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## Ecotheology and Theology of Eating : Controversies and Convergencies

Pihkala, Panu

2015-04

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Pihkala , P 2015 , ' Ecotheology and Theology of Eating : Controversies and Convergencies ' , Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis , vol. 26 (2015) , pp. 64-81 .

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/156069>

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# Ecotheology and the theology of eating

## Convergencies and controversies

PANU PIHKALA

Environmental theology (or, ecotheology) developed slowly during the first half of the twentieth century and has become a major field of study since the late 1960s. While many of the issues discussed in ecotheological works have included consequences for food production and eating habits, these themes were often not explicitly discussed. The reasons for this are interesting and complex. Issues related to food have been culturally very sensitive and have manifold connections to religiosity. In regard to the discussion about the rights and value of animals, controversies have been seen to arise between ecotheology and 'animal theology'. Recently, a new interest has arisen in the themes of food, eating, and Christian theology, which has resulted in a new field of literature which could be called the 'theology of eating'. This article gives an overview of the relations between these fields, with an emphasis on both early ecotheology and new literature about the theology of eating.

### Introduction

Most of us must live from the box and the bottle and the tin can . . . . The farmer now raises a few prime products to sell, and then he buys his foods in the markets under label and tag; and he knows not who produced the materials, and he soon comes not to care. No thought of the seasons, and of the men and women who labored, of the place, of the kind of soil, of the special contribution of the native earth, come with the trademark or the brand. And so we all live mechanically, from shop to table, without contact, and irreverently. (Bailey 1943 [1915]: 65)

The writer of this text, Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858–1954) was for decades one of the best-known natural scientists in North America. He published an enormous quantity of scientific writings and his influence also extended overseas. Bailey was a strong political player, and was especially active in the Country Life Commission which aimed at a reformation of the US countryside in the early twentieth century (for the Commission, see Minteer 2006: 20–6).

Bailey, a very liberal Christian with a Masonic background, was also one of the earliest pioneers of what is nowadays called ecotheology: religious thought and action concerning the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Bailey also wrote poetry and philosophical works, of which the most famous and significant piece is his 1915 treatise *The Holy Earth*. Here, Bailey argued poignantly for the adoption of a stewardship ethic in caring for the Earth. The book also included some arguments hinting at the intrinsic value of non-human creatures, which was very radical at the time (for Bailey, see Minter 2006: 17–50; Carlson 2000: 7–30).

A recent research project revealed that there were more proponents of ecotheology in the first half of the twentieth century than has previously been noted (Pihkala 2014). However, there still were not very many of them. Bailey was a rare case, and even rarer was his inclusion of concrete ethical and theological cogitations relating to food, eating and animals, which will be discussed at more length below.

Food and eating would also be rare themes in later works of ecotheology. As a field, ecotheology developed slowly during the first half of the twentieth century and has become a highly significant field only since the late 1960s (for an overview, see Conradie 2006). While many of the issues discussed in ecotheological works have included consequences for food production and eating habits, these themes were often not explicitly discussed before the turn of the century. The reasons for this are interesting and seem to be complex. Issues related to food have been culturally very sensitive and traditional eating habits have often been linked with religion. In regard to the discussion about the rights and value of animals, there has even been seen to be a controversy between ecotheology and ‘animal theology’ (Linzey 2006). Many proponents of ecotheology have not changed their eating habits or promoted animal rights.

Recently a new interest has appeared in discussions on the themes of food, eating and Christianity. This has resulted in a new field of literature, which could be called the ‘theology of eating’ or ‘theology of food’. Some of these works focus on vegetarianism, but the field extends also to even broader themes, such as the general function of food and eating for societies and Christianity. The works of broadest range approach Christian theology comprehensively from the viewpoint of food and eating.

