

Eucharistic Eating: The Moral Economy of Food

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When you come together to eat, wait for one another... lest you come together to be condemned. (I Corinthians 11. 33 – 4)

When the first Christians met for worship on the day they called the Lord's Day they met not in synagogues or Temples but in the dining rooms of Mediterranean houses where they reclined or sat at table and shared a meal together. In so doing they were following the common practice of their Mediterranean contemporaries in the first century who, whenever they gathered for religious, social or political purposes organised their meetings around a two course meal. The meal was followed by entertainment or debate known as the symposium. In the case of the Christians this would have taken the form of hymn singing, reading of scripture, oral testimony, intercession and exposition of scripture. In centring their worship on table fellowship they adopted the common custom both of their Jewish and Gentile contemporaries and of Christ and the Disciples. From the early chapters of the Synoptic Gospels until the Resurrection appearances the Gospels recount numerous instances of Christ reclining at table with the Disciples, and using meal occasions as lived parables of many aspects of his teaching and ministry. Analogously the most common metaphor for the Kingdom of God in the Gospels is the messianic banquet. Further the growing and sharing of food forms either backcloth or foreground material of the majority of the parables of Jesus. Even in his Resurrection appearances Christ eats with his disciples, first at Emmaus, and later on the beach. By contrast in the Church since the late Middle Ages the growing and eating of food has become marginal to the worship and teaching of Christians.

In this essay I will suggest that the turning of the sacrament of the Eucharist into a token meal, and the infrequency with which the laity in medieval and later periods received even this token, are profoundly connected with the declining significance of food growing and eating in Christian culture. There is a similar disconnect between the cultivation of food and the cultures of food in modern industrial societies where those engaged in growing and preparing food are undervalued, and acts of food purchase and preparation are turned into consumer rituals.

The modern disconnect between the cultures of farming and food is also implicated in the breakdown of the community of human and nonhuman creatures which is manifest in the ecological crisis. Much attention has been paid in recent years to Christian descriptions and doctrines of nature in the attempt to redress what Lynn White and others have argued is an ecological deficit in Christian doctrine. But I suggest in this paper that of far greater significance is the influence of Christian *practice*, and in particular the meal and worship practices of Christians, on attitudes to creation, and that the recovery of the sacramental understanding of food, in the Eucharist, and in *all*

Christian eating, is essential to ecological Christian witness.

Food is foundational to civilisation and society, and food rituals are at the heart of the Old Testament. The Torah records the first origin of human agriculture in the fertile Levant crescent with its narratives of the transformation of the patriarchs of Israel from nomads to settled agriculturalists. 'My father was a wandering Aramean' (Deut 26. 5) is the cultural memory which Israel carries with it to the Promised Land, and the nomadic life of the pastoralist in the form of the forty years wandering in the wilderness becomes a sacred memory which is frequently invoked as a model both of divine guidance and of judgement for subsequent generations. It is in relation to that memory that the laws of Israel are divined and edited, and the seeming security of the 'land of milk and honey', which is God's gift to Israel, is frequently contrasted with the more insecure, and hence the more dependent, life of the nomad. A recurring theme of the Old Testament writers concerns the issue of faithfulness to God which the relative security of agricultural surplus in the land created for the Israelites: 'take heed lest you forget the Lord your God, by not keeping his commandments and ordinances: lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply...that your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'. (Deut. 8. 11 – 14). As nomadic pastoralists they were always reliant on divine providence. As settled agrarians they learned to rely on their own skills in possessing and subduing the land and consequently they began to abandon their fidelity to Yahweh. Thus the editors of the Torah and the Prophets read the ecological problems which poor soil stewardship and overgrazing produced in the Levant in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE as consequences of infidelity to the creator: because they had neglected the laws of God which required them to respect the land, not to overgraze it, and to allow it to lie fallow by giving it regular Sabbaths, the land itself had dried up and turned salty and was no longer fertile. The Exile of the Israelites from the land is also seen in this light – because they had not given the land its Sabbaths, they were exiled from the land so that it may receive a Sabbath from the Lord.

What distinguished the Israelites from their other farming neighbours in the first great agrarian economy of ancient Mesopotamia were rules governing diet and animal husbandry, and the distribution of the land and its products. From the first stories of the creation in Genesis it is clear that for the God of Israel the life of warm-blooded animals was understood to be a precious thing because of its physiological closeness to human life. The Israelites were therefore commanded to treat all animals with reverence. Killing of animals is only permitted under the terms of the Noahic covenant as a concession to human sinfulness, and even so it is restrained by the sacrificial system which preserves the people from the infection of killing by reserving this dangerous activity to the tribe of the Levites, the priestly group, who were set apart from the other tribes and performed this activity only in the Temple precincts. The sacrificial system was the key means for expressing reverence for *nephesh* or the life blood as it involved careful and limited ritual slaughter of the animals the Israelites kept in their fields. It also specifically excluded wild animals, including birds and reptiles. It thus enjoined a careful and sacred respect for

the lives of animals who might otherwise have been regarded as the property of Israelites to dispose of at will, while at the same time ensuring that wild animals are preserved from hunting, and that extent of grazing and crop lands were limited by the requirement to give them sufficient roaming land. Far from representing a cruel system which wasted animals and expressed disrespect towards them, the sacrificial system was in fact far more ascetic in its treatment of animals than is often imagined. The way in which dietary laws – what it was permitted to eat and not eat – map on to the rules and procedures for Temple sacrifice, as demonstrated by Mary Douglas, indicates a degree of restraint in the killing and eating of animals, and hence of respect for animals, which was closer to religious asceticism than to the disregard for the intrinsic moral significance of animals found in medieval Catholic writers such as Thomas Aquinas, or in modern attitudes to animal husbandry and slaughter.

The sacrificial system was not only a means for sanctifying animal husbandry, slaughter and meat eating. It was also the central device in Old Testament religion for atonement for sin, and for healing and restoring the disturbance that human sin and wickedness caused both in divine human relations and in relations with other creatures, human and nonhuman. Sacrifice was the divinely ordained mechanism for maintaining the ‘eternal covenant’ between God and Israel and for recovering the promise of cosmic harmony between God, people and land. As Margaret Barker suggests, the eternal covenant was ‘the system of bonds which established and maintained the creation, ordering and binding the forces of chaos’. Disregard of the divine statutes therefore risked returning the world to its pre-creation state as ‘waste and void’, as Jeremiah at one place suggests, and even extinguishing light in the heavens, while the restored creation by contrast is returned to its Edenic state where peace, justice and righteousness reign. In the Old Covenant the means by which this restoration takes place is atonement, which literally means to cover or repair a hole or cure a sickness. The *place* of restoration was the Temple which was ‘the meeting place of earth and heaven’ where each action and ornament was said to have a heavenly counterpart. Not only the high priest but the Lord was understood to perform the acts of atonement which repaired the ruptures to creation caused by sin and hence Jewish tradition has it that the priest in effect ‘transferred the atoning power to God. And since it is the Lord who performs atonement then for Barker *kpr* has to mean restore, recreate or heal’.

Barker’s account of atonement in the Old Testament sheds important light on the significance of the New Covenant for creation care because it brings the tradition of the eternal cosmic covenant, and the interconnection between physical and moral laws in Hebrew cosmology, into the heart of the New Testament. Christ was Incarnate on earth in an era when, according to Isaiah, God had abandoned the Noahic covenant: the sacrificial system of the Israelites was no longer effectual because they had abandoned the righteous demands of the law without which neither blood spilt nor burnt flesh could atone for sin. The Lord therefore no longer honours the atoning blood shed in the Temple. Hence Isaiah envisages a new Atonement ritual, enacted by the ‘suffering servant’ who shall ‘sprinkle many nations’ with his atoning blood, carry the sicknesses of the people, and remake ‘the covenant bond of peace’. The Suffering Servant is not only the one who makes

atonement by the pouring out of his blood, which heals the rift caused by sin, but he also becomes the scapegoat who carries away the sins of the people and who is, like the scapegoat 'pierced for our transgressions'.

