RELIGION, FOOD, AND EATING IN NORTH AMERICA
For our mentors
CONTENTS

Foreword xi
MARTHA L. FINCH
Acknowledgments xv
Introduction: Religion, Food, and Eating xvii
MARIE W. DALLAM

PART 1: THEOLOGICAL FOODWAYS

1. DYNAMICS OF CHRISTIAN DIETARY ABSTINENCE 3
DAVID GRUMETT

2. "JOIN US! COME, EAT!": VEGETARIANISM IN THE FORMATIVE
PERIOD OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND THE UNITY
SCHOOL OF CHRISTIANITY 23
JEREMY RAPPORT

3. "AND AS WE DINE, WE SING AND PRAISE GOD":
FATHER AND MOTHER DIVINE'S THEOLOGIES OF FOOD 42
LEONARD NORMAN PRIMIANO

4. HALLELUJAH ACRES:
CHRISTIAN RAW FOODS AND THE QUEST FOR HEALTH 68
ANNIE BLAZER
PART 2: IDENTITY FOODWAYS

5. DRAYDEL SALAD: THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF JEWISH FOOD AND FUN IN THE 1950S 91
   RACHEL GROSS

6. SALMON AS SACRAMENT: FIRST SALMON CEREMONIES IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST 114
   SUZANNE CRAWFORD O’BRIEN

7. AN UNUSUAL FEAST: GUMBO AND THE COMPLEX BREW OF BLACK RELIGION 134
   DEREK S. HICKS

8. “I CHOSE JUDAISM BUT CHRISTMAS COOKIES CHOSE ME”: FOOD, IDENTITY, AND FAMILIAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN CHRISTIAN/JEISH BLENDED FAMILIES 154
   SAMIRA K. MEHTA

PART 3: NEGOTIATED FOODWAYS

9. CRYSTALLIZING SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA: SUGAR, HONEY, AND THE GODS OF AFRO-CUBAN LUCUMI 175
   ELIZABETH PÉREZ

10. GOOD TO EAT: CULINARY PRIORITIES IN THE NATION OF ISLAM AND THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS 195
    KATE HOLBROOK

11. MINDFUL EATING: AMERICAN BUDDHISTS AND WORLDLY BENEFITS 214
    JEFF WILSON

    NORA L. RUBEL

PART 4: ACTIVIST FOODWAYS

13. KOINONIA PARTNERS: A DEMONSTRATION PLOT FOR FOOD, FELLOWSHIP, AND SUSTAINABILITY 253
    TODD LEVASSEUR

14. REFRESHING THE CONCEPT OF HALAL MEAT: RESISTANCE AND RELIGIOSITY IN CHICAGO’S TAQWA ECO-FOOD COOPERATIVE 274
    SARAH E. ROBINSON

15. QUASI-RELIGIOUS AMERICAN FOODWAYS: THE CASES OF VEGETARIANISM AND LOCAVORISM 294
    BENJAMIN E. ZELLER

Selected Bibliography on Religion and Food 313
List of Contributors 319
Index 325
Thirteen
KOINONIA PARTNERS
A DEMONSTRATION PLOT FOR FOOD,
FELLOWSHIP, AND SUSTAINABILITY
TODD LEVASSEUR

[Man has lost his identity with God [and] with his fellow man. . . . As a result, the poor are being driven from rural areas; hungry, frustrated, angry masses are huddled in cities . . . the chasm between blacks and whites grows wider and deeper; war hysteria invades every nook and cranny of the earth. We must have a new spirit—a spirit of partnership with one another. But how can these things become flesh and blood?
—CLARENCE JORDAN, 1968

The past sixty years have seen a tremendous growth in environmental consciousness in American society. This is due to insights from the science of ecology and the development of more sophisticated technologies that can measure human impact on the environment. Such increased consciousness has resulted in humans deliberating about the perceived ills of industrial agriculture, bemoaning the rapid loss of species diversity, and debating the reality of human-induced climate change, to name only three of many environmental issues. Such consciousness is also entering into the doctrines, ethics, and institutional governance of a wide variety of religious groups, leading
can communities of faith that are grappling with issues of sustainability, and especially sustainable food production. However, Koinonia’s own storied history makes it a unique example of how food is a marker of race, of environmental practice and stewardship, and is a key ingredient in the gathering and sharing of fellowship. The chapter argues that food is important to Koinonia for the group’s identity, theology, farming practices, and corporate vision. Furthermore, the central importance of food for Koinonia ranges across the community’s history, from its early conception to its role in today’s Ecological Reformation. Koinonia is thus an exemplar of how food is a marker of religious identity for certain segments of North American religions, and, for the purposes of this case study, this identity is premised on mutually reinforcing poles of Christian fellowship and Christian environmental concern.

“A DEMONSTRATION PLOT FOR GOD”

During the first half of the 1900s in the American South, some things were as certain as the changing of the seasons. In no particular order, these included—but were not limited to—hot, humid summers of toil in agricultural fields; religion (which for most southerners meant church); poverty; volunteering for and serving in two world wars; and racism. Dominant concepts of masculinity permeated white society, while wealth and family connections went a long way in deciding a person’s social status in the top tier of this society. Excluded from the top tier were the rest of white people, who ran shops and worked on farms and whose views, dreams, and social conditioning were in large part shaped by a southern aristocracy. Equally running through the gamut of residents who constituted this half of the South’s color line were white supremacist groups, annual and regional celebrations of the Southern Army and Confederacy, and churches, with very fluid lines between the three.