Interestingly, these works on the theology of eating often have strong connections with ecotheology, but not always: sometimes the spiritual significance of eating is emphasized in a manner which does not include ethical reflections. However, usually the works on the theology of eating include discussions about sustainable food production and consumption. Their discussions about

gardening and farming often extend into the ecotheological theme of ‘tilling and keeping’ the planetary environment as a whole. Further joint themes are found in studies which emphasise connecting with nature and the spiritual significance of our relationship with the natural world. Thus, many works on the theology of eating also provide a fresh angle on ecotheology.

This article gives a brief overview of the relationships between these fields. A historical discussion is included: very little research has been conducted on early twentieth century ecotheology. Elements related to eating and food in early ecotheology are analysed and their relations to later developments are discussed. Important themes related to food and eating in ecotheological works of the later twentieth century are briefly discussed. Substantial attention is given to an overview of this new field of the ‘theology of eating’ and its connections with ecotheology. The focus is on food and eating, but in many cases drinking is also included in the reflections under study.

The selection of literature is limited to Anglo-American sources. English seems to be the main language used in the relevant works, but there may naturally be significant books in other languages which are not used here. Concerning different Christian denominations, Protestantism is prevalent in the sources. In the initial sections of the article, this emphasis has historical reasons: it seems that Protestants occupied a key position in early ecotheology. The reader will do well to note that since the 1970s, Orthodox and Roman Catholic voices have been highly influential in ecotheology as well.

The structure of the article is as follows. The first section focuses on early ecotheology and eating, in which an agrarian influence and the work of Liberty Hyde Bailey occupy a prominent position. Subsequent chapters discuss the themes of animal theology and sacramental eating in ecotheology. A following section discusses food-related themes in ecotheology of the late twentieth century up until the emergence of an interest in the theology of eating. The final section gives an overview of the new field of the theology of eating and its connections to ecotheology.

It is impossible to perform here a complete survey of themes related to food and eating in ecotheological works: the literature in the field is abundant and is increasing rapidly. However, while it is neither possible to discuss every book on the theology of eating, the field is still limited and a relatively wide overview is possible. The selection of books related to the theology of eating is mostly restricted to ones which have connections with ecotheology, but, as mentioned, most of the works in the field do have that connection. In addition, a few others are mentioned as examples of different kinds of works on the theology of eating, such as ones focusing solely on the spiritual experience of the person eating.

## Early ecotheology and eating: the agrarian influence

According to a recent study, the main forms of early twentieth-century ecotheology can be divided into three parts. The first of these comprises some of the American proponents of the Social Gospel, an influential Christian social movement, also engaged in what could be called the 'Soil Gospel', endeavouring to protect the soil. Bailey was a central figure in this group. Second, the British tradition of creation-oriented theology which gave rise to some of the first denominational statements to be delivered by Anglicans in the early 1940s. Concern for the countryside and the soil was one of the concerns underlying this strand of ecotheology. And third, a group of American theologians who influenced the first forms of a wider Christian environmentalism which emerged from the late 1940s onwards. Key figures were Paul Tillich (1886–1965), Daniel Day Williams (1910–73) and Joseph Sittler (1904–87). Earlier concern for the soil, especially following the environmental disaster of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, paved way for the reception of their message (Pihkala 2014).

These theologians and thinkers mostly approached the value of nature from a broad perspective, which is one of the reasons why they did not engage in much concrete ruminations about food and eating. They saw it as their task to provide wide-ranging statements, and evidently this was also expected of them. Theologians who have made practical ethical statements have often been accused of going beyond their remit in relation to society. Overall, the early ecotheologians had to navigate between what they wanted to say and what people were ready to hear. Even the general statements related to care of the Earth were radical at the time, as they were for decades to come (Pihkala 2014: 198–200).