If Christ is the suffering servant, which the Evangelists and St Paul clearly believed, then the New Covenant which Christ sets forth in the fellowship of the bread and the cup at the Last Supper with the disciples is truly a cosmic covenant for, as with the Day of Atonement, the blood of Christ atones for the polluting effects of sin on the creation. This is the metaphorical significance of the piercing of the body of Christ by the Roman centurion: his blood is poured out on the earth, as was the blood of all sacrificed and slaughtered animals in Israel, and so the earth is healed. This is why the writer to the Ephesians can say that it is the divine plan hidden from before the foundation of the world 'to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph. 1. 10) and why St Paul explains in Colossians that 'in him all things hold together' and that through him God reconciles 'all things whether on earth or in heaven' (Col 1. 17, 20). The atonement which Christ first sets forth at the Last Supper is truly a cosmic event, and hence, as the Gospel writers have it, not only is the meaning of his death affirmed in the Temple itself when the veil of the Temple is torn in half – Christ having become the great High Priest who has passed into the heavens and hence there being no more need for a Holy of Holies – but the earth also witnesses to its anticipated restoration with an earthquake and a partial eclipse of the sun. As Barker suggests, this understanding of the New Covenant is the essential background to interpreting the new life and new creation imagery of the New Testament – the New Covenant heals the earth.

Barker's interpretation of the Temple background to the Last Supper narrative and subsequent Eucharistic practice argues for a new association of the Eucharist with the eternal covenant. This association is clearly indicated in the words of Christ recorded in the narratives of the Last Supper in the synoptic Gospels, and as repeated in I Corinthians – 'this cup is the New Covenant in my blood'. These words refer not to Exodus but to the eternal covenant. Furthermore Christ is described as the High Priest in the Letter to the Hebrews. This approach suggests that the traditional association of Eucharist and Passover is not in the mind of the author of the book of Hebrews since Passover is the one sacrifice not offered by the priest. Further evidence is found in the first Synagogue sermon of the Apostle Peter who indicates the connection of the New Covenant with the Day of Atonement and not the Passover when he tells his hearers 'repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord' (Acts 3. 19 – 20). In this first Christian sermon the same simultaneity of judgement and restoration is realised as in the Day of Atonement rituals. St Paul also sees the Eucharist in these dual terms in I Corinthians when he suggests that if the body is not truly discerned the Corinthians will eat and drink judgement, while properly distributed and shared the broken body of Christ makes all one. Four centuries later *Bishop Serapion's Prayer Book* makes the same connection when it speaks of the Eucharist as 'the medicine of life to heal every sickness and not for condemnation' while the *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* includes the prayer that the Eucharist may bring remission and forgiveness of sins, healing of soul and body, and not

judgement and condemnation.

The connection between Eucharist understood in these terms and the restoration of creation is underscored by the theurgic function of the Day of Atonement in the First Temple. Just as Psalm 110 has it that when the king entered the holy of holies he became the Melchizedek priest and the Lord, so the writer of the Hebrews has it that Christ as high priest is enthroned as the heavenly lord. Hence as Barker suggests both the ecstatic Aramaic invocation *Maranatha* and the *Epiklesis* invoke Christ to come and dwell on earth among the elements of bread and wine. In the *Epiklesis* the Church takes up the paradigmatic cosmic role as the new Ark of the Covenant through which Creation is being redeemed from the Fall, rescued from judgement and renewed after the glorious body of Christ Resurrected and Ascended, and now sacramentally present in the Church constituting meal. In this light the placement of the Lord's Prayer immediately after the Eucharistic Prayer takes on even more significance: the first petition on earth *as in heaven* indicates the same theurgic meaning which the Day of Atonement, and hence the Eucharist, have on Barker's interpretation: as the Church enacts the Eucharist Christ is present *on earth* as in heaven so bridging the cosmic divide and restoring order to the whole creation.

That the Eucharist is the *new* Covenant, as Christ announces at the Last Supper, is crucial to the way in which it replaces the old sacrificial system, and hence to an understanding of the role of the new Covenant in the ecological restoration of creation. According to the first Covenant sin polluted not just the people of God but the land and the whole creation. Isaiah makes this clear when he says that the 'earth mourns and withers' because men have 'broken the everlasting covenant' (Isaiah 24, 4, 6). As Robert Murray argues the covenant between God and Israel was a 'cosmic covenant' which included the whole of creation and not just the people of Israel. This cosmic vision of covenant is connected with a cosmology in which creation emerges out of the original waters of chaos and in which only the providential action of the creator keeps the waters at bay and so makes space for the land. These divine actions of binding destructive cosmic forces are part of a moral bargain with humanity. When humans uphold the justice of God, and allot the land in due portion to each other, without reducing some to slavery or debt bondage then the land gives its due portion and the forces of chaos are restrained. But when humans pollute the land with their sin, when they because the few 'add house to house and greedily devour the earth' (Isaiah 5. 8) they invite judgement in the form of the inundation of the waters of chaos and the destruction and pollution of the earth. Isaiah connects not only avarice and injustice but also war with ecological destruction – 'the envoys of peace weep bitterly...the land mourns and wastes away' (Isaiah 33. 7 – 9). As Barker comments when the cosmic covenant is broken 'powerful destructive forces are released and the Creation is at risk'.

The interpretation of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, and of the Eucharist in the New Testament, as representing a cosmic covenant is highly significant in relation to the subsequent development of Eucharistic theology but it is not without its problems. Central to these is the traditional association of the Last Supper with the Passover, an association which is affirmed by the three synoptic gospels which clearly

indicate that the last supper is the Passover meal. The different chronology of Christ's last days in the Gospel of John perhaps lends credence to Barker's account that this association is misleading. However the alternative dating can be explained by the different dating systems, and hence days for celebrating the Passover, between diasporic Jews and Palestinian Jews. One approach to bringing together the two traditions – of Eucharist as Passover and as New Covenant – is indicated in the fact that St Paul refers to Christ *both* as the High Priest who makes the sacrifice and as the paschal victim or the one who is the sacrifice. Instead of opposing Passover and the Day of the Atonement Paul draws on both these archetypal rituals to account for the full redemptive significance of the death and resurrection of Christ. Similarly the early fathers, including Irenaeus and St Cyril of Jerusalem continued to draw on both Old Testament rites in expounding the meaning of the Eucharist.

While we may not go all the way with Barker in rejecting the traditional association of Eucharist and Passover, nonetheless Barker's association of the Eucharist with the Day of Atonement and the eternal covenant is a valuable corrective to an over-emphasis on sacrifice in Eucharistic theology. As Barker argues this over-emphasis has become an obstacle to the appreciation of the cosmological and social setting of the Eucharistic meal, and even to its central place in the worship of Christians, to the point that the Eucharist has for long been represented in Catholic and in some Orthodox perspectives as a sacrifice which the priest at the altar constantly represents to God, as if the original sacrificial system had not been done away with but is rather recreated in the Eucharistic offering.

This problematic sacrificial theology was deeply implicated in the extent to which in the Middle Ages the Eucharist became a privileged rite in which only priests regularly participated. The laity were invited only to gaze on the Eucharistic elements, and received the bread of the host at most once a year at the Easter Mass. There was a consequent shift from *eating* to *seeing* the host which much influenced the design of churches, as well as the elaboration of processions involving the host displayed in a monstrance for the sight of the laity. As Eamon Duffy suggests 'seeing was believing'. The elite in pre-reformation Europe could receive communion on a daily basis if they hired a priest and built a chapel in their house. But for the common people the politics of the Eucharist was about the withholding of the means of grace rather than genuine participation. This domestication of the Eucharist in the politics of feudal society served to reify the relations of peasants to elites, and this reification was not confined to Europe. As Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasuriya observes, this reification and domestication also took hold in Europe's colonies where the Eucharist came to represent and symbolise the exploitative power of colonists and their local collaborators over nature, peoples, and cultures. Instead of its association with the liberative meal traditions of Christ and the first Christians the Eucharist becomes an elite cult which legitimated the elite-masses structure of colonial society and drove the ordinary people to superstition and fetishisation of holy objects and relics since the real Eucharist was for most of the year denied to them.

Despite this ambiguous association with colonialism and classism, and despite the

more ecclesial focus of the modern Roman Catholic vernacular Mass, to this day Catholic devotion to the elements of the Mass continues, and with it the experience of the Mass as occasion for individual penance and personal edification. Equally this conception of devotion and sacrifice continues to influence Protestants in their refusal to recover the earlier Christian pattern of Eucharist as the normal and regular form of worship on the Lord's Day.

Part of the Protestant reaction against the ritualism of the Eucharist was a critique of the perceived idolatry of the veneration of the Host and the associated implications of magical powers and the associated doctrine of transubstantiation. This revulsion – which is clear in Cranmer, Calvin and Luther – is also connected with the sacerdotalism of the medieval church and in particular the central role of a priestly hierarchy in mediating the grace of the sacraments through priestcraft. So enduring is this legacy that in much Protestant culture the Eucharist is still associated in a problematic way with the Catholic tradition of the sacrifice of the Mass. Despite the proposal of *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry* that the Eucharist is the normative liturgical event of Christians when they meet together on the Lord's Day, and as was the universal custom of the early Christians, many Protestants still use a service of the Word as the paradigmatic act of worship, reserving the Lord's Supper for a monthly or quarterly event, and then often in the form of a short rite which is tacked on to a service of the Word which is to all intents and purposes self-contained and lacking any referent to the sacrament of the Eucharist which follows it.

