made holy by God's holy love.

I have been exploring how God communicates God's life to us in our eating. This has been a tumultuous exercise, as the good and the bad of our eating have moved in and out of view. Our hazardous eating practices have begun to look very bleak as we see that this means of grace, this provision of God's life for us, is abused and misappropriated. Yet even in our eating God has effected union with us through Christ by inviting us to the table of his broken body and spilt blood. God disrupts our gluttonous devouring by introducing a new economy of abundance in the Eucharistic breaking-as-sharing.

This is good news for us because it allows us to receive God's life through the gift of food. Yet the biblical witness is clear that the final goal of redemption will include the renewal of all things (Revelation 21) and not only us humans. And in the Church, we have received the Spirit of resurrection—the Spirit of new creation—and therefore anticipate the final restoration of all things (Romans 8:11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). How then do we enact presently the fellowship with all things that will characterize the new creation? How do we love—abide with (1 John 4)—non-human creation, the creation on which we depend for our food and sustenance? I will explore this through two biblical images, Sabbath rest and the eschatological banquet.

In the fellowship of the Spirit—who is the perfecter of creation—the Church anticipates the final Sabbath rest; and in this Sabbath rest the Church learns to grant rest to non-human creation and to abide with all creation in the gift of Jubilee.

Sabbath is a dominant theme in Christian Scripture, especially the Old Testament. From the first pages onward, Sabbath rest is a sign of God's indwelling of creation and of the eschatological completion of all things. In the Genesis 1 account, God creates humanity and the other land creatures on the sixth day, appraises the whole as "very good," and then rests (Genesis 2:1-3).[13]

As John Walton has convincingly argued, the account in Genesis 1 uses temple language.[14] This conveys the sense that God is creating a great cosmic temple, within which God will dwell—a theme that finds fulfillment in the tabernacling of the Word in Jesus Christ (John 1). Sabbath, then, is resting in fellowship with God. The Israelites were told to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy, because by so doing they inhabited creation as God's cosmic temple.

In Leviticus 25, this Sabbath practice is expanded. Every 7 years there is to be a Sabbath year, in which the land is also allowed to rest. God tells the people that they are to live only on what the land naturally produces (Leviticus 25:6). This is a sign that God's creative temple-making includes all creation — God desires to dwell in all the universe, and consequently God desires that we abide with the whole creation in love.

We can practice this Sabbath rest in simple ways by finding opportunities to allow the land to rest. This will necessarily vary depending on context, but even simple acts can stir our memory to remind us that the universe is God's dwelling place, a not-yet-completed temple in which the fullness of God will dwell. Further, we can give back to creation through simple acts like composting. Rather than wasting our leftover organic material, we can use it to enrich the earth around us. In so doing, we are anticipating the day when creation is renewed and all creatures mutually share in God's triune fellowship.

A second biblical image that seems a fitting conclusion to this exploration in the theology of food: the final Great Banquet. The banquet is a common eschatological theme in both the Old and New Testaments, including scenes like the three messengers dining with Abraham (Genesis 18), times of feasts (i.e., Leviticus 23), the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15), the two eschatological parables of the banquet (Matthew 22 & Luke 14), and the wedding banquet in which Jesus turns water to wine (John 2).

In the eschaton we will be received into the Great Banquet, the Triune God's festal life; in this final banquet our eating will be transformed so that predators and prey abide together and all creation shares in the mutual love of God.

As I discussed earlier, when Jesus is at a meal he inevitably becomes the host. This is what is so remarkable about Jesus' first public act in the Gospel of John. He is at a wedding when the wine runs out. His mother turns to him to help—though we have no reason to think it is Jesus' problem. And yet, Jesus assumes the role of host by providing enough wine that the

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[13] It is commonly recognized that Genesis 2:1-4 is of one literary unit with Genesis chapter 1, so that 1:1-2:4 comprises the first account of creation and 2:5-25 the second.
[14] John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 72-92.

festivities can proceed—in style—on into the night. As with all Jesus' signs and wonders, this is an act in which Jesus shares the triune life with those around. He grants the life of God, God's festal life, to all. Because the triune life is like a wedding banquet, in which the Father and Son are united in their mutual love as the Spirit joins them and celebrates this union.[15]

The vision that we receive of the End of all creation, then, is of all things being drawn up in the dynamic wind of the Spirit to share as witnesses and celebrants of the union of Father and Son. We are drawn into the final banquet of God's own wedding feast. In this banquet we receive the food of God's celebration as a gift of union and grace, a gift worth sharing and celebrating in its own right.

In anticipating this final reality—the banquet we will share in God's festal life—we turn to our fellow creation with fresh eyes. We see it not as mute, fungible "stuff" but as saturated with God's glory and holiness, signs of the great feast we await. It is no wonder that Christians have throughout history painted cornucopias and lavish table spreads. To paint "still life" is to view non-human creation as valuable and suffused with meaning and beauty. By painting it and appreciating such paintings, we take time to attend to created beings' unique actuality.

But our appreciation is not reducible to a set of actions, for to love is to enjoy a state-of-being of abiding with the other. Learning to love non-human creation is a way of being with and seeing this world in which we live, to recognize it as the site of God's good creation and the temple of God's dwelling, and to anticipate its final consummation in the great banquet of God's festal life. This is to be brought into right relationship with God and creation, to receive God's good life in the food God gives and to abide with creation as the object of God's love and signs of God's generosity.

Postlude

Holiness is formed and sustained by being drawn into the consuming fire of God's life—consuming but not destroying. And as we are swept up into this strange and transforming way of life, we begin to make this God visible in the world. We make visible a way of being with others that bears a semblance of God's consuming-without-destroying. Learning to eat well and justly is one way of making this visible, as we approximate an eating that strives to *abide with creation* rather than destroy and exploit it. Through holy eating we not only abide with all creation well, it also draws us into a deeper sharing and fellowship with people we love, both those we know well and those who are vulnerable and in need. And holy eating, finally, grafts us into Jesus' body, who gives us his own flesh and blood that we might take him into our bodies. By sharing in Christ's flesh, our bodies are brought into the giving and sharing of the Holy Trinity.

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[15] Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 98-134.