

Jennifer R. Ayres. *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013. 248 pages. \$25.34.

Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology by Jennifer R. Ayres introduces a grounded practical theology of food in two parts. Part one is contextual and sacramental. Ayres examines selected economic, agricultural, environmental, medical, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of global food system practices to compel her readers to act for social changes in food production, distribution, and scarcity in the world and especially the United States. Expounding upon a lament from Wendell Berry that humanity has failed to notice and protect the intrinsic relationship between human and economic health and the health of the land, Ayres writes, “Humans belong to not only social communities, but also the land, in its deepest, most interdependent sense. And yet, even those human beings who most long for a felt sense of relationship to the land find themselves alienated from it” (27).

Why should people of faith, and specifically the readership targeted by Ayres—Christians—care about worldwide issues of food security? Because needing and sharing food knits all of us to one another and to the life-sustaining earth given by God. And, to quote directly from Ayres again, “If God is being revealed in the food system as it is, people of faith might justifiably question whether this god is worthy of worship” (54). Of course for Ayres global food processes do not reveal God. Rather God becomes embodied in sacraments such as the Eucharist. Table fellowship and feasting invites the gathered to imagine and enact alternative futures for human flourishing over and against the intractable problems of the global food system. Just as Christians become members of the body of Christ at the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper and its elements of ordinary food also remind the faithful that their lives belong to the earth and share connection with the hunger and thirst of God’s people everywhere. So, when Christians arise from communion, they must go out into the world and attend to feeding the people of God justly.

Part two of *Good Food* is ethnographic and practical. It presents actual communities of faith dedicated to transformative measures of food justice and illustrates how to practice the sacramental purpose that Ayres recommends. Ayres begins with congregational life attuned to food justice. She describes Faith in Place, an interfaith environmental organization with focus upon sustainable food. It sponsors a winter farmers market hosted by Faith Lutheran Church in Brookfield, Illinois, Sola Gratia, and a community-sustainable agriculture (CSA) farm worked and located at St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church of Urbana, IL. Next she highlights urban farming projects such as Woodstreet Farms in Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood and the *Atlanta Community Food Bank Community Gardens* to portray how the most blighted metropolitan areas can be renewed by savvy initiatives for food sovereignty. Her Chicago connections lead her to Cuentepec, Mexico where the Chicago Religious Leadership Network for Latin America (CRLN) provides a firsthand look at farmers, laborers, and impoverished families crippled by multinational food enterprise. Food practices in the United States destabilize the lives of people beyond its borders. Ayres returns stateside in her narrative with a visit to Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina. Originally a set of Mission Schools founded by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions to provide quality education to Appalachian students, and marked by a triad commitment to work, academics, and service, Warren Wilson College continues its three-part educational legacy by fusing it with liberal arts education. Ayres writes about how Farm Crew students reimagine the dignity of agricultural life and resist and respond in their own way to the alienation and exploitation of global food systems.

Preachers and homileticians will find *Good Food* to be informative, persuasive, and pragmatic for crafting theological responses in classrooms, pulpits, and the public sphere to food insecurity at multiple registers. But some conclusions may overreach, for instance—“And when young adults on a rural college farm work together to tend to a sick sow, whom they know by name, they resourcefully practice an improvisational kind of agricultural creativity. They also honor life in all its complexity . . . [i]n these seemingly small things, they are visionaries” (161). Expanded discussion of how the array of “local global” food practices from less visible visionaries like mono-cultural and multi-cultural immigrant and enclave communities inflect the complexity of sociality, food, land, justice, and theology is also missing. Still, *Good Food* arrives as a timely Christian analysis and charge to remedy a social threat affecting the entirety of creation.

Gerald C. Liu, The Theological School, Drew University, Madison, NJ