The Reformers, including Cranmer in England and Luther and Calvin in Germany and Switzerland, had pressed for much more frequent communion than the annual Easter communion which had become the late medieval norm. But the old practice of infrequency has proved hard to reform, and moreover the priestly associations of the Eucharist remained. For the argument of this paper this infrequency is a real problem. Protestant refusal of the Eucharist as the central form of Christian worship on the Lord's Day – from American megachurches to Scottish Presbyterians, from Swedish Lutherans to evangelical Chinese – implies a continuing rupture between rationalist Christianity, over-focused on the proclamation and reception of the Word, and the embodied material life which is embraced and redeemed in the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, and hence a problem for Christian ecological witness.

Contemporary Eucharistic scholarship, informed as it is by anthropological and sociological perspectives on meal rituals and traditions in the Mediterranean region at the time of Christ, offers a way to address this problem while not losing the important connection between Old and New Covenants, Eucharist and Passover and Temple and Eucharist. And with the aid of anthropological and social scientific approaches to the cultures of food in the ancient world, and in the modern, another way may be found to address the continuing infrequency of Eucharistic celebration in so many Churches around the world, and to recover its rich agrarian, and hence ecological associations. Anthropologists Claude Lévi Strauss and Mary Douglas argue that dietary practices and meal rituals are culture shaping and enact core elements of the beliefs, rules and symbol systems which constitute the structure of different societies and people groups. Rituals of

eating and food preparation act in many cultures are said to connect people with the life of the gods. They also provide powerful pathways for sharing and sustaining beliefs, and for passing on and retelling memories, narratives and traditions. Eating is also crucial in cementing social bonds, and meals can be sources of discrimination and exclusion, as well as solidarity. Douglas argues that power relations and the structure of a society are both manifested and sustained in patterns of eating and food growing. On this account an industrial economy which fosters the consumption of manufactured food is also likely to be an economy in which small family farmers find it hard to get a fair return from supermarkets and food suppliers, and where damage from industrial farming techniques to biodiversity and the soil is discounted as economic 'externalities'. Equally the ritual structure of a meal may manifest power relations in the family or beyond the home. If, as Mary Douglas argues, meal rituals and dietary practices are important symbolic representations of underlying social structures then in societies where a growing number of meals are eaten by individuals sitting alone in front of electronic entertainment devices we would expect to find an analogous individualism in society, and growing disorder in familial and community structures.

This conception of a moral economy is crucial to understanding the impact of the ministry and teaching of Jesus in the social context of Palestine under Roman occupation in the first century of the Christian era. The phrase 'moral economy' is first coined by E. P. Thompson in a paper on eighteenth century food riots in England. Thompson suggests that these riots, far from being disorderly events were evidence of a moral economy of the poor inasmuch as those who took part in them were responding to the attacks on common customs and social traditions associated with the enclosures of common land which prevented the poor from growing their own food and forced them either into vagrancy or wage labouring in industrial factories. First Century Palestine under Roman rule manifests a not unrelated set of circumstances. There were food riots at many places in the Roman Empire and in their efforts to sustain and extend its rule Rome's Emperors made strenuous efforts to extract agricultural surplus from the far regions of the Empire to keep the price of bread low in the imperial cities, and to provision their legionnaires. Palestine was one such marginal province whose place in the imperial agricultural economy was the provision of surplus. The remains of large wine and olive presses, and of bunk houses suitable for large groups of farm workers to sleep in, have been found on sites south of Galilee. Archaeologists have also uncovered evidence of fish drying and bottling facilities in the region of Tyre, the deep Mediterranean sea port, where products such as fish paste, olive oil and wine would have been exported to Rome.

The parables of Christ concerning food growing and harvest take on a new significance when set in the context of the threats to Israelite smallholder agrarianism from the combined effects of the imperial taxation system, and an imperial food economy which relied on the extraction of surplus food from its colonial holdings to maintain its growing armies and urban centres. Christ's parable of the rich landowner who had acquired so much land that he needed to build bigger barns to store all his surplus is indicative of the way in which wealthy Jewish landowners were cleaning up as small farmers went to the wall in first century Palestine (Luke 12. 13 – 22). Christ characterises

the landowner as a rather self-satisfied and self-concerned individual who plans, having stored his surplus, to rest from his labours secure in the knowledge that while others go to the wall he has enough laid up so he can relax, eat and drink and be merry. But, as the parable indicates, his life will be required of him before he gets to build his barns. He is quite literally storing up judgement for himself even as he rejoices in the surplus he has hoarded from the land.

In the Gospel of Luke this parable is immediately followed by one of the paradigmatic meal incidents of the Gospel which is the feeding of the five thousand. Landlessness and food poverty are closely related in agrarian cultures and, as Dominic Crossan points out, many who were drawn to Christ's preaching and ministry were ill from sickness and diseases associated with malnutrition. The meal is portrayed by Luke as analogous to the feeding of the people of Israel with manna in the wilderness. In the context of his many parables and teachings which critiqued privilege and excess, Christ's practice of the banquet, and his association of the Kingdom of God with the messianic banquets, enacted a subversive recovery of the traditional moral economy of people and land. These meals recalled the egalitarian moral economy of the ancient Israelites because they refused the distinctions between righteous and sinner, and even between Gentile and Jew which was sustained by Second Temple Judaism. Just as Christ announces in a pivotal saying that 'many will come from East and West and will eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven' (Luke 13. 28 – 9) so in his own acts of eating he chooses to eat with those who were considered far from grace including not only tax collectors and sinners, but prostitutes, Samaritans and the sick. These meals at which Christ welcomes the 'unclean' to eat with him are essentially missionary meals at which the proclamation of the kingdom becomes a lived reality; those who are outside the orbit of grace are invited in and through their participation in table fellowship with Christ they are offered forgiveness and redemption.

Jesus' critique of the Temple and his predictions of its downfall were devastating and troubling to religious leaders precisely because this ancient centre of the Jewish religion had been so corrupted by collaboration with the imperial economy that it was no longer the moral or spiritual centre of Judaism, no longer the mercy seat of God. Jesus challenged the Temple authorities when he forgave the sins of the Paralytic man, and when he healed those who were sick because of their poor diets and indebtedness to the Roman imperial economy. And Jesus challenged it more directly when he announced that one day soon 'not one stone would be left upon another' (Luke 19.44). And Christ did not only challenge – he enacted a different story, a different society which he called the Kingdom and which, as Crossan argues, he inaugurated in Galilee with his disciples. This was the society of the common purse, the society of the common meal to which sinners and not just the righteous were welcome, and it was the society in which bread was broken as a sign that the new society that God was birthing in Jesus was truly a foretaste of the heavenly banquet promised to the patriarchs and saints.

We glimpse this new society in which the imperial order of want is overturned at a number of places in the Gospels but it is archetypically realised in those places where bread is broken: the food economy Jesus inaugurates challenges the economy of want and

scarcity which international and imperial trade had brought to Palestine. The feeding of the 5,000 is a classic example of this archetype. The disciples wanted to solve the problem through the market – ‘let them go and buy something to eat’. Jesus teaches them to resolve the problem through a community of production and sharing: let us see what they have to eat; organise them into groups; let them sit down and eat. He then blesses and breaks the loaves and there is more than enough for all to eat. Blessing and breaking create the miracle of sharing – they break the distorted money economy of hoarding and possession and enact a new reality of giftedness and communal abundance. In the setting of the impoverishing agrarian economy of Roman Imperial occupation an act of blessing, breaking and sharing on this scale was truly a meal which turned eating itself into a political act of resistance to the imperial order. Hence too Christ’s account of the power relations implicit in imperial meals such as the symposium. ‘In the world men sit at the top seat’ but he counsels his own disciples to take a lower seat. For Christ the politics of eating is revolutionary subordination, a subordination which truly unsettles the principalities and powers. In this light the blessing and breaking of bread which Christ regularly enacts becomes a paradigmatic act of resistance to the Roman imperial economy and to the central role of the Jewish Temple in the organisation of this economy in Palestine.

