PUTTING PRACTICE ON THE TABLE: FOOD STUDIES AS
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LIVED RELIGION

by

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The study of religion, particularly the study of religious practice, or “lived religion,” creates the challenge of representing the complex networks of history, geography, and culture that converge on a region and an individual to contribute to the formation of religious identity. By applying the study of foodways to Robert Orsi’s definition of lived religion, this thesis demonstrates how the use of a specific commodity can be used to address our subjects with more complexity. Specifically, the language of lived religion and foodways is applied to religious practice in the American South, the commodity of meat and its symbolic and ritual use among male Southern Christians.
Dedicated to
Catherine Cunningham Anderson
CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ....................................................................... 1

II. LIVED RELIGION AND THE STUDY OF FOODWAYS......... 8

III. THE PIG AS A LIVING SYMBOL: THE BARBECUE JOINT & EATING IDENTITY.................................................................21

IV. MEAT AS RITUAL, THE SMOKEHOUSE & THE GRILL, COOKING OUTDOORS & THE ASSERTION OF WHITE MALE PATRIARCHY.................................................................38

V. HUNTING AS LIVED RELIGION: SEEKING MEAT, SEEKING GOD.................................................................53

BIBLIOGRAPHY.................................................................................69
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Robert Orsi's 2002 address to the American Academy of Religion, he asks about the relevance of the study of lived religion today. When one studies religion it is inevitable that sooner or later, someone will put you in the position of trying to explain the deep divisions, the injustices, and the violent acts, that have been carried out by persons with prayers on their lips. To answer them we should try “to balance carefully and self-reflectively on the border between familiarity and difference, strangeness and recognizability, whether in relation to people in the past or in another cultural world.”¹ This method allows us to present the most alien ideas on the common ground of daily life, observing the common humanity of practices, without losing sight of the differences that divide. Although the people on this earth may live in an endless number of worlds, the simple truth is, we all have to eat. As Tennessean journalist Jennifer Justus writes: “...sharing a meal connects all walks of life to their common humanity, encouraging appreciation for cultural differences without losing a special place of one’s own.”²

Food studies "is not the study of food itself but rather the study of the relationship between food and the human experience"³ and foodways is defined as: "the whole

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¹ Robert A. Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?" Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. (Salt Lake City. 2 Nov. 2002)


interrelated system of food conceptualization and evaluation, procurement, preservation, preparation, consumption, and nutrition shared by all the members of a particular society.” Although religion and food have frequently been a topic for scholars within history, anthropology and sociology, relatively few religious studies scholars have chosen to make food the center of their work. Important studies within food and religion studies include Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, Daniel Sack's *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*, and R. Marie Griffith's *Born Again Bodies*. In contrast, many scholars of the American South have made food important in their work, a reflection of the importance of food in Southern culture.

To begin, this thesis will address some basic characteristics of the academic study of lived religion, as proposed by Robert Orsi, and how the study of food can be used to address each of them. The remainder of the thesis applies food studies to lived religion in the American South and those foodways that have been heavily

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associated with Southern masculine culture: the pig and its preparation, the deer and the hunt. When men cook it is a ritual reversal of the cultural assumption that women are the primary homemakers. Where “...churchmen...preside over cookouts, church eating has been largely the domain of women. Foodways both reinforce the gender hierarchy and subvert it.”

Although women may be largely responsible for church food, the grill and the barbecue remain the domain of men and meat is a particularly potent food to demonstrate the meanings assigned to foodways, especially how meat is used to construct certain masculine identities. This thesis will address pork and venison in the specific context of the American South, and this excludes a discussion of states such as Texas, where beef reigns supreme. Pork is a symbol of Christian identity, separating Christians from the other Abrahamic traditions, but pork barbecue is a symbol of Southern Christianity. “Even when religion is not overtly expressed, the sense of holiness about food carries over in cultural symbols...Maybe the best example of a foodway that expresses the connection between religious behavior and southern culture is barbecue. The ritual cooking and eating of a hog commemorates a mythic place and time, communal bond, and identity still sacred in the South.”

The pig, as a symbol of the South, stands in the crossroads of the South's violent history and its hope for progress: Christianity and Southern cultural practice.

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Samuel S. Hill outlines the four characteristics of Southern religion that I believe are crucial for addressing lived religion in the South. First, “the Bible is the sole reference point of belief and practice,” second, “direct and dynamic access to the Lord is open to all,” third, “morality is defined primarily in individualistic and interpersonal terms” and fourth, “worship is informal.” All four of these characteristics can be explored through the study of Southern foodways. “The connection between food and religion runs deep in the southern Bible belt” and Southern meals have elements “that sustain a southern as well as an evangelical Christian worldview: the sacredness of family, the providence of God, and the holiness of place.” Chapter two discusses these elements of Southern religion by studying the pig as a symbol of Southern Christianity.

Chapter three builds upon chapter two to look at pork barbecue as a ritual reflecting the continued importance of traditional gender boundaries as an expression of Southern identity and the associated commitment to faith. After going from symbol to ritual, chapter four brings all of the elements discussed previously together, to discuss hunting as lived religion. Although hunting wild pigs has its following in the South, no hunting season is held with as much reverence as deer season. For that reason we switch our attention from the pig, to deer, to express how deer hunting is its own informal denomination of Southern religion. I choose to address white, male, Southern Christians to contribute in a small way to that body

of scholarship\textsuperscript{16} \textsuperscript{17} \textsuperscript{18} \textsuperscript{19} which seeks to complicate the many labels and stereotypes that surround those identity markers. “Although studies of masculinity acknowledge men as gendered beings and gender’s influence in traditionally male undertakings—politics, the military, and so on—scholarship has at times portrayed manhood as unchanging, with the result the analysis of manhood seemed an unattractive topic.”\textsuperscript{20} This is important because, “to leave masculinity unstudied, to proceed as if it were somehow not a form of gender, is to leave it naturalized and less permeable to change.”\textsuperscript{21} Like the pig, and pork barbecue