The aforementioned Liberty Hyde Bailey was not a professional theologian, but rather an expert in the natural sciences, which gave him room and reason to comment on practical issues. Agrarian thinking, which forms Bailey's wider framework, was a highly influential strand in early ecotheology. Bailey championed a simple, rustic lifestyle, which included subsistence farming and an emphasis on eating simple, clean foods. The total lifestyle was seen to have a spiritual dimension, and thus Bailey also emphasized the spiritual elements of eating. He wrote in 1915: 'Yet it is not alone the simplicity of the daily fare that interests me here, but the necessity that it shall be as direct as possible from the ground or the sea, and that it shall be undisguised and shall have meaning beyond the satisfying of the appetite' (Bailey 1943 [1915]: 63).

Thus, Bailey championed fresh and local food: interestingly, he also included a discussion about the dangers of a growing tendency to add artificial ingredients

to food (Bailey 1943 [1915]: 70–9). Overall, Bailey emphasized a connection to a place, to the rhythms of nature and to the community. Common meals were crucially important. This included at the same time a connection to the previous generations: a person was to find his identity as a part of a story and a place. Mortality and the cycle of generations, and the deep fecundating matter of religions, were thus included. Persons were called to be faithful stewards of the land, a religious task which could be pursued in the contexts of a variety of actual religions. Bailey took his imagery from Christianity – *The Holy Earth* is full of implicit Bible quotes – but his Christianity is very liberal. The agrarian lifestyle associated with stewardship was the key; not doctrinal creeds or membership of institutions.

The similarities between Bailey's thought and that of later agrarian ecologists are manifold and obvious. There is actually a direct chain of influence from Bailey to Wendell Berry, the most famous American agrarian spiritual thinker for decades (on Berry, see Peters 2007), as well as onwards to current agrarian thinkers such as Norman Wirzba, who shall be discussed in more detail later.

Bailey was strongly influenced by Social Gospel-style optimism, although he was also keenly aware of the darker sides of human behaviour and became less optimistic in his later years (Carlson 2000: 26). Overall, both the Social Gospel and agrarianism have come under heavy criticism: are they viable in a world shaped by technology and urbanization, or are they actually merely characteristic of naïve optimism or romanticism? Ecotheologians, as well as proponents of different forms of ethical eating, have emphasized the elementary significance of hope. They have argued that even while the situation may look very difficult, only by believing in the possibilities of change can change actually be possible (for an example from theology, see Conradie 2006: 136). This hope-based activism has been the driving force behind agrarians, ecotheologians, and for example activists of fair trade foods and community-supported agriculture. It has also been the energy source for the proponents of animal rights, but the relationship between these groups and ecotheologians has been complex.

### Animal theology and ecotheology

The early ecotheologians were situated in such a way as to personally witness major changes in society. Most of them had spent their childhoods in the countryside or at least in semi-urban areas, and they lamented the loss of connection to nature and community that they observed around them. At the same time they were deeply immersed in traditional ways, including eating mores.

Vegetarianism and the promotion of animal rights took place mostly through the agency of other, even more counter-cultural people (Pihkala 2014: 200–4), including minority religious groups such as the Tolstoyans, whose relations with traditional forms of Christianity were often strained (see Preece 2008).

The famous British pioneer of animal theology, Andrew Linzey, has for a long time criticized a lack of thinking about animals in the mainstream of eco-theology, a lack which has led into a separation of animal theology and eco-theology (Linzey 2006). The results of recent research mostly confirm Linzey's views. However, the promotion of abstinence of animal eating was present also among theologians: the German winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) was a very famous figure at the time. He was also very widely known among theologians for his role in biblical studies (Barsam and Linzey 2000). Some theologians followed Schweitzer in his views about animals and vegetarianism, but in the works of the most prominent early eco-theologians Schweitzer is surprisingly little discussed: vegetarianism was a difficult topic for them.

Only since the 1980s has the field of animal theology started to develop. In addition to Linzey's works, the so-called 'process theologians' especially have been active writers on the theme, often combining wider ecotheological insights with animal theology. Drawing on the philosophical and theological adaptation of Alfred North Whitehead's and Charles Hartshorne's writings, authors such as John B. Cobb Jr, Charles Birch and Jay McDaniel have written about animals and ecotheology (Birch and Cobb 1981, McDaniel 1989).