A number of scholars now suggest that we do well to understand the Eucharist in the light of the meal tradition which Christ inaugurated in his ministry, and not just in the light of the Last Super narrative. This approach also broadens the theological significance of the Eucharist from the almost exclusive focus of the medieval Mass tradition on penance and the death of Christ. Instead, as Bruce Chilton suggest, bread and wine may be said to constitute Christ’s sacrifice to God, and the sacrifices of his disciples, and these sacrifices take the place of the killing of animals in the Temple cult. In other words Chilton argues that Jesus wanted it to be understood that the messianic meals he inaugurated replaced the Torah mandated sacrificial system as re-enacted in Second Temple Judaism. The meal tradition of Christ was therefore the central enacted parable of his prophetic condemnation of the compromised religion of the Temple, and hence also a crucial element in the claim of blasphemy against the Temple with which he was accused at his trial before the High Priest (Mark 11. 15 – 19).

In this approach the Eucharist is interpreted in relation to the other meals which Jesus took with his disciples. Many of these meals were in effect missionary meals for they were meals at which others were frequently invited into the circle, or even to act as host. The story of Zachaeus is the classic account of this function of the meal, but other less obvious exemplars include Christ’s drinking water with the Samaritan woman at the well, and his feeding of the five thousand. In all cases Christ’s choosing to eat with those whom debt, poverty, prejudice and illness, or their association with the Romans, had placed outside the sphere of the righteous causes embarrassment to his own disciples, and shocked outrage among Pharisees and other rabbis. Such meals, as well as Christ’s teachings, were interpreted as an implicit attack on the Temple, blasphemy against the Temple being the principal accusation brought against him at his trial. Offering open access to grace without the mediation of the Temple religion, Christ is viewed by the

Jewish authorities as a dangerous subversive. The reason was simple. The Temple was at the heart of the extraction of agricultural surplus of the Roman imperial economy in Judea. Judea and Galilee were self-governing provinces and the Temple treasury was the place where the poll tax and imperial Tribute were gathered before being handed over to the Romans. Thus Christ's frequent denunciations of the religious mediation of grace and the Temple system were also attacks on the imperial economy itself and his meals, and his teaching about the messianic banquet open to the poor and even to Gentiles, were equally implicated in this attack.

If the Eucharist as practised by Christians in the first century was the regularisation of the many meals which Jesus held with tax collectors and sinners, as well as with Pharisees and with his own disciples throughout his ministry, this suggests a rich association between Eucharistic worship and the whole ministry of Christ. It suggests also that the Eucharist in the early church was intricately associated with redressing the wrongs against the poor and the land that were implicit in the social conditions of food production of the kind sustained by imperial Rome. Just as the table fellowship of Christ was the *means* to redemption for sinners, so Christian eating, as Balasuriya suggests, becomes an acted parable of a moral economy which recalls the idealised moral economy of the Torah and which is enacted in the community of the Kingdom that Christ himself establishes around him. In the Kingdom, and hence at the Eucharist, the poor no longer have their land expropriated from them for the benefit of the tables of the wealthy, but instead are welcomed to the messianic banquet alongside the rich where they find not only a place but a voice in worship after the breaking of the bread.

On this account the now dominant practise of Eucharistic worship as a token meal which symbolises the death of Christ fails to represent either the original meaning *or* practice of this meal for the early Christians. As Dennis Smith argues the New Testament itself unambiguously describes the first Eucharists not as token meals but real meals and it is evident from early Christian art that worship in the early church was around tables in the dining rooms of the houses where the first Christians met for worship. However it is clear from I Corinthians that there were moral and social problems thrown up by the association between Christian worship and eating which needed to be urgently addressed. Paul's foundational description of the Eucharist in this epistle is preceded by his extensive discussion of the problem of meat offered to idols. As N. T. Wright suggests this account is not epiphenomenal to his account of the Eucharist. On the contrary it provides the crucial context. The economy of eating was in Corinth problematic precisely because it was a pagan economy in which almost all meat eaten in Corinth was butchered at pagan temples. How to eat meat without the infection of idolatry was the pressing moral question that St Paul addressed in this letter immediately before his description of the Eucharist itself. His concern was that the Eucharist was marred at Corinth by its infection over the arguments about meat offered to idols, and the larger context in which rich had meat and the poor merely bread crumbs. Bread for the poor, wine for the rich – the very Eucharistic elements had become the occasion for division in the church at Corinth.

Paul was writing to the Corinthians to put them right on their practice of the

Eucharist because they had turned it from the meal of common sharing as practised by the disciples in Jerusalem into a meal more like that of a Roman Symposium in which the rich ate first and had their fill of luxury foods, while the servants cleaned up on the crumbs when the wealthy were done. This was not the practice of the common meal as Jesus had shared it with his disciples before and after his death. Paul begins by recounting the story of the feeding on manna in the wilderness, a feeding which initially went wrong because the people of Israel neglected the two rules that God established for receiving the manna which were, first, that the people should gather only sufficient for what they needed and second, that they should not hoard or try to store up the manna. The Corinthians were doing anything but this in their practice of the common meal – instead of sharing together equally some had far too much while others went without.

This problem with the form of the meal at Corinth provides a vital clue to the meaning of Christ's words 'do this in remembrance of me' which St Paul sets centre stage in his own account of the Eucharist. We tend to hear these words in the light of Augustine's and Aquinas' inward and rationalist sacramental theology. But when St Paul writes these words he is referring to the common practice of Christians breaking bread together in the name of Christ. This common meal tradition established a foundational connection at the heart of the Christian religion between the moral economy of food and of divine grace, a connection first enacted in the Messianic meals of Christ and the daily community practices and worship of the first Christians. Another key phrase in St Paul's account of the Eucharist is the language of 'discerning the body': these are interesting words which again Christian history has turned inward. Aquinas' sacramental theology has trained Christians to think of these words as indicating some inner sin which if unconfessed will lead to the communicant being condemned when she receives the sacrament. But the meaning to the first readers of this epistle could not have been plainer. The body of Christ was an alternative political order to the imperial polity of Rome – this is precisely why Paul uses the traditional classical metaphor of the body. And so to discern the body is to discern the significance of the way of Christ which was the way of common sharing in which the weak are respected alongside the strong, the rich eat and drink alongside the poor; discerning the body refers to the alternative moral economy inaugurated by Christ of revolutionary subordination. The body of Christ, as Paul goes on to explain in 1 Corinthians 12 – 14, realises this moral economy on earth in the common meal, and in the acts of worship and ministry which follow it when the strong give honour to the weak, and those with less respect in society are given voice.

The problem is that modern Christians have two economies in mind when they hear or read this passage – the economy of salvation, which is taken to be the sacrifice of Christ through which sins are forgiven, and the economy of food, which is subject to secular political and economic arrangements. But for Paul there is no such distinction between politics and religion, or indeed nature and culture. To confess that Christ is Lord is to confess that Caesar is not – it is a far more profoundly political confession than it is for Christians after the conversion of Constantine. Similarly to break bread blessed in the name of Christ was a profoundly political event. The Christians modelled in their first communities a different economy to the imperial pagan economy of Rome.

All of the butchers in ancient Corinth were servants of the Roman pagan economy – all of their meat was offered to the Roman imperial cult as a part of the process of its slaughter. Eating meat offered to idols was therefore unavoidable for Corinthians. The organising concern of the context of this first narrative of the Last Supper in 1 Corinthians is Paul's concern that the Christians in Corinth were in danger of turning Christian eating into meals which were like pagan symposiums, manifesting the dubious commitments and social relations of the Roman moral economy. Thus when St Paul suggests that Christians ought mostly to desist from eating meat in Corinth, because for the weaker and poorer brethren the sight of the rich eating pagan meat would be offensive, we realise the urgency of clarifying the distinctiveness of the Christian ritual meal from pagan ones. For St Paul eating and drinking meat and wine at tables devoted to demons meant that Christians would become embedded in the idolatrous and pagan worldview.

Paul's narrative of the Eucharist in I Corinthians, like other accounts of meals in the New Testament and in the early fathers, indicates that the early Christians did not make the kind of ritualistic demarcation between the Eucharist and other forms of eating. The tradition attests to a variety of ritual meals, with a variety of elements including at least bread and wine, bread and water, bread and fish, bread, water and vegetables. And the tradition attests to a variety of liturgical contexts some of which took the form of an explicit act of worship in which the Eucharistic meal was preceded by the kinds of prayers preserved by Hippolytus and the *Didache*, and some of which were more along the lines of what it has become customary to call agape meals – that is to say a meal which was in every sense of the word a meal, where the Church literally sat down and ate together having first blessed all the food that was set before the faithful. What sets these meals apart from pagan meals is that the food offered and consumed is seen as the gift of God, creator of the universe. Their blessing and breaking and sharing recovers the creation ethic of the ancestors of Israel who ate manna in the wilderness – it reconnects the gifts at the table with the gifts of God in creation, and celebrates the dependence of the people of God on God's generous gifts of spiritual and physical sustenance. The meal becomes a microcosm for the divine plan to redeem the whole creation from the effects of sin: physical food becomes spiritual food as bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.