In opposition to this was black society, located on the other half of the early 1900s color line. Suffering under the abuses of Jim Crow racism, crippled by high rates of illiteracy and poverty, and largely living lives of indentured servitude under the guise of sharecropping, southern blacks were largely united by church, fraternal lodges, diet, and poverty. They were further united by the collective need to navigate the myriad dangers to their bodies and fortunes from white southern culture and the power

---

Figure 13.1 Sign at entrance to the main campus of Koinonia Farm. Photo by Todd LeVasseur, used with permission.
of its legal, economic, and political machinations. Although there were regional differences, nuances, and complexities in wealth, religion, society, and happenstance for blacks (and, to be sure, for whites), the specter of race and poverty nonetheless meant that some things were unavoidable in the South during these years; these included long days of toil in agricultural fields and segregated Sundays spent in church.

One person born into this environment made a concerted effort, along with his wife, to challenge the entrenched power hierarchies of the time. These challenges were levied at the status quo of church, field, and table. The person's name was Clarence Jordan.

Jordan was born on July 29, 1912, to well-off, white Baptist parents. A precocious child, Jordan was devout in his beliefs about Jesus and active in church. However, biographies reveal that he recognized something was amiss as he memorized and sang various hymns that praised God and taught that God loved all of creation equally. According to these biographies, Jordan's young mind and conscience struggled with trying to find answers to various questions, among them, if God loved all equally, then how come blacks and whites did not go to church together? How come wealthier whites kept poorer whites and blacks in a form of bondage and servitude via the institution of sharecropping? How come both the aboveground and underground workings of southern law and “justice” did not echo the design of God's kingdom, which according to the Bible was based on equality and compassion for the poor and broken of society? These questions took root in Jordan's young mind and slowly sunk deeper and deeper into his being so that by the time he was thirty years old and married to his life partner, Florence, these concerns became the inspiration behind creating Koinonia.

In the interlude Jordan matriculated at the Georgia State College of Agriculture at the University of Georgia under the stated intent of learning how to make agriculture accessible, affordable, and successful for poor, illiterate farmers—both white and black. He was heavily influenced by the Sermon of the Mount found in the Gospel of Matthew. The ethical mandate of Jesus' teachings as shared in this gospel crystallized for Jordan in two ways: first, he became a pacifist and walked away from his ROTC duties and a career in the U.S. Cavalry. Second, he entered into the ministry and also became a New Testament scholar at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In effect, Jordan's upbringing in a farming community and in church shaped his adult path; yet his own interpretation of the Gospels and his experience of the poverty of Georgia's farming communities influenced the direction of this path.

Furthermore, while enrolled in the seminary, Jordan was equally influenced by the image of the early church found in the book of Acts. This New Testament book shares that the early, primitive church that existed right after the death and resurrection of Jesus held all in common and was a fellowship open to all people—men, women, Jews, and Gentiles—because Christ's substitutionary atonement and God's love applied equally to all people, regardless of class or race. The rich compost of Christ's teachings and example of this early church helped Jordan's seed vision of challenging southern power structures take root; the fruit was a run-down 440-acre farm in rural Americus, Georgia, that the Jordans, along with friends Martin and Mabel England, purchased and called Koinonia.

“Koinonia” is a Greek word that translates into fellowship and community, and the goal of Koinonia from day one has been to create an inclusive church, open to all members of God's creation. The term is found in Paul's first letter to Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:16) and implies fellowship in both the body of Christ and the sharing of one's purse and worldly possessions (equally implied in the Book of Acts 2:42-47). In Jordan's eyes and words, Koinonia was to become the "demonstration plot" where blacks and whites were to live, work, eat, and worship together, side by side, showing that even in the heart of the South, reconciliation and fellowship were possible.

In essence, Koinonia was to model living and creating God’s kingdom in the here and now, in both word and deed, as shared in the Book of Acts. Given that Americus was a rural farming region fractured by the dual realities of racism and poverty, Jordan specifically made the interracial growing and sharing of food the center point of the Christian community. Jordan further believed that good farming, with the labor shared equally by both races and the sharing of the products of that labor, whether this be profit from sales or at a lunch table under a tree, all undertaken within a structure of shared daily prayer, was a modern re-creation of the early church described in Acts. Thus the uplift of both race and finance via shared farming and devotion to God was the guiding Christian vision of Jordan's life until his death in 1969.

During his life Jordan labored to put into practice the description of God's love found in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, where Paul writes that all are one in Christ Jesus—black and white alike in Jordan's reading. It is
this commitment to racial equality that separated Koinonia from other Christian agrarian communities of the era, such as the much more insular Bruderhof and Amish. This vision of racial, spiritual, and economic equality is still present at Koinonia today, and it is this unbroken lineage and theologically grounded beginning in interracial fellowship that makes Koinonia unique in today’s Ecological Reformation.

FELLOWSHIP AND FOOD

Koinonia has been many things and has seen many people over its seventy years. In its earliest days it became a place where Jordan shared his agricultural training with poor sharecroppers in the region, black and white alike. It was a place where progressive (for the time) methods of agriculture were attempted, such as utilizing different methods of composting the soil. It also became a place where blacks and whites shared labor and the fruits of that labor.