Later in the 2000s a new wave of books on animal theology has emerged and recent ecotheological works often at least mention animals; but there is still a certain tendency for authors to focus only on single issues. An integration of the discourses concerning ecotheology, animal theology and theology of eating seems most necessary, since all three fields are in the end closely related. Celia Deane-Drummond is an example of a contemporary scholar who is skilled in both traditional ecotheology and animal theology, and she has co-edited important article collections on animal theology (Deane-Drummond and Clough 2009; Deane-Drummond *et al.* 2013). David Clough has emerged as a major representative of systematic theology about animals (Clough 2012).

### Sacramentality, eating, and ecotheology

The most common framework for addressing food and eating for early ecotheologians was the Eucharist and, more widely, thinking about the sacramental dimensions of food and drink. Two key pioneers in ecotheology, Paul

Tillich (1886–1965) and Joseph Sittler (1904–87), both included reflections on eating in this connection.

Tillich was one of the most famous and influential Protestant theologians of the twentieth century. His interests were wide and ranged from ethics to psychology, from arts to dogmatics. What is less known is that Tillich was also one of the first systematic theologians to give nature serious attention and his efforts influenced later ecotheologians (Drummy 2000; Pihkala 2014: 139–49).

Drawing from his own experiences of nature since childhood and his love of natural philosophy, especially that of Schelling, Tillich had argued in the late 1920s for the importance of nature and matter. In his essay 'Nature and sacrament', Tillich emphasizes the significance of the material elements in different religious – especially Christian – phenomena. He discusses both the traditional sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist, and other 'sacramental' instances. Tillich's key argument is that the material element is never arbitrary: the whole sacrament or sacramentality is a product of the 'intrinsic power' of the material element and the acts of Divine will. He summarizes: 'Sacraments originate when the intrinsic power of a natural object becomes for faith a bearer of sacramental power' (Tillich 1948: 111).

On this basis, Tillich discusses an exceptionally wide range of phenomena, ranging from natural cycles to animals. Unfortunately, the discussion of any single subject is relatively brief, but nevertheless the text is fascinating and groundbreaking. Food and water are naturally included, although water is given more attention than eating, since in traditional Lutheran theology, which forms Tillich's background, the sacramental role of water has been less valued than the role of bread and wine. In addition to reflection about the role of eating in the Eucharist, bread is used as a focal point in Tillich's discussion of Protestantism and sacramentality, when the question of the relation between 'special' sacramental events and everyday life is discussed. Tillich links the separate sacred moments and acts with all life: 'The bread of the sacrament stands for all bread and ultimately for all nature' (Tillich 1948: 111). Thus, the everyday consumption of bread also acquires a certain sacred dimension, although Tillich does not venture into an extended reflection on this theme.

Tillich affirmed the value of nature in the aforementioned essay; but he was even more clear about the human need to treat nature responsibly in his later writings, such as his pioneering 1948 sermon 'Nature, also, mourns for a lost good' (for an overview, see Drummy 2000). Some years later, another progressive Lutheran theologian and Tillich's acquaintance, Joseph Sittler began to publish influential writings on ecotheology. A Professor of Theology in the Chicago area and an active ecumenist, Sittler was a famous preacher and public



theologian (Bakken 2000). His earliest ecotheological writings from the early 1950s show some agrarian themes, but their emphasis is more on systematic theology than in the texts of Bailey and others.