This recognition is doubly important in relation to the morally and theologically objectionable supercessionist readings of Christian salvation history in subsequent eras. Christian freedom in eating foods that Jewish law proscribed does not mean that the sacred meanings of the old covenant are simply set aside or supplanted. One of the most extensive treatments of Jewish dietary laws in the early fathers is Novatian's essay *On Jewish Foods*. Novatian treats of the dietary laws as allegories of the moral and spiritual life so that for Christians the true meaning of the proscription on certain foods as unclean is that they represent human vices, while restraint from eating such foods represents the virtue of temperance. For Novatian the 'consummation of the law' which Christ realises means that as St Paul has it 'to all who are pure themselves, everything is pure' and that 'every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected that is accepted with

thanksgiving'. But while this means that all foods can be enjoyed by Christians who enjoy 'evangelical liberty' as blessings received from creation, it does not mean that Christians should eat with an excess of sensuality or that they must not guard against greed or gluttony. On the contrary the Jewish laws are a continuing reminder that food is a source of temptation and that desires are still prone to corruption even for those who are in Christ. Christian eating is still subject to the rule of virtue and the one who eats and drinks in moderation and with a clean conscience 'eats with Christ'. Christians may not be drunkards or gluttons because Christian eating is subject to 'the law of frugality and moderation' which St Paul commends to Timothy. And there is one more rule that Christians share with Jews and this is the prohibition on eating food offered to idols for such food, since it has been offered to demons, 'nourishes the one who partakes of it for the devil, and not for God, and makes him a table-companion of an idol, not of Christ, as the Jews also rightly hold.'

Novatian's account of the importance of moral virtue and spiritual worship in Christian eating indicates that *all* eating is potentially eating *with Christ* for the early Christians and that there is a moral and ritual continuum between the Lord's Table and the household meal. This recognition is an important corrective to much Catholic Eucharistic practice and theology, and to much Eucharistic theology since the Reformation. It indicates that not all ritual meals were associated in the Christian mind with sacrifice. Some Christian meal practices were open to sacrificial interpretation where the bread and wine could be seen as elements which when blessed become the body and blood of Christ, and as such represent a sacrificial meal which redeems creation from the Fall, just as the Day of Atonement had once done, though less perfectly as the writer to the Hebrews indicates. But sacrifice while an important metaphor, is not the only way in which ritual eating is understood in the early church. Equally strong are metaphors concerned with mission to the world beyond the Church, with the binding of the fellowship in the shared act of eating and drinking bread which has been broken and from a cup which is shared, and with blessing and gift giving.

This conclusion implies that *all* meals are ritual meals for Christians. There is no distinction between a household meal and an ecclesial common meal. All meals constitute community and sociality, and offer opportunities for conversation and table fellowship. The elements and the rituals of Christian meals then are *all* theurgic (and hence the tradition of Christ as the unseen guest at every meal) and all are constitutive of Christian identity, of the boundary between *ecclesia* and *seculum* in a pagan world. Christ refuses the distinction between sacred and secular meals which medieval sacramental ideology and the doctrine of transubstantiation sustained and whose influence continues since the Reformation, to the point that it continues to infect social scientific theories of sacred-profane boundaries in non-western cultures. From the perspective of Christ's earthly ministry *all* meals, food growing, the social economy of food, are caught up in the divine economy of giving and receiving which his many acts of blessing and breaking of bread set forth. We see this in so many places in the Gospel – for example when he is walking in the fields on the Sabbath and he and his disciples pluck kernels of wheat to eat as they walked. The scribes condemn him for lack of respect to the Sabbath but Christ's

answer 'the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath'. Religious boundaries may represent divine mandates but ultimately they are to serve humanity's imaging of God. Where they obstruct that image they can be abrogated.

Modern European culture has however been profoundly shaped by the sacred-profane distinction which emanates into Christian theology from the Medieval practice of the Mass. The Medieval focus on priestly or cultic objects and sacred space paved the way for the emergence of the non-cultic as secular in succeeding centuries. In post-Christendom Europe and North America profanity in relation to creation and food takes the form not of disrespecting the host or refusing to honour the priest. In a sense both host and priest are side-lined in modern secularism. It is now the creation itself which is profaned while the sacred Host is set aside, replaced with the sacred dollar or Euro. The contemporary form of idolatry is the devotion of the culture of food to money, from crop to table. This produces a new kind of profanity in which industrial food is debased while the soil is eroded and the land poisoned. By participating without critique in the fruits of modern agronomy do Christians analogously 'eat meat offered to idols' and imbibe a world view which is contrary to the Gospel?

This point is sharpened by the recognition that most celebrations of the Eucharist in Europe and North America occur not in rural areas but in cities where the resonance of the agrarian references of the elements of bread and wine may be lost, either consciously or materially. Thus congregations that decide to use a real loaf of bread rather than communion wafers may use a loaf which has been made from petrochemically farmed wheat and then manufactured by what in Britain is known as the Chester process. If we follow such a loaf back to its origins we see how intrinsically it is implicated in the ecological problematique of the modern food chain. The farmer who grows the wheat first prepares the field with tractor drawn deep ploughs and other factory made petrochemical-fuelled devices which send to the four winds some of the precious soil in which the wheat is to be grown. The seed is delivered by truck to the farm, having been ordered on the farmer's personal computer with an energy-hungry cathode ray tube for a monitor, and then dispersed mechanically on the land. Then the farmer applies chemical fertilisers to the crop made by an industrial process invented in the 1940s which uses large amounts of heat derived from burning oil to fix nitrogen from the air in the form of artificial fertiliser which can be spread on the soil. Pesticides and herbicides are subsequently sprayed on the crop, either by tractor or aerial spraying; these new synthetic chemicals are made in chemical refineries which are major energy users, and delivered to the farm by truck in thick plastic bags. The chemicals then leach into ground water and must be expensively filtered out by electrically driven filters and pumps to make the water safe for human consumption. The farmer harvests the wheat with a combine harvester, delivers the grain to a silo where it is sprayed with fungicide before being stored with the aid of mechanical blowers to prevent it spoiling for months or years. Eventually the wheat is driven to a large flour mill where electrically driven motors turn plates which grind it into flour. It is then refined, treated, bagged and transported to depots, and ultimately to a bread factory. Here a long conveyor belt turns the flour into bread by the Chester process which rapidly mixes and kneads the dough but does not

allow it enough time to properly prove, and hence requires the addition of extra gluten and other artificial raising agents. Once out of the ovens and cooled by electrically driven fans the bread is then mechanically sliced, placed in plastic bags, and transported to a supermarket to which customers mostly drive themselves in their vehicles to purchase their bread and other supplies. At the same time as all this is going on manufacturers are using energy hungry cathode ray tubes on the entertainment devices in peoples' homes to display advertisements, made in large film studios, though never in bread factories, which are designed to entice the consumer to purchase one brand of bread over another. And at the end of each day vast quantities of industrially produced bread are discarded, or sometimes given to charity, because sell-by dates are exceeded before all the brands and types of bread can be sold. Consumer choice necessitates waste, even although of course most of the bread on supermarket shelves in the US and the UK is made by the same industrial process, and so the existence of choice is somewhat illusory.

When a loaf which is the product of this novel structure of food growing, making and marketing is presented at the altar with words that declare that it is through the goodness of God that the people 'have this bread to offer' and moreover that it is 'fruit of the field, work of human hands' credibility is being stretched. Did the goodness of God intend that bread should be wrung from the land at the expense of the rape of the soil, the poisoning of ground water and the wasteful expenditure of fossil fuels, or that it should be manufactured in such a way as to turn it into the ambiguously convenient consumer product which is modern sliced bread? While it is the case that there is a foundational agrarian reference in the use of bread and wine as the elements of the Eucharist, it is questionable whether this agrarian reference is truly honoured and proclaimed in these circumstances. Do these circumstances represent the 'new creation' which is begun in the Resurrected body of Jesus Christ and which the Eucharistic feast celebrates and re-enacts?