For a majority of Christians, food has always played a central part in the mystery surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. In many ways what is today called the Last Supper captures the central teachings of Jesus. According to the New Testament and those who believe its historical accuracy and subsequent theological meanings, “For Jesus, eating with others in Israel was a parable of the feast in the kingdom which was to come... Eating was a way of enacting the kingdom of God, of practicing the generous rule of the divine king. As a result, Jesus avoided exclusive practices, which divided the people of God from one another in his view.” Thus the ministry of Jesus—his parables, his miracles, his healings, and especially his feeding of the masses, coupled with his words during the Last Supper that became the basis of the Eucharist/Communion—was about opening the kingdom of God to all, regardless of social class, gender, race, or national provenance. Therefore, in the mind of Clarence Jordan and his own exegesis of the New Testament, sharing a meal that has been blessed by prayer and a spoken-aloud grace was one of the supreme acts of Christ-centered fellowship, and even more so in a racially segregated South. For Jordan, a shared meal at the dining table at Koinonia was the way to make “flesh and blood” Christ’s atoning love.

However, Jordan’s forthright and blatant attacks against the entrenched systems—systems backed by both black and white churches—of race and power found in the rural South were not met without resistance. Indeed, for Jordan, “life in the body of Christ from the perspective of Sumter County, Georgia [where Koinonia is located], involved three interconnected passions: the practice of nonviolence as the moral disposition of the Gospel; the preservation, cultivation, and protection of the soil, ‘God’s holy earth’; and the proclamation and provision of hope to ‘those who suffer and are oppressed’.” Tragically, the response, precipitated by powerful local whites, to these three passions was violent and thorough: boycotts of Koinonia products; pressure to not sell seed stock and other farming tools and agricultural necessities to members of Koinonia; and at its worse, drive-by shootings. Nonetheless, Jordan and his supporters remained steadfast in his vision throughout, and he continued to preach and enact his message of embodying God’s kingdom in the here and now at Koinonia.

Over time, tensions eased and the civil rights movement brought a renewed sense of mission and urgency to the community after the boycotts of the 1950s. Koinonia became instrumental in helping host and house leaders in the civil rights movement during these tumultuous years, providing a base of operation for Freedom Riders to move further into the South. This era was followed by the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when many Jesus “hippies” found the farm, worked in its fields, and helped construct new buildings on the campus. These include the current cafeteria where the community gathers Monday through Friday for shared noonday lunch.

One other key event occurred in the 1960s: Millard Fuller and his wife joined the community and worked with Jordan to build homes on community property that were then sold to poor blacks at no interest. Jordan called this the “Fund for Humanity,” and it laid the foundation for Fuller’s now world-famous Habitat for Humanity, which is based in Americus.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the community turned its attention to campaigning for solidarity with war-torn countries in Central America, adding to the community’s institutional concern for immigration, peace, and justice work that in large part still defines Koinonia today. Also in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bob Burns joined the community and proceeded to transform a small section of the farm into a certified organic market garden, selling produce to Atlanta to help the community meet its financial budget. Burns had spent time in the tropics of Asia as a Mennonite volunteer, where his botanical knowledge fused with indigenous
agroecology practices. Upon returning to the United States and joining Koinonia, Burns put into practice his own approach to sustainable farming. This approach included both organic certification and the development of permaculture practices (explained below), with the latter becoming the key agricultural approach Koinonia uses today as the community attempts to grow its food sustainably.

**KOINONIA TODAY**

In many respects Koinonia today resembles the original version, teachings, and practices birthed by Clarence Jordan. It is still an inclusive community that is home to permanent residents who have all accepted a Christ-centered life of voluntary poverty, prayer, contemplation, and hospitality. Some are married, some are not but have children, while all take a vow of voluntary poverty, and most would be considered liberal Protestants, although there are Catholics and nondenominational members. Here liberal means a progressive reading of the Bible, as well as an ecumenical Christianity that includes participation in interfaith coalitions. It also means a biblically and Christ-inspired support for environmental and social justice issues, including issues of sustainable agriculture and ecological food production.

Residents who have pledged their lives to residing on the campus are called stewards, whereas novices are residents who have lived at Koinonia for three months to a year, at which point they become provisional members and begin the process of becoming full stewards. There are also interns who reside at Koinonia for three to six months—if they feel called to stay, they may begin the process of becoming a full-time novice resident and eventually a steward.

Koinonia makes most of its income from selling seasonal pecan products. The pecans come from acres of monoculture pecan groves, and some of the trees Jordan himself planted. The pecans become value-added products at an on-site bakery and processing center and are then sold via mail and online catalogs. Products include granolas, pastries, and chocolate pecan bars and chocolate/pecan/coffee bars made with fair-trade chocolates and coffee beans.

The latter product reflects the continuing commitment of the community to support ethically traded and grown food products, and the long-term goal of the community is to become a certified fair-trade processor. Overall this reflects the community’s continued commitment to justice, paying a living wage (to both suppliers and community workers via a shared purse), and providing earth-friendly products—the same principles that motivated Jordan to begin Koinonia.