In a 1953 essay 'Sacraments and mystery', Sittler focuses on the problems related to experiencing the sacred in the Eucharist in an urbanized and industrialized society. He thus emphasizes the significance of participating in the process of farming:

When bread is the end-product of planting and tilling and nurturing the fields of one's ancestral home, and when wine is the domestic product of vines pruned and cared for by our hands and by the hands of remembered fathers under the suns of home – then heavenly investiture of these common things with Divine meaning is a possibility. It comes very close to becoming an impossibility for a generation which buys its bread in shining wrappers in a super-market... (Sittler 1953: 13)

Later, Sittler's *A Theology for Earth* (1954) and *Called to Unity* (1961) became key texts for ecotheology. Sittler argued that Christianity will not make sense to contemporary people if it does not recover its mostly forgotten heritage as a nature-oriented faith. His theological framework emphasized the cosmic significance of Christ's work and the universal nature of God's grace, which led him to develop the ancient theological theme of 'nature and grace', especially in his main work, *Essays on Nature and Grace*, published in 1972 (see the collection of his writings, Sittler 2000). This approach led him to emphasize the significance of everyday life activities, but while his reflections include affirmations of the spiritual value of eating and drinking, he does not develop these themes very far.

However, despite not producing very extensive discussions about eating, Tillich and Sittler still discussed the actual eating more than most later ecotheological works did, until the later rise of interest in the theme. When later ecotheology did discuss the theme of eating, it usually did so by focusing strongly on the Eucharist. 'Sacramental ecotheology' has been a popular strand, especially in Orthodox and Roman Catholic ecotheology, although with variants: sometimes the generally sacred character of the universe has been emphasized, and sometimes the traditional sacraments (Conradie 2006: 118, 133–5). However, as David Grumett and Rachel Muers have noticed, metaphorical and symbolic interpretations of eating have tended to surpass the theme of actual eating in theology (Grumett and Muers 2008: 1), and this applies also to ecotheology. There are surprisingly few works dealing with food and eating in the

large bibliographical index about ecotheology (Conradie 2006: 379). On the whole, ecotheology has often focused on general-level statements, and their consequences for food practices have not been explicitly discussed. However, the ethical challenges related to agriculture, soil and food production have gained more attention, as shall be discussed next.

### **Ecotheology and ethical problems related to food**

In general, more people have become conscious of the various ethical problems included in the processes of global food production and consumption since the 1960s. These questions have also gradually gained more prominence in ecotheological works, and they were for a long time the main topic of food-related discussions in this field (see the literature listed in Conradie 2006: 162, 376).

The ecumenical movement and especially the World Council of Churches have been widely influential in promoting ecotheological notions, and one of the strengths of the movement has been the integration of social and environmental justice concerns. At the same time, the questions related to the economic order of the world have been very difficult and politically loaded, also causing controversies among Christians. On a general level, the problems related to food production and sharing have been recognized and also practical statements have been given, but many differences and problems remain. Also, there are different interpretations of whether the voice of the churches is ultimately being heard in decision-making contexts (for WCC and ecotheology, see Hadsell 2005).

Recently, some of the food-related themes which have received growing attention among ecotheologians include genetically modified crops (for an introduction, see Deane-Drummond 2008: 74–9) and the problems related to climate change and food production (for example Davis 2009, DeWitt 2009). However, the discussion has focused on justice issues, and actual eating has usually not been much discussed. An exception is Michael Northcott's *A Moral Climate* (2008a), which also includes reflections about the significance of congregational meals and the Eucharist. The work can be seen to be connected to the new interest in the theology of eating, in which Northcott has participated, as will be discussed below.

## The theology of eating and ecotheological themes in its different forms

In the 2000s, a new field in theology can be seen to have been established with the emergence of a wave of books dealing with theology of eating. As discussed above, the topic itself is not new in theology, but the emphasis it has now received is.

Below is given an overview of works which can be seen to belong to this new field in theology, as well as an analysis of their connections with ecotheology. Works on the field are introduced by categorizing them according to their main focus on the topic. Naturally, many works deal with several of these themes, and the categorization is partly heuristic.

### A focus on vegetarianism and its history in Christianity

In recent decades a growing number of theological works have appeared which are concerned with vegetarianism, even though it would still be an exaggeration to call ‘vegan theology’ a very popular field. Along with Andrew Linzey’s pioneering and widely known work books such as *Is God a Vegetarian? Christianity, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights* (Young 1998) and *Good News for All Creation: Vegetarianism as Christian Stewardship* (Kaufman and Braun 2002) have entered onto the scene.