The related claims I am making here are that food *is* politics, and that the Eucharist is therefore political food. Just as Eucharistic practice in Europe, both before and after the Reformation, represented a very different kind of politics than the revolutionary subordination of Christ and the apostles, so a Eucharistic practice which fails to challenge the profanation of the creation represented by modern agronomy is equally flawed. In twenty-first century profane eating, eating food offered to idols, has become the norm and this idolatry, like the idolatry of earlier cults, involves sacrifices – of the soil, of the soul of modern humanity, and of the sanity of the farmer. As the agricultural regions of Latin America and other parts of the 'developing' world are still being drawn into the sphere of influence of this economy, under the process called globalisation, such riots and other forms of protest – for example the villagers in India who put their villages and fields up for sale to the highest bidder – continue to feature as a direct and inevitable response.

Industrialism has not only created a food economy which is highly centralised and which requires even the poorest to have access to cash to purchase food. It has also produced forms of alienation with respect to the cultures of food growing and eating. First there is the increasingly industrial form of food growing, which has had deleterious

effects on the health of soil and water-catchments, on the welfare of farmers and rural communities, and on biodiversity. More than any other activity industrial agriculture is responsible for the humanly generated extinction of species that the earth is presently undergoing. With its preference for monocrops, its sweeping away of ancient forests and grasslands, and associated ecosystems, and its disregard of the wisdom of traditional land management practices, modern agriculture is crucially implicated in the ecological crisis. Within Europe evidence for this assertion is not hard to find. The contrast between biodiversity and soil quality between the former Eastern block countries such as Poland and Hungary and Western Europe is particularly revealing in this regard. While wild bird species have declined more than 70 per cent in Western Europe as a consequence of the widespread application of pesticides and herbicides, the draining of marshlands and the destruction of forests, in many parts of Eastern Europe the numbers of wild birds are comparable to pre-industrial levels.

In the shadow of the Second World War C. S. Lewis asked the question whether chemical agriculture would direct the modern world. Lewis did not know of the technical problems which now beset modern agronomy including pesticide residues, groundwater pollution, declensions in bird numbers and other wildlife, diminishment of soil quality and an increasing treadmill of chemical inputs, agriculture related climate change, the bankrupting of small farmers, and the decimation of rural communities. Instead Lewis was trained by his reading of medieval literature to believe that there is wisdom in the prior order of the biophysical world even although this is an alien conception to the modern mind. According to Lewis chemical agriculture was wrong not because of its consequences but because it was intrinsically in conflict with the wisdom of nature's order, which he describes in the medieval language of natural law, which in an ecumenical spirit he also calls the 'tao'. For Lewis the industrial farmer invites the judgement of God and of nature or what James Lovelock has called the 'revenge of gaia'.

Lovelock writes of climate change as the ultimate instance of nature biting back in response to humanity's neglect of natural wisdom, and there is a highly significant relationship, though one Lovelock refuses, between climate change and industrial agriculture. The global market in agricultural commodities, and especially palm oil and soya, is driving a rate of tropical deforestation which is unprecedented and a major contributor to the enhanced greenhouse effect. Forest fires in Indonesia and the Amazon are producing vast amounts of greenhouse gases while the loss of tropical forest removes a significant carbon sink. The combined effect is responsible annually for between one tenth and one quarter of the present anthropogenic warming of the climate. Chemical agriculture is also implicated in climate change for two other reasons. First deep mechanical ploughs and machine harvested annual cereal crops release significant amounts of carbon from the soil, which is the largest planetary carbon sink besides the oceans, into the atmosphere. Second, industrial agriculture is highly dependent on fossil fuels, such that approximately 3 kilojoules of chemically farmed corn require the input of 1 kilojoule of fossil fuel. The Haber Bosch process which creates nitrogen fertiliser from petrochemicals is largely responsible for these heavy energy inputs and was the major factor in the abandonment of the traditional approach of the small farm to the nitrogen

cycle which utilised animals to manure fields and crop rotation to sustain yields. The global food economy in which so many agricultural products are now marketed is also implicated in climate change. The distance between field and table has grown exponentially with the emergence of a global food economy. This has seen the rise in air flown and lorry driven food so that in Britain and the United States a typical supermarket contains a significant proportion of foodstuffs which have been transported thousands of miles both within these continents, and from as far away as Chile, Zimbabwe and New Zealand, a procedure which involves substantial expenditure of greenhouse enhancing gases.

Whereas for Lovelock the revenge of nature against the profligate abuse of its energy store is to be seen in the coming cataclysm of climate change for Lewis the judgement of the earth on the un-wisdom of modern technological efforts to subdue it and exclude it from moral influence over the ends of human living was already evident in the moral decay of a Europe in the grip of totalitarian dictators. The adulation of domineering and emotive dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini manifested the tragic fall of 'modern man' who in seeking to subject nature to technological reordering was himself becoming the slave of uneducated desire and instinct. On Lewis' account emotive impulses become the moral lights of modern humans precisely because their attempts to subdue nature to technology require them to discard the wisdom of the world.

Wendell Berry analogously suggests that in their neglect of the laws of ecology modern farmers, and the scientists and politicians who guide them, are not just myopic but morally deficient. By neglecting the wisdom of conserving soil quality for the next generation the modern farmer, and the politicians and consumers who collude with him, manifest 'moral ignorance and weakness of character'. Lewis and Berry both challenge the modern separation of fact and value. They suggest that science informed agriculture, far from liberating modern humans from natural necessities has subjected them to a new form of slavery – the slavery of the machine and of untutored instinct. This mechanistic slavery takes a number of forms in the global food economy. There is first a growing disconnect between the growing and eating of food. So remote have global food chains become that the average item of food in an American supermarket has travelled 1500 miles. And while some European countries, such as France, have strenuously sought to preserve regional food cultures and food supply chains, others have foods which are at least as distant as those American supermarkets. An unscientific survey of a Scottish supermarket local to my home revealed that nine-tenths of its fresh food had been air flown, or in some cases shipped, from places as distant as Israel, Chile and New Zealand, and this included most of the organic produce, which rather flies in the face of the claim that organic food is more ecologically sustainable. One major consequence of these remote food chains is that much of the food consumed in the rich North is grown in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America on lands once given over to indigenous agriculture. With the turning over of this land to cash crops for export, millions of small farmers have been forced to migrate to other areas, either the cities where they can hardly eke out a living as squatters, or to forests and hill sides where their agricultural necessity destroys ancient forests or precipitates soil erosion.

For growing numbers of people their remoteness from food production and agricultural practices also maps on to an increasingly attenuated engagement with traditional approaches to food preparation and to eating. For a growing proportion of people in Britain, including many children as well as adults living alone, eating has become an individualised meal experience which often involves pre-prepared and pre-packaged in a factory or fast food outlet, whether of the baguette or burger variety. As a result the traditional social context of the meal at which families gather around the table to talk over the events of the day, and to *be* family together, is increasingly a counter-cultural experience.

Just as eating becomes more detached from the farm or even food preparation, so at the other end of the spectrum food growing has been subjected to increasing manipulation by scientific researchers and technologists. This manipulation has in many cases had extremely ambiguous results. For example the nutritional value of chemically grown food has declined such that essential minerals such as magnesium, calcium are present at much lower levels than they were in traditionally grown foods sixty years ago. At the same time the preparation of food has also been increasingly professionalized, either by food scientists working for food manufacturers, or by professional chefs who view the preparation of food as high art, an art which is presided over by an 'academy' of elite Michelin starred restaurants and famous chefs in which food preparation and eating have become ends in themselves, detached from the *habitus* of everyday living, and where a few chefs are even driven to suicide under the stress of maintaining these temples to their trade.

If Christian worship is effectively to resist the devotion of modern civilisation to an increasingly headless abuse of the precious resources of this good earth then there is an urgent need to recover the full agrarian and social significance of Eucharist in Christian worship. Breaking bread was the paradigmatic meal of first century Palestinians and Romans. The early Christians worshipped sitting at tables where they blessed the cup and broke bread because it was a common meal, not just a 'sacral' act. The social meanings attached to the meal traditions in which the Eucharist began have considerable resonances with the witness of the Church today in a situation where once again a global imperial economy is the source of oppression of both humanity and the land. The creatures which are the elements of bread and wine are transformed in the Eucharist into the new creation which is the body of Christ, the Church, and in this transformation lies the possibility of the end of the groaning of creation and the remaking of all things towards their peaceable destiny. The Eucharist does not only remake human politics and spaces but the politics and spaces of all creatures, human and nonhuman.