Koinonia is currently guided by both vision and mission statements, and also by eight Partner Covenant ideas that guide the lives of stewards. These statements are held up and enacted via the community’s current corporate structure, which includes an executive director and various department heads who oversee an aspect of campus and community life to which the community is committed. For example, there is a farm crew director, a hospitality director, and a marketing director, all of whom oversee and manage employees, interns, community members, and volunteers in their area of responsibility. The covenants, vision, and mission statements help guide the community and keep its identity intact amid the thousands of annual visitors, continual flux of interns, departure of novices, and inevitable turnover in paid staff.
The need for paid staff is a result of the campus being too big (over 400 acres, with a welcome center and museum, library, chapel, residence halls, and various buildings associated with pecan production) and the jobs too many to be met by just interns, provisional members, and stewards. Therefore, the community hires local residents to work in the kitchen and to help around the campus; many of these are black residents whose parents were active in the community when Jordan was alive or shortly thereafter and who bought houses through the Fund for Humanity.12

Koinonia has adopted a mission statement to guide and manage all these activities and personnel. The community’s current mission statement dates to 2007 and states, “We are Christians called to live together in intentional community sharing a life of prayer, work, study, service, and fellowship. We seek to embody peacemaking, sustainability, and radical sharing. While honoring people of all backgrounds and faiths, we strive to demonstrate the way of Jesus as an alternative to materialism, militarism, and racism.” Many of Jordan’s original motivations for creating Koinonia are still present in this current mission statement; these include pacifism, discipleship, reconciliation between races, and a sharing of fellowship (and economic livelihood) in community life. Explicitly added to the statement is a modern, vibrant concern for sustainability that is both institutional and individual. Taken together, Koinonia’s concerns and activities make the community an exemplar of “prophetic activism,” which is a faith-based, progressive activism that seeks to redress social inequalities and that “envisions an altered future in which human relationships to one another and the natural world are repaired.”13

These prophetic concerns are also found in the vision statement created by a group of community stewards and members to help guide Koinonia through its next fifty years, as well as in the Partner Covenant enacted in 2002. The seventh Partner Covenant asks stewards to be “a steward of the earth, recognizing the beauty and wonder of the earth as God’s creation,” while the sixth covenant asks stewards to “participate in Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation, recognizing that we are one family regardless of race, creed, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, economic status, or any other difference.”14 Meanwhile, Koinonia’s vision statement reads:

Love through service to others
Peace through reconciliation
Joy through generous hospitality

This statement is enacted through concrete measures and actions that are influenced by the further results of a “visioning weekend” held in 2003. During this weekend fifty members and friends of the community jointly agreed on five challenges that the community needed to face and address in the coming fifty years of Koinonia’s existence. The fifth challenge to be met is a “demonstration of new community based and environmentally responsible ways of farming.” As a result of this vision, a “Friends of the Earth” focus group has been developed. This group meets to discuss issues of sustainability and to first brainstorm and then come up with concrete actions about how the community can grow healthier, more sustainable food.

Given the vision of joy through hospitality, peace through reconciliation and sharing, love through service to others (and for many community residents, this includes nonhuman others), and the mission and covenant of sustainability and stewardship, food has once again become the de facto center of Koinonia’s identity. Whether it is through selling pecan and fair-trade products to meet financial needs, developing sustainable farming techniques, or sharing meals as a form of fellowship and hospitality, food at Koinonia is a central marker of life for residents and visitors alike.

FOOD—SHARED AND SUSTAINABLE—IS EVERYWHERE

The heading for this section is as much a truism as it is a rhetorical use of language. This is because at Koinonia, all someone has to do is look outside any window of campus, or take a walk fifty yards in any direction, to see and come across pecan orchards, chickens, cows, goats, and a wide variety of other plant and animal life that will one day become food for a human body. As a living, breathing farm, the evolutionary and ecological realities of birth and death, growth and decay, and quotidian caloric needs are inescapable and impossible to miss. For Koinonia, these realities are embraced and incorporated into values of hospitality, love, and sustainability; for members of Koinonia, they are incorporated into the living body of Christ, present through the mysterious and wondrous workings of Creation, whether in the field or at the table. And at Koinonia, how this food is grown and shared is a marker of both institutional mores and a quest for environmental stewardship.
The concept of stewardship is found in the first chapter of the Hebrew Bible, specifically in Genesis 1:26–28. In the cosmology story related therein, Yahweh/Elohim grants humans dominion over creation. The Hebrew used in this passage, how it is translated, and the ethical and environmental implications thereof have become an issue of much debate by religion and nature scholars, ecotheologians, and those in Abrahamic subtraditions involved in the Ecological Reformation. For many Christians, especially Protestants, and even more so, Evangelicals, the concept of stewardship has morphed into the concept of “Creation Care.” While Koinonia is not an Evangelical community (although some members are Evangelical), it has adopted similar language, and community members see themselves as being called to steward the campus in sustainable ways. This calling is reflected in the community’s mission statement, Partner Covenants, and the results of its visioning weekend. What this means in practice is that Koinonia, largely through the efforts of the farm crew, is putting into practice permaculture farming techniques throughout the fields and campus of the community’s four hundred-plus acres.

Permaculture is a system of sustainable farming created in the 1970s by the Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren at their ecovillage, Crystal Waters. The two began to host permaculture trainings and workshop so that now there is an international network of permaculture practitioners, teachers, and publications. Owing to the influence and groundwork (both literal and figurative) of Bob Burns, quite a few members of Koinonia’s farm team as well as stewards and members of the overall community have received permaculture training. The community actively hosts ten-day permaculture trainings that are open to the public for a fee, with instruction provided by community members and outside permaculture teachers. Some members see this as Koinonia’s next gift to the culture-at-large, and especially to fellow Christians. According to some at Koinonia, the first gift of the community was interracial fellowship, followed by the gift of Habitat for Humanity, and next it is hoped it will be sustainable ways of growing food, with Koinonia providing practical example, method of instruction, and inspiration.