These works on vegetarianism have an intrinsic connection to ecotheology. To use Christian concepts, these books deal with a fundamental aspect of the created world; the animals. Even when historically animal theology and ecotheology have usually been treated as separate enterprises, they are intrinsically connected. That said, the divide between ecotheology and animal theology, which Linzey has prominently criticized, works both ways. Ecotheologians have discussed animal theology only a little, but by the same token proponents of animal and vegan theology have not usually discussed general ecotheological themes very extensively. Exceptions include Linzey’s work, which operates from a wide theological framework concerning the value of creation.

The articles collected under the title *Eating and Believing* (Grumett and Muers 2008) focus mostly on the history of Christian attitudes to vegetarianism, but also include ecotheological discussions related to present-day ethical problems. The editors, David Grumett and Rachel Muers, have continued to explore the historical dimensions of the issue in their own book, *Theology on the Menu* (Grumett and Muers 2010). In *Eating and Believing*, however, two of the contributors, Michael Northcott and Christopher Southgate, extend the ecotheological content into a wider perspective. This is logical given their

backgrounds: Northcott is one of the most famous Christian environmental ethicists in Britain (see his earlier *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, Northcott 1996), and Southgate has specialized in matters related to religion, science, and nature (see especially Southgate 2008a). Northcott's article in *Eating and Believing* focuses on fish and includes reflections on the current global problems associated with overfishing (Northcott 2008b). Southgate's article deals with the relationship of eschatology and eating and extends the discussion also to climate change (Southgate 2008b).

The prominence of British writers and scholars in the area of animal theology is clearly seen in the aforementioned works, as well as in another collection of articles about animal theology as it is widely understood, entitled *Creaturely Theology* (Deane-Drummond and Clough 2009). In that collection also, the most wide-ranging ecological reflections are contributed by Northcott (2009) and Southgate (2009). However, Southgate's discussion of migration and extinction ventures quite far from the theme of eating, which is at hand in this article.

#### A focus on the wide-ranging theology of food and eating

Books which apply the theology of eating as a comprehensive viewpoint on Christianity are relatively recent and few. Angel F. Méndez-Montoya's *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (2009) has a strong Eucharistic emphasis and includes reflections on historical developments, as well as some discussion of other religions. Ecological themes are merely a side issue. Seemingly the most comprehensive book on the subject so far is Norman Wirzba's *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (2011), which also has a very strong ecotheological dimension.

Wirzba, an American Professor of Theology and Ecology at Duke University, has often written about ecotheology. He draws heavily on the agrarian tradition and has also promoted Bailey's thought (Wirzba 2009). *Food and Faith* is his effort at developing a comprehensive theological treatment of the subject. The total theological framework is based on a trinitarian and incarnational approach, establishing a view of the world which emphasizes interdependence, community and the value of the material reality. Wirzba discusses the activity of both growing and eating food, and his approach takes into account the wide-reaching ethical issues related to food production and distribution. As one of the very first monographs to discuss the subject, Wirzba's book has gained a good deal of attention, relatively speaking, among readers of theological works. The book is clearly a work which fits both into the fields of the theology of eating and ecotheology.

Another American writer, Gary W. Fick, has written a monograph entitled *Food, Farming, and Faith* (2008). As the title suggests, the book places a strong emphasis on farming; while both Wirzba's book and this one have an agrarian dimension, Fick's has the greater focus on the theme. The books have an eco-theological emphasis in common, but Wirzba is more concerned with the act of eating itself.

A comprehensive approach, and one with ecotheological dimensions, is also taken in the anthology *Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread*, edited by Michael Schut (2002). The background of the book is concerned with the Earth Ministry, a Christian environmental organization. The book has the clear intention of encouraging its readers to change their eating and consumption habits in the interests of promoting sustainability. Included are texts covering a variety of topics from ecotheology and spirituality to ethical questions such as genetic modification and the global food trade. In addition, Schut has written a study guide to be used in local groups.