The central claim of this paper is that the church-constituting ritual meals of Christians are paradigmatic places where the modern nature-culture distinction is refused. In the Old Testament sacrificial system which the Eucharist replaces, in the messianic banquets described in the Gospels, in the meal traditions of the early Christians, and in much of the subsequent Eucharistic tradition in Christian history, the ritual meal involves acts of blessing and sharing which draw the whole creation representatively into the atonement, reconciliation and divine-human fellowship which are the fruits of the work

of Christ and which are constitutive of the priestly calling of the people of God to continue Christ's pioneering priestly work in drawing the creation into praise of the creator. For the first Christians their ritual meals were crucial events in establishing the boundary between pagan and Christian in cities where meat and wine were intricately connected with pagan sacrifice. For Christians in the twenty-first century paganism takes the form of consumerism and devotion to the money economy. This modern paganism has subverted the human and other than human food chain and hence the health of the soil and air, forest and mountain, river and ocean. In the context of ecological breakdown Christian eating, in Church and in the home, is central to the Christian witness to the human mandate to care for creation and to resist its heedless destruction, including that advanced by modern agronomy.

For 12,000 years farmers were guided by two fundamental beliefs: that humans are part of the web of life, and that that web of life is cyclical, communal and mutually reinforcing. For most of that time these beliefs have shaped not only the farming year and farming practices but human civilisation in general. As we have seen it is impossible to underestimate the influence of the agricultural practices of the ancient Israelites on their religious and moral traditions. Agriculture is foundational to the Genesis creation narratives. And we have seen that the same influence is there in the parables of Jesus. He uses the metaphor of feasting to describe the new order which the Incarnation inaugurates on earth, and the metaphor of propagation to describe his own and his followers' struggle in birthing that new order against those who opposed it in first century Palestine. Agrarianism in the Old Testament is focused on the need to preserve the fragile land of Palestine from the threats of soil erosion and salinity. The Sabbath provided a significant limit on Hebrew use of land – moderated demands on land and animals. The neglect of the Sabbath is also the occasion of divine judgement; the Prophets interpret the long exile in Babylon not only as judgement on Israel for neglecting the Sabbath but to help the land recover from hundreds of neglected Sabbaths. The sacrificial system was crucially implicated in the connection between Israelite agrarianism and the divine will to preserve the web of life. Sacrifice finds its first explicit mention in the sacrifice that Noah offers to God of a burnt offering of exemplars of the animals and birds which he had saved in the Ark. This primordial sacrifice attempts to restore the fallen creation and to bring it back from its path toward destruction, on which the Flood is seen as the judgement of God. Noah recovers what others in his generation had lost, which is humanity's priestly vocation to offer up from the abundant gifts of creation sacrifices which atone for sin, which are pleasing to the Creator, and in which creation is restored to the order which is the work of its maker. Yahweh finds the smell of the burnt offering pleasing the famous Noahic covenant is uttered in which God promises to desist again from so nearly destroying all life on earth (Gen 8. 20 – 1). But it is also to this paradigmatic first sacrifice, and the great banquet which no doubt followed it, that is traced the tradition of the proscription on drinking the blood of the animal which represents the spirit, the life force, and is therefore to be respected. The blood must be returned to the earth as a sign of respect for the origin of all life in the divine creation.

There is general agreement that the offering of food in the Eucharistic feast is

equally significant for Christians in connecting the Church constituting rite of Eucharist with the whole of the divine creation. The Eucharist is in effect a microcosm of the history of creation-redemption as it finds its completion in the Incarnation of Christ. However the claim that the Eucharist makes the church, which in the twentieth century has been advanced by the Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac, needs also to be read in the light of the moral economy of food. Here both Catholic and Protestant may learn something from those Christian farmers who departed the shores of Europe in the face of bloody and extreme persecution and established the Mennonite culture of North America which until today maintains a close relation to the land. Just one of their major disagreements with Catholic and Protestant theologians was over the theology of the Lord's Supper. They claimed that the Lord's Supper was the constituting action of the body of Christ; however for the Anabaptists it was not the priest or the altar, nor their mystical association with Christ, which made the elements holy but rather the gathering of the whole people of God and the holiness of lives. The crucial element in a proper invocation of the body of Christ *is* the body of Christ where the body is conceived not as the material or mystical body of Jesus Christ but, as St Paul has it in I Corinthians 12, the community of the local church. As Yoder points out Anabaptist ecclesiology broke with Reformation and Catholic theology over the question of the visibility of the Church and its capacity to act.

In Anabaptist perspective the Lord's Supper has no objective power, no mystical significance, apart from the participation of the people of God in the action of breaking bread. There is no invisible Church, no mystic power, which resides behind the real presently existing Church as represented by the local congregation. Instead the Church and the Lord's Supper are mutually constitutive because the local church in its gathering to break bread *is* the agent who breaks bread. The President acts on behalf of the community, and the act of breaking bread creates and sustains the community. This approach places ethics, holy living, at the centre of the Eucharist-Church relationship because it also requires that those who gather to break bread are together living lives in communities whose morality and order follow the teachings of the Gospels. There is no objective sacramental mystery here. Only when the people of God act morally and live holy lives do they constitute a body of people who can break bread and so be the body of Christ. Here we have a recovery of the early significance of the important words 'eat and drink worthily' in 1 Corinthians 11. Fear of individual unworthiness was a major motive for the infrequency of lay participation in the Eucharist for more than a thousand years, and for some remains a motive to this day. But in the Anabaptist reading unworthiness is not an individual matter. It is the revolutionary subordination of the people of God to one another – and in particular of the strong to the weak – which is the mark of the true body of Christ on earth and provides the ecclesial link between holy living and holy eating at the Lord's Supper.

The relation of holy living to holy Eucharist in Anabaptism recalls in a powerful way the same connection in the Old Testament sacrificial system – when Israel's agrarian economy was ordered after the commands and ordinances of God the Temple sacrifices were pleasing to Yahweh. They were just sacrifices because they represented an agrarian

society in which the people were just in their relations to one another, to animals and to the land. When they acted without restraint, amassing wealth and agricultural surplus at the expense of the land and of the poor, they ceased to live justly and their sacrifices became offensive. The Anabaptist recognition of the foundational significance of Christian eating is surely not unconnected with the fact that they are unique among Protestant Christians in North America in resisting modern agricultural practices. Instead of pursuing the model of power over nature, and of agriculture as an extractive economy, they have sustained a model of holy agriculture in which communal dependence and the conservation of the soil go hand in hand. Instead of debt to banks and government to sustain the high inputs and machinery of chemical farming they have been content with growing enough to sustain their communities, and this restraint, and freedom from debt, has made them not only the best conservers of the soil in North America, but, in recent decades, the most successful farmers, if success is measured in quality of life as well as quantity of production. As Wendell Berry says only the Amish

as a community, have carefully restricted their use of machine-developed energy, and so have become the only true masters of technology. They are mostly farmers, and they do most of their farm work by hand and by the use of horses and mules. They are pacifists, they operate their own local schools, and in other ways hold themselves aloof from the ambition of a machine-based society. And by doing so they have maintained the integrity of their families, their community, their religion, and their way of life. They have escaped the mainstream American life of distraction, haste, aimlessness, violence, and disintegration.

There will be those who at this point will say ‘ah, but we cannot turn the clock back: global food is the future, local food the past.’ Thankfully however while such an opinion still dominates the food industry, the European Commission, and the Federal Government of the United States, there is a growing recognition among American and European citizens of the need to restore the relationship between the culture of eating and the culture of growing, and to recover a more sustainable relation to the land. The rise of farmers’ markets and of organic box schemes, the growing demand for organic food, increased concern with food miles and the rising market in fair trade food products all indicate a counter movement to the dominant trend of the global food economy. If the connections I have sought to establish in this paper between Eucharist, eating and ecology are to be recovered in the Christian practice of worship, Christians will be among those who will seek in future to know where their food has come from, how it was grown, at what cost, and how fairly and sustainably. But the implications of this paper go further than this. If these connections hold true then Christians must go further in recovering the relationship between the revolutionary subordination of the first Christian communities and the moral economy of food.

I suggest in conclusion two ways in which this might begin to be achieved. The first would be to recover the sense in which the Lord’s Supper is a holy meal which reflects the holy lives, and holy eating of Christians in their day to day conversation and

walk. One means of remaking this connection would be to revive the practice of the ‘holy loaf’ as a Eucharistic practice, a practice which is still performed in some parts of Europe. Members of the congregation would then make the bread by hand, from flour which has been ecologically grown, and bring it to church to become the one loaf which is broken and shared in the Eucharist. The second would be to return to the early Christian norm of worship *around* the Lord’s Table and to find ways of reversing the historical trend from a real meal to a token meal. This would mean recovering the use of real loaves of bread, and not wafers or even a token small loaf, and of drinkable quantities of wine and water, as central elements of a regular Eucharistic feast in Church.