In a nutshell, permaculture is a mix of systems theory, holistic ecology, and sustainable agriculture practices whose goal is to create permanent agriculture systems, and thus permanent human cultural systems that are embedded in local landscapes. Therefore the ideal of permaculture is to create a self-enclosed, regenerative, sustainable feedback system of agriculture that requires minimal off-farm/site inputs. This ideal is embodied in “edible forests” of perennial stone fruit trees, as these require the least amount of human management and provide annual, nutrient-dense fruits. The trees also provide shade and fodder for grazing animals such as chickens, pigs, and goats, who in turn help fertilize the trees; leaves for making compost to be used elsewhere on site; wood for building houses; seeds that can be pressed for oils; and habitat for indigenous species of flora and fauna.

Furthermore, many within various permaculture circles, both in the United States and internationally, criticize the current industrial model of agriculture that has flourished since the onset of the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution is a term used to describe the large-scale industrial agriculture model that has gained adherents around the world beginning in the 1940s and which depends on mechanization of work and the use of petroleum-based chemicals and fertilizers. Critics of the Green Revolution claim that this method of farming requires intensive inputs of petroleum-based insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and artificial fertilizers, all of which are seen to be unhealthy and toxic for the environment and especially agricultural soils and farm ecosystems. They also argue that the industrial model of farming displaces humans to urban environments, and that it is based on a model of monoculture (meaning one crop is grown at large scales of hundreds to thousands of acres) crops for export markets, so that taken together it is harmful to both society and food supplies.

Permaculture advocates hold their own model of farming up as the ideal corrective, as permaculture is about designing polyculture (the opposite of monoculture) systems of food production that use nature’s own patterns and “energy” to create healthy, safe, bountiful, seasonal, petroleum-free (ideally) food items for human consumption. As this is an ideal, the reality is that it takes many years to approach edible forests and self-regeneration, but it is this ideal toward which Koinonia is aiming. And this aim of self-sufficient, eco-friendly food production is highly motivated by the community’s Christian identity, at both institutional and individual levels.

For example, one community member stated that “sustainability is one of our areas . . . because of the sacredness of the land and of creation . . . None of this 'God gave us this land and we can do whatever we want to.' It's 'God gave us this land and we better take [care] of it.'” This member traces this view back to the original agricultural vision for Koinonia as
articulated by Clarence Jordan himself. Another past member and current employee who works on the farm crew expresses similar sentiments. This employee’s duties include caring for the community’s milking cows and goats and culling rabbits, turkeys, and chickens to be eaten by those community members who are omnivores. He claims, “I mean I just think it’s an obvious fit; that care for creation ought to be part of Christian consciousness.” He goes on to explain that he is motivated to practice sustainable food production because of

the health factor . . . you know, eating foods that are more nutritious, that don’t have the negative aspects of chemicals being ingested into the body. . . . We all feel safer eating foods that are naturally grown without chemicals. I think that lines up with a Christian view of stewardship of creation, caring for the soil, supplementing the soil. . . . So I think that all of these things ought to be a part of a Christian consciousness.17

Such a belief leads to one of the current tensions in the community: how to transition the pecan orchards, which are needed for the community to remain economically viable, to sustainable, organic, permaculture groves. The current groves require chemical fungicides and insecticides, as pecan trees suffer from blight and pest infestation. Yet there are currently almost no organic pecan orchards anywhere in the South, so Koinonia sees itself as once again blazing trails as it slowly begins to diversify its varieties of pecan trees and attempts to begin new groves that are organic and sustainable. Moreover, this approach to growing and marketing food (in this case, pecan products) is one that is thoroughly influenced by Christian concepts of justice, fair trade and labor practices, and sustainable stewardship.

These sentiments are also shared by the community’s current executive director, who has been instrumental in advocating that sustainability become part of the community’s future, and who is equally supportive of this occurring in the fields and groves on campus. For this director, “I think that, well, getting right to the heart of it, I think we as humans are called to be in partnership with the Creator to re-create the garden. And we have done the opposite.” Therefore, for this community steward, sustainable farming methods become a tool for re-creating the garden. As she explains, “The land, the animals, the buildings, the people . . . to me, it’s all holistic. That’s the reason why we started looking for a philoso-

phy . . . some holistic way of nurturing all of this back to health. That’s why we came upon permaculture.”

The practical results of these beliefs are that Koinonia now has blueberries and muscadine grapes that are grown organically; a one-acre garden that supplies the cafeteria with seasonal organic greens and summer fruits like tomatoes, squash, and strawberries, and a variety of other vegetables; a three-acre permaculture field with built-in swales that provides corn, squash, and beans; and a variety of animals that provide meat and milk. These include bees for honey and pollination, chickens, turkeys, geese, rabbits, goats, and cows. The community is also actively seeking regional domestic varieties of many of these animals to help build on-farm diversity and to find breeds that are able to withstand the hot summers and cool winters of the region. Last is the slow process of transitioning to permaculture-designed pecan orchards that will also contain a wider variety of stone-fruit trees that will be intermixed with the pecans, all fertilized and “mowed” by rotational grazing of the cows and goats. All this work with food and farming connects Koinonia with a slow but growing North American Christian movement that sees caring for God’s creation via sustainable food production to be a Christian duty.19

SHARING FOOD: FELLOWSHIP AND HOSPITALITY

The attempt to sustainably grow as much produce and meat as possible on-site is one aspect of Koinonia’s relationship to food; the other key aspect is how this food is prepared and shared. And it is in the preparation and sharing that Koinonia gives truth to the claim of Gary Fick, Protestant agronomist and advocate for sustainable farming, that “what we eat and how we eat is full of meaning about what we believe and what we value.”20 Throughout the history of Koinonia, the values most associated with food have been fellowship, reconciliation, health, and sharing. These values are present at every step of each noon lunch prepared in the community’s kitchen, which is located adjacent to the community’s cafeteria.