#### A focus on gardening

Other volumes focus on small-scale farming, especially gardening. A major emphasis in works of this kind is on the spiritual benefits of growing food, but the dimension of justice and an ecotheological approach are also often included. The main ecotheological theme of responsible gardening, 'tilling and keeping' (cf. 1 Gen. 2:15), is extrapolated out from a specific garden to the whole environmental 'garden' of the Earth.

A relatively famous example of a recent work of this kind is Fred Bahnson's *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith* (2013). As in many volumes of this genre, Bahnson's book has a strong emphasis on community. Forms of urban gardening, including community gardens, have increased in popularity in industrialized countries. The emphasis on the spiritual significance of food links the book with other volumes, which, even though they discuss eating more than growing, have a similar focus on spirituality.

#### A focus on the spiritual and sacramental dimensions of eating

Spirituality and sacramentality are an integral part of many works dealing with theology and eating, such as the aforementioned books by Wirzba and Méndez-Montoya. However, for some books these themes are the primary focus. A number of these works, which emphasize the spiritual dimensions of eating, focus on the subject so narrowly that an ethical or ecotheological discussion is

not included. A telling example is the anthology *Bread, Body, Spirit: Finding the Sacred in Food* (Peck 2008). It includes some texts by the same authors who are featured in books mentioned above, but the content is almost totally restricted to the spiritual significance of food for the persons eating it.

However, some significant works, which approach the theology of eating mainly from the viewpoint of spirituality or sacramentality, do have interesting connections to ecotheology, even when they do not focus on it. A fascinating example is the work of the British theologian David Brown, who also contributed to the volume *Eating and Believing*. Brown, a scholar with exceptionally wide interests, has written one of the most substantial theological treatments of the 2000s on the theme of sacramental theology. Brown has a broad view of sacramentality: he discusses the traditional sacraments and especially the Eucharist and baptism, but his purpose is to analyse all kinds of elements and encounters in which the sacred is mediated through material phenomena (see Brown 2013). Based on this approach, Brown includes a lengthy treatment of food and drink in the second volume of his trilogy on sacramentality, *God and the Grace of Body* (Brown 2007).

Brown's basic claim is that current Christianity has lost much of the understanding which earlier linked the sacred strongly with eating and drinking. All three of its central elements which are related to meals – the harvest, hospitality and gratitude – have diminished in value. Brown comes very close to touching on ecotheological themes when he discusses the potential of natural elements in encountering the sacred (Brown 2007: 120–84), but he does not venture into a discussion of the ethical challenges related to humans' relationship to nature; that theme is only briefly discussed in the first volume of his trilogy, which deals with places, architecture and the arts (Brown 2004). Thus, Brown's approach has strong similarities with Sittler's and Tillich's, including a prominent use of the term grace; Sittler and Tillich, however, have integrated ecotheology in their views more strongly than Brown.

A focus on ethical choices about eating in daily life

Finally, some volumes focus first and foremost on the ethical consequences of different food-related choices. This is also a strong theme in Wirzba's book, but other works focus mainly on this subject and do not venture into other wide-ranging theological considerations. A fine example is the very recent book *Faith in Food: Changing the World One Meal at a Time* (Campbell and Weldon 2014). The emphasis is on sustainability, which is understandable given the book's background in an inter-religious organization called the Alliance for Religions

and Conservation (ARC). Thus, the book is not limited to Christianity only, but includes reflections on many other religions also.

A specific theological field could be discerned through its focus on a theological treatment of daily life. This ‘theology of daily life’ is an ancient phenomenon, but seems to have become more popular again. A telling example is a whole series of brief books issued by the Fortress Press called ‘Christian Explorations of Daily Living’. Topics include working, travelling, shopping – and eating. The volume *Eating and Drinking* (Groppe 2011) presents a brief but wide-ranging theology of eating, especially for American Christians. Ethical and ecotheological dimensions are integrated in the book, as well as in the purpose of the whole series (see the Series Foreword in Groppe 2011: xii). In the current age of environmental concerns, it has been realized that questions related to daily life are at the same time questions related to environmental sustainability.

To bring this brief overview into close, it may thus be stated that the theology of eating is currently both an emerging field of its own and also connected to other theological fields. It depends upon the reader and the reader’s situation as to which conceptual framework is best used as a vantage point from which to view theological disciplines, but it seems that the use of a term such as the ‘theology of eating’ is necessary and fruitful. However, it is important to keep in mind the connections between the theology of eating and other fields. The theology of eating is linked with a wide range of questions, and its profound connections with ecotheology challenges scholars who are interested in it to familiarize themselves with both fields.

## Summary

The purpose of this article was to give an overview of the interesting relations between ecotheology and the theology of eating. At the same time, a brief introduction was given into the relatively new field of the theology of eating (or the ‘theology of food’).

A historical focus has been included, since there has so far been very little research on early ecotheology. It was found that early twentieth-century ecotheologians did not focus extensively on themes of food and eating, with the exception of Liberty Hyde Bailey, who championed local and organic (to use a current term) foods and emphasized the significance of eating together. Among the key founders of the later ecotheological movement, Paul Tillich and Joseph Sittler discussed the themes, mostly in relation to sacramentality. Tillich emphasized in the late 1920s that bread itself was elementary for

Christians, in contrast with such views of the Eucharist which emphasized only the role of the Word of God in the event. This was linked with Tillich's view of the significance of all material things, which Sittler also shared and developed into an even more explicitly ecotheological direction.

It was noted that the theme of animals, not to mention vegetarianism, was a challenging one for early ecotheologians and they mostly omitted engaging in discussions about it, even while Albert Schweitzer's works were available. Since the 1960s, the ethical problems linked with food production and sharing were increasingly being discussed among Christians, with important discussions taking place in ecumenical encounters, for example in the context of the World Council of Churches. Later, questions related to genetic modification and the effects of climate change on food issues were introduced as food-related topics in theological discussions.

Ecotheological themes in different forms of the theology of eating were then discussed. Works on the theology of eating were categorized according to the differences in their main focus. It was noted that books with a focus on vegetarianism have connections to ecotheology through their discussion of animals, but that they usually do not engage in wider ecotheological reflections. A few books discuss the history of vegetarianism or eating in general in Christianity, usually with minimal ecotheological content. The ecotheological discussions in British article collections about eating and animals were noted.

Works with a wide-ranging focus on the theology of food and eating were seen to be few and relatively recent. Norman Wirzba's 2011 *Food and Faith*, which also has a very strong ecotheological emphasis, was seen to be among the most comprehensive and significant of these. Thus, Wirzba's book brings the theology of eating and ecotheology into a closer relation.

Books with a focus on gardening were found to often have a significant ecotheological element through their emphasis on sustainability and the spiritual calling of the gardener. Other volumes focus on the spiritual and sacramental dimensions of eating. While these works often do not have explicit ecotheological content, their emphasis on the value of material things brings them quite close to ecotheology. David Brown's work on sacramentality was seen as especially noteworthy in relation to the theological fields under discussion. Finally, books with focus on ethical choices about eating in daily life were briefly introduced, and it was noted that these recent works often have an ecotheological element.



Dr.Theol. **Panu Pihkala** has specialized in environmental theology. He currently works in the Faculty of Theology in the University of Helsinki under Prof. Risto Saarinen, in the project funded by the Finnish Academy of Sciences called 'Religious Recognition and Toleration of Otherness'. His dissertation (December 2014) analysed early twentieth century ecotheology and especially the role of Joseph Sittler, American pioneer in the development of the field. Significant parts of the research were conducted in Chicago. Pihkala writes actively for general publications about theological themes, including a January 2014 text about animal theology ('Eläimet ja kristinusko').

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