A third means may be indicated in the extent to which in many black churches in America, and in some white ones, as increasingly in some churches in Europe, there is a practice of the ‘pot luck’ lunch after worship on Sundays which for many is as constitutive of the community life of the Church as the service of the Word which precedes it. The food eaten at such gatherings is though neither considered holy nor is it any different from the food sold in industrial food stores and grown unsustainably on industrialised farms. Reordering the meal which follows the worship as an agape meal at the heart of worship, organising the service of the Word *around* the meal, rather than tacking the meal on at the end once the liturgy is over, would offer another powerful way to restore the connection between Christian worship and the fruits of the earth.

There are three ruptures which need healing and restoring. First there is the rupture between the service of the Word, sometimes with the Sacrament attached, and the pot luck meal which follows. Second there is the rupture between the holiness of the Sacrament, and the unholiness of the way in which food presented at a pot luck supper has mostly been grown. And there is the rupture between holy eating in Church and holy eating in the home. If as I am suggesting eating is paradigmatic of the Christian relation to creation, and of Christian worship, then all meals are holy meals. In the home as well as in Church, not only should food be sourced with this in mind. All meals should be accompanied by prayerful recognition of the gifts of creation which are most manifest to us on a daily basis in the sustaining power, and the communal enjoyment thereof, of the gift of good food.

Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 2. Smith’s thesis represents a major contribution to scholarly understanding of the nature and setting of early Christian worship, and to the connection between the banquet, the symposium and the Eucharist and I have relied on his research in what follows. His thesis has been very well received among New Testament scholars though it has yet to make much impact among scholars in other disciplines.

John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

See further my exposition of this theme in the prophets in Michael S Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 198 – 215.

On land distribution laws in the Old Testament see Michael Northcott, *Life After Debt: Christianity and Global Justice* (London: SPCK, 1999).

Klaus Eder, *The Social Construction of Nature* (Sage, 1996), pp. 58 – 96.

Mary Douglas, ‘The Eucharist: Its Continuity with the Bread Sacrifice of Leviticus’, *Modern Theology*, 15 (1999), 209 – 224. Douglas argues that the growing distaste for animal sacrifice shown by the Prophets was not lacking among the editors of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and that this distaste

was related to the emergent conception of the 'rights of animals' under the influence of ascetic religious practices and beliefs which spread from the Buddhist East around the eighth and seventh centuries BCE.

Jeremiah 4.23 as cited in Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T and T Clark, 2003), p. 45.

Mary Douglas cited in Barker, *Great High Priest*, 45.

Jewish Encyclopaedia as cited Barker, *Great High Priest*, 47.

Barker, *Great High Priest*, 51.

Isaiah 52. 15 and 53. 4 – 5 as translated in Barker, *Great High Priest*, 53.

Isaiah 53. 5 cited Barker, *Great High Priest*, 54.

Barker, *Great High Priest*, 55.

Barker, *Great High Priest*, 56.

Barker, *Great High Priest*, 58.

Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1982).

See further Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 128 - 57.

It is worthy of note that most of the technologies with which humans are currently despoiling the earth's web of life are derived from the weapons of war, including of course not only nuclear energy but pesticides and sonar. The novel broad spectrum pesticides first used in chemical agriculture were originally developed as nerve agents for use in biological warfare while sonar, which was invented to detect submarines, is now used to detect shoals of fish which are then hoovered up by the giant and government subsidised fleets of trawlers which are turning oceans into deserts.

Margaret Barker, 'The Book of Enoch and Cosmic Sin', *The Ecologist*, January 2000.

Massey H. Shepherd, 'Are Both the Synoptics and John Correct About the Date of Jesus' Death?', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 80 (June 1961), 123 – 32.

Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400 – 1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 95 – 102. Duffy shows how alongside this attenuated practice there arose another custom of the 'holy loaf'. Each week at Sunday Mass an ordinary loaf of bread was presented by one of the laity who were organised for its provision in a rota. It was received in a solemn procession at Matins, and the giver blessed by the priest. Later at Mass it was taken and blessed by the priest and then distributed among the laity. It was not formally the sacrament of the body of Christ but came to have sacramental associations.

Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 2 – 8.

Balasuriya, *Eucharist and Human Liberation*, 27 – 33.

Commission on Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982).

Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, 'The Anthropology of Food and Eating', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31, (2002), 99 – 119.

Mary Douglas, 'Food as a system of communication' in Douglas, *In the Active Voice* cited A. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 4.

E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), 79. On the Enclosures and their larger impacts see E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*

Sean Freyne, 'Herodian Economics in Galilee: Searching for a Suitable Model' in Philip F. Esler (ed.), *Modelling Early Christianity: Social Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (London: Routledge, 1995).

John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1991), 122 – 6.

This is the central claim of John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Harrisburg, Penn: Trinity Press International, 2000). See also Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the Eucharist According to Luke* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994).

Bruce Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus in Johannine Circles* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

See further Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 128.

In addition to Crossan and Smith, Richard Horsley, Marcus Borg, Gerd Theissen, N. T. Wright and William Herzog offer interpretations of the meals of Christ which are analogous to this approach. See also Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 'The Eucharist as Meal of the Kingdom', paragraph

E 22.

Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*.

N. T. Wright, 'One God, One Lord, One People: Incarnational Christology for a Church in a Pagan Environment', *Ex Auditu*, 1 (1985), HYPERLINK "<http://www.northpark.edu/sem/exauditu/papers/wright.html>"

McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 272.

Novatian, *On Jewish Foods*, 3 and 4, trans. Russell De Simone, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1974), 147 - 151.

Titus 1. 15 and 1 Tim. 4. 4 cited Novatian, *On Jewish Foods*, 5.

1 Tim. 6. 10 cited Novatian, *Jewish Foods*, 6.

Novatian, *Jewish Foods*, 7.

See further Koenig, *Feast of the World's Redemption*.

Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Michael Northcott, 'A place of our own' in Peter Sedgwick (ed.), *God in the City* (London: Mowbray, 1995), 135.

I had not fully understood the place of fertilisers in the energy economy until a lecture by Simon Rich entitled 'Energy and Agriculture' and given at the Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences, Duke University on February 3rd 2005.

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See further Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Benjamin S. Orlove, 'Meat and Strength: The Moral Economy of a Chilean Food Riot', *Cultural Anthropology*, 12 (1997), 234 – 68. See also 'Villages for Sale, Rural Despair Growing', *The Hindu* January 31, 2006, HYPERLINK "<http://www.hindu.com/2006/01/31/stories/2006013103481100.htm>"

Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986) remains the classic treatment of the anti-ecological and wasteful procedures of modern agriculture. For a more recent treatment see Colin Tudge, *So Shall We Reap: What's Gone Wrong with the World's Food and How to Fix It* (London: Penguin, 2003).;

C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1943).

C S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Remi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*, trans. Teresa Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

On the connection between the devastating annual forest fires in Southeast Asia and industrial palm oil plantations see G. J. Aditjondro, 'The politics of Indonesia's forest fires', *Ecopolitics* 1. 1 (2001), 2 – 12.

N. T. Myers and T. J. Goreau, 'Tropical Forests and the Greenhouse Effect: A Management Response', *Climatic Change* 19 (1991), 215 – 26; see also Philip M. Fearnside, 'Greenhouse gases from deforestation in Brazilian Amazonia: Net Committed Emissions', *Climatic Change* 35 (1997), 321 – 360.

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Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 13.

Frederick Kirschenmann, 'Ecological Morality: A New Ethic for Agriculture', in D. Rickerl and C. Francis (eds.), *Ecological Morality: A New Ethic for Agriculture* (Madison, WI: American Society for Agronomy, 2004), 167 – 176.

Vigen Guroian, *Ethics After Christendom: Toward an Ecclesial Christian Ethic* (Grand Rapids,

MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 160.

John D. Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Scottsdale, Penn: Herald Press, 1993), 32 – 3.

John Howard Yoder, *Täuferium und Reformation in Gespräch* cited Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 33.

John Zizioulas supports an analogous position when he opposes the practice of a private priestly mass and suggests that the celebration of the Eucharist requires the actual personal presence of the people of God: John Zizioulas, 'The ecclesiological presuppositions of the holy eucharist' cited Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2003), 178.

Wendell Berry, 'The use of energy' in Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986), 95.

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