This common dining hall and hospitality center is the heartbeat of Koinonia’s campus, and it is metabolically connected to, serves, and is served by the fields, the chapel, the visitor’s center, and the residential halls.
Everyone who is on the campus of Koinonia at noon between Monday and Friday is invited to the cafeteria to share in the noonday lunch that is prepared by a mix of employees, community members, and interns.

There is a standard format for these shared meals, including dining options for vegetarians and vegans; the placement of all the food along a twelve-foot table, with silverware and plates first, then food, and then cups for drinks; and the ringing of a large bell that hangs outside the cafeteria’s door, alerting the community that lunch is about to begin. After the bell rings, those on campus who are participating in the meal (participation is expected of stewards, interns, and volunteers and encouraged for everyone else, especially including visitors) gather around the table and share in a grace/benediction/blessing. (Logistically this can create a problem, for if there is a tour of fifty people on campus that day the cafeteria can rapidly fill to capacity.) This benediction is either read or given by a community member, or by someone invited by a community member, while a peace candle is lit. The grace is often Christian based but can be interfaith. After the meal, everyone who is visiting the campus is encouraged to stand up and introduce themselves.

The cafeteria consists of six long tables with space for eight to twelve people to fit around, and two smaller tables that seat four to six people. There are also couches and chairs and, if the weather permits, picnic tables outside. Community members and interns are encouraged to visit with and get to know visitors, so that the community’s vision statement of love, peace, and joy in service and sharing can be put into practice during these noon meals. No one is turned away from this meal due to dietary restrictions, race, age, nationality, or place of residency. This shared noonday meal is the same shared meal instituted by Clarence Jordan at the beginning of the community’s history, and today it features food items sustainably grown on site.

Koinonia is able to communicate its storied history via this institutional practice of sharing meals with visitors; however, the meals also become a vehicle for community members to put the vision of Christ’s sharing of food with all people into practice. This is because the “table fellowship of Jesus [points] to the community as the standard venue for thinking about [Christianity].” Many visitors report that they are genuinely moved by the communal sharing of food in the dining hall, and for some this experience is heightened when remembering the revolutionary act that such sharing meant in rural 1940s Georgia. As the community’s hospitality director and permaculture teacher explains, “I just have this idea that we are a place for . . . drawing people together . . . So if we have [a visitor] who’s a Buddhist and they want to meditate and that’s what they’re comfortable with and they want to share with us about that, that’s great. And we can all sit down and have a meal together and talk about it.” We see here that Jordan’s original vision of acceptance, hospitality, and fellowship over a shared meal is present in this current member’s approach to the various people who spend time in the community, even if that person is not Christian.

Another visitor who was vacillating on becoming an intern and eventually married a community member had this to say about their experience of sharing food at Koinonia’s noonday lunch:

I believe that Koinonia is part of God’s plan: people need to see this and then go out and be like, “Whoa. There’s a different place to live.” Like just the other day there was a guest here and she was from Atlanta and she’s always wanted to come out to Koinonia . . . She came with a couple of her good friends and her husband and she had never experienced radical Christianity or community or permaculture. She had never heard of any of this stuff [and] she got a tour right before lunch. And then at lunch we were talking about . . . the earth and loving the earth and loving each other and . . . she introduced herself after lunch like everyone always does, and she was like, “I’m so happy to be here.” And the [community member in charge of lunch that day asked if] one of our guests [could] lead us in prayer, and the woman stood up and she was sobbing. She was . . . so moved by lunch, by the way [we] were doing lunch . . . this person . . . was so moved by lunch that she was crying so hard that she couldn’t even say a prayer! And she finally choked out something and [she was so moved] by the way the people were eating lunch together! And I’ve seen that again and again, since I’ve been here.”

Similar stories about such moments of transformation that take place in the dining hall and fields are not uncommon and are frequently shared among community members and by members with visitors. Such moments of transformation around food have been present at Koinonia throughout the years, beginning with Jordan, his family, subsequent black and white members, and continuing through today’s vision of earth and human stewardship and hospitality.
I believe that God’s action of creating, sustaining, redeeming, and saving . . . converge in the mundane, pedestrian events of . . . daily life . . . and probably the most mundane event of all—eating food. . . . These everyday events are pervaded by sacredness, meaning, and value, and they constitute the arena in which God bestows grace. . . . When placed in this context, food consumption assumes an entirely new meaning . . . Like it or not, eating food is a moral and theological activity whereby we define ourselves; construct political, social, and economic institutions; and respond to God.

—MARK GRAHAM, SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, 2005

From harvesting pecans to pasturing sheep and cows, Christians at Koinonia are responding to their conception of God and to Clarence Jordan’s original vision for the community with joy, love, fellowship, reconciliation, radical sharing, and peacemaking. They are also responding to God’s creation by implementing permaculture practices, thus demonstrating a way to grow food that they believe is holistic and sustainable. Although eating food is indeed one of the most mundane events of life, it is an event that is fraught with meaning, whether acknowledged or not. At Koinonia, this event is imbued with several layers of meaning, all grounded in an understanding of Christianity influenced by the early church, yet that is equally influenced by an ecological view of the world afforded by the environmental sciences of today. It is this unique combination that places Koinonia at the forefront of North America’s Ecological Reformation, where the community’s own unique approach to growing and sharing food is a practice of both sustainability and Christian reconciliation and fellowship.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did the history of segregation and sharecropping influence the formation of Koinonia, and especially shape how food became a central focus of the community? Are such issues still found in America today, especially in farming communities where there are migrant workers?

