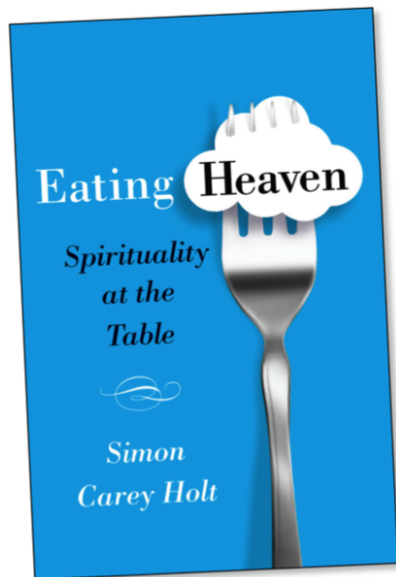




BOOK REVIEW: EATING HEAVEN: SPIRITUALITY AT THE TABLE, BY SIMON HOLT



Eating Heaven prompted me to think about where I most appreciate food and the tables that help me live life to the fullest. I love eggs and coffee as a treat to start the day. Carrot, celery, apple and ginger juice is my afternoon drink of choice. Our family dinners are admittedly a mixed bag, but at their best help us reconnect and laugh together. And our church Auburn Life is at its best circled around the communion table praying for one another, lunching together after Sunday Stuff down the road at Hotel Hawthorn, or sharing hospitality with international students at Auburn Hub on Tuesdays. In fact, when I think about the places that are most life-giving for me, and where I most fruitfully cooperate with God in mission, our home dining table, church communion and dining tables, work lunch table, church dining tables and various café and pub tables are among my favourite places. Whether in the company of friends or family, or reading and writing alone in a café, heaven comes close for me at meal tables.

Eating Heaven is a beautifully written book that encourages me in my love of food and celebrating community at different tables. Simon Carey Holt, a chef by background, is Senior Minister of Collins Street Baptist Church. He teaches spirituality of everyday life in theological colleges, but is also passionate about living it through his homemaking, hospitality and engagement with the cafes and civic life of Melbourne.

The book is a delightful smorgasbord of dining. Like a seasoned travel writer, Holt guides his readers from the backyard barbecue to five-star dining, from the family kitchen to the multicultural table, and from city cafes to festive gatherings. He invites us to understand the nature of vocation for those who work in kitchens and to see the communal meaning of the church's communion table. Each chapter takes us to the experience of a different table, and concludes with one of Holt's favourite well-worn recipes - from Anna's Baumkuchen to Credo's Zucchini Slice. Along the way, his love of food and friendship with diverse people is contagious.

My favourite chapter was "The Five-star Table". Holt dines with his wife for a delightful and expensive nine-course culinary adventure (for the second time in his life), and then discusses how he balances being committed to justice as well as beauty. This a tension in many spheres, but especially with food when 1.1 billion people in the world consume too few calories, and another 1.1 billion consume too many. How we eat, what we eat, where the food comes from, who we share food with are hugely challenging issues. Holt does not hesitate to invite us to reflect on bigger issues, but he is also not prone to offer simplistic answers and balances that challenge for food security and justice for all, with the invitation to celebrate and enjoy the food and relationships we have.

One of Holt's anecdotes is about the Collins Street Baptist church minister from about a century ago. Frederic Spurr, who was a keen social commentator and public intellectual, called for outdoor seating along Melbourne's footpaths and boulevards. He was ahead of his time in reflecting on what the city

needed, or what it was ready for. But Holt brings a timely message, that we can live out our deepest values and celebrate the best of life - and invite others to do the same - while we sit at different tables. Concludes Holt:

It is through the daily practice of the table that we live a life worth living. Through the table we know who we are, where we come from, what we value and believe. At the table we learn what it means to be family and how to live in responsible, loving relationships. Through the table we live our neighbourliness and citizenship, express our allegiance to particular places and communities, and claim our sense of home and belonging. At the table we celebrate beauty and express solidarity with those who are broken and hungry. (p150).

[1]Simon Carey Holt, *Eating Heaven: Spirituality at the Table*, (Brunswick East: Acorn Press, 2013.)



Darren Cronshaw

Darren Cronshaw is passionate about training and resourcing missional leaders through his work as Mission Catalyst - Researcher with the [Baptist Union of Victoria](#) and pastor of [AuburnLife Baptist Church](#). He serves as Head of Research and Professor of Missional Leadership at [Australian College of Ministries](#) (SCD), Honorary Research Fellow at [Whitley College](#) (University of Divinity). He is co-author with Kim Hammond of [Sentness: Six Postures of Missional Christians](#) (IVP 2014).