2. How is food central to Koinonia? Discuss its importance in terms of how it is grown, its economic role, and how it is shared.

3. Does the human relationship with food change when it is shared communally, especially in a religious setting? Why or why not? How is this reflected at Koinonia? Furthermore, who and what counts as a member of a “community”?

NOTES


6. Jordan was also exposed to Social Gospel reformism during this time, and this liberal approach to Christianity merged with the disgust he already harbored toward southern racism. K’Meyer, Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South, 11–30.

7. Jordan coined the term “demonstration plot” himself and used it numerous times when discussing and writing about Koinonia. It even appeared in the

8. The Brüderhof and Amish are both intentional Protestant Christian groups with members who typically live in close-knit, agrarian-based communities.


11. Freedom Riders were groups of African Americans and Caucasians—some from the North, some from the South, some Jewish, most Christian—who rode together in buses to challenge with their bodies areas where racial discrimination was deeply entrenched.

12. David Castle writes that “We acknowledge that we are not going to get along perfectly all the time. In fact, community living often brings out not only the very best, but also the very worst in us” (“A Brief History of Koinonia”). To deal with the inevitable disagreements that attend to living and working with other humans, members at Koinonia try first to work things out by talking, then use a mediator, and lastly address the issue as a whole community.


15. For permaculture design basics and the theory behind them, see Bill Mollison, Permaculture Two: Practical Design for Town and Country in Permanent Agriculture (Stanly: Tagari Books, 1979).


22. Interview with author at Koinonia, May 2009.


RECOMMENDED READING


MARIE W. DALLAM is assistant professor of religious studies at the Honors College of the University of Oklahoma. She is the author of Daddy Grace: A Celebrity Preacher and His House of Prayer (New York University Press, 2007), and is currently working on a manuscript about American cowboy churches. Her research interests include new religious movements, race and ethnicity, and the dialectical relationship of religion and American culture.

MARTHA L. FINCH is an associate professor of North American religious history at Missouri State University. She received her Ph.D. degree in religious studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and is the author of Dissenting Bodies: Corporealities in Early New England (Columbia University Press, 2010) and co-editor with Etta M. Madden of Eating in Eden: Food and American Utopias (University of Nebraska Press, 2006). She is currently working on a book manuscript, “Outward Adornment: Plain Dress in American Protestantism.”

RACHEL GROSS is a Ph.D. candidate in religion at Princeton University and a dissertation fellow at the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. Her dissertation is a material culture and ethnographic examination of nostalgia for American Jewish communal pasts, including studies of Jewish genealogists, the use of historic synagogues as museums, children’s books and dolls, and American Jewish foodways. She received a B.A. degree in Jewish studies and an M.A. degree in religious studies from the University of Virginia.

DAVID GRUMETT is Chancellor’s Fellow in Christian Ethics and Practical Theology in the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, UK. With Rachel Muers he is author of Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat and Christian Diet (Routledge, 2010) and editor of Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology (T&T Clark, 2008). His interest in the topic of theology and food is inspired by a passion to retrieve and rearticulate Christian traditions of practice in order to address the pressing social, ecological, political, economic, and cultural questions of present-day life.

DEREK S. HICKS is assistant professor of religion and culture at Wake Forest University’s School of Divinity. He is the author of Reclaiming Spirit in the Black Faith Tradition (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). In addition, he served as assistant editor of African American Religious Cultures (ABC-CLIO Press, 2010) and contributed a chapter to Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions (New York University Press, 2012) with sociologists Michael Emerson and Jason Shelton. His work examines the complexities of race, culture, and identity formation in African American religious life and thought.

KATE HOLBROOK is the Specialist in Women’s History in the Church History Department, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was the first recipient of the Eccles Fellowship in Mormon Studies at the University of Utah. She is co-editor of two forthcoming books: This Labor of Love and Duty (Church Historians Press) and Women and Agency in the LDS Church (University of Utah Press). She also co-edited Global Values 101: A Short Course (Beacon Press, 2006). Her dissertation, Radical Food: Nation of Islam and Latter-day Saint Culinary Ideologies (Boston University) and analyzes twentieth-century Nation of Islam and LDS foodways through official publications, cookbooks, homemaking manuals, and oral history interviews.

TODD LEVASSEUR is visiting assistant professor at the College of Charleston, South Carolina. He teaches in the Religious Studies Department and the Environmental Studies Program, offering courses on religion and ecology, religion and food, religion and sustainable agriculture, religion and animals, and introduction to environmental studies.

SAMIRA K. MEHTA is a candidate for a Ph.D. degree in American religious cultures in Emory University’s Graduate Division of Religion, where she is completing a dissertation tracing the cultural history of Christian/Jewish blended families from 1965 to 2010. Her interests focus on familial religious practices and on religion, gender, and sexuality in the American family. She has received fellowships from Northeastern Consortium for Faculty Diversity Dissertation at Allegheny College and the Sloan Foundation’s Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life at Emory University.

REID L. NEILSON is managing director of the Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He received graduate degrees in American history and business administration at Brigham Young
University and completed his Ph.D. degree in religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of several books, including *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-Day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and *Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan, 1901–1924* (University of Utah Press, 2010). He is also the editor or coeditor of many academic books.

ELIZABETH PÉREZ is assistant professor of religion at Dartmouth College. A historian and ethnographer of Afro-Diasporic religions, she earned her Ph.D. degree at the University of Chicago Divinity School. She is currently preparing a book manuscript based on doctoral research conducted in a predominantly African American community of Afro-Cuban Lucumí, Espiritismo, and Palo Monte practitioners on the South Side of Chicago. Her most recent research project examines the challenges of transgender and transsexual people as religious actors in the contemporary United States.

LEONARD NORMAN PRIMIANO is professor and chair of the Department of Religious Studies and codirector of the Honors Program at Cabrini College, Radnor, Pennsylvania. He is the coproducer and cofounder of The Father Divine Project (http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/luerz-primiano/index), a multimedia documentary and video podcast about the Peace Mission Movement. Recent research and publications include an analysis of the musical culture of Father Divine’s Peace Mission Movement, as well as a study of Roman Catholic ephemeral culture as exemplified by the “holy card.” In 2011 he opened an exhibition of votive objects from his own collection at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute in New York City. The exhibition catalog, *Graces Received: Painted and Metal Ex-Votos from Italy* (2012), contains his essay “Cathliciana Unmoored: Ex-Votos in Catholic Tradition and Their Commercialization as Religious Commodities.”

JEREMY RAPPORT is visiting assistant professor of religious studies at the College of Wooster. In addition to his contribution to this volume, he has published a study of vegetarianism in the Unity School of Christianity in *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* and the entry on the Seventh-Day Adventists for Oxford University Press’s forthcoming second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*. His other research and publication focuses on American metaphysical religions, new and alternative religions, and religion and science, including “Corresponding to the Rational World,” a study of use of scientific language and rationales in Christian Science and Unity in *Nova Religio: The Journal of New and Alternative Religions*. He is currently preparing a book manuscript based on his doctoral dissertation, “Becoming Unity: The Making of an American Religion.”

SARAH E. ROBINSON is a Ph.D. candidate in religion with a concentration in women’s studies in religion at Claremont Graduate University in Claremont, California. Her transdisciplinary dissertation combines feminist, ecological, and comparative religious studies methods to examine contemporary sustainable agriculture projects integrated into Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist contexts in the United States. She chairs the Ecology and Religion Section for the American Academy of Religion, Western Region, and previously served as chair for the Women and Religion Section. She has cocreated, cotaught, and assisted courses on globalization, peace, sustainability, transnational and women’s studies at Claremont Graduate University: Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California; and the University of California, Berkeley. Working with the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir in Oakland, California, she has organized interfaith panels of musicians and religious leaders.

NORA L. RUBEL is associate professor of religion and classics at the University of Rochester in New York, where she teaches a course on Religion and American Foodways, as well as other courses in American Religion. Her first book, *Doubting the Devout: The Ultra-Orthodox in the Jewish American Imagination* (Columbia University Press, 2009), examined the representations of ultra-Orthodox Jews in popular culture. She writes on a wide variety of topics related to religion and ethnicity, particularly in relation to food, and is currently at work on a book about *The Settlement Cook Book* and American Jewish identity.

JEFF WILSON is associate professor of religious studies and East Asian studies at Renison University College, University of Waterloo. He is the author of *Dixie Dharma: Inside a Buddhist Temple in the American South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012) and *Mourning the Unborn Dead: A*
Buddhist Ritual Comes to America (Oxford University Press, 2009). He was the founding chair of the Buddhism in the West Group at the American Academy of Religion and a member of the 2010–2012 Young Scholars in American Religion program.

Benjamin E. Zeller is assistant professor of religion at Lake Forest College, Illinois. He researches religion in America, focusing on religious currents that are new or alternative, including new religions, the religious engagement with science, and the quasi-religious relationship people have with food. He is author of Prophets and Protons: New Religious Movements and Science in Late Twentieth-Century America (New York University Press, 2010) and coeditor the forthcoming Bloomsbury Companion to New Religious Movements (Bloomsbury). He founded and served as chair of the Religion, Food, and Eating Seminar of the American Academy of Religion throughout the seminar’s five-year tenure. He has also received a Fulbright Scholar Fellowship to study contemporary religion in Finland.

INDEX

abstinence: Christian basis for vegetarianism, 8, 12; Christian food abstinence vs. non-Christian norms, 13, 17–19; food as regulation of sexual desire, 5, 6; as a matter of choice: 11–13; of meat, 5, 7–9, 11; Mormon rules of, 196; Nation of Islam’s rules of, 203. See also alcohol, abstention of; fasting; vegetarianism
abundance, 43, 47, 51
acculturation, 96–99, 138, 139; of African Americans, 137–38, 139, 140–41, 149; of Jewish Americans, 91, 94–96, 103, 106–7, 109
African Americans: and cooking, 135–136, 139, 140–41, 146–48; foodways of, 136–39, 143–45; and the Peace Mission: 46, 61; and religion, 141, 142–43, 149–50. See also black religion, gumbo; okra; slavery, soul food agency, 121, 139–41, 146, 150, 179, 286 alcohol, abstention of, 195, 196, 276, 277 Annie Hall (1977), 234 American culture, 91, 92, 93, 99, 105–8; cookery and, 96; foodways and, 92 Amish, 9; and interdependence, 125–27; and reciprocity, 122–23; and respect, 123–25 animals, treatment of, 274, 275, 276, 279, 282–83, 289; industrial factory farming and, 275, 278, 281, 282; standards of halal slaughter and, 274, 276, 282–83, 292n14 anti-assimilationism, 14–15. See also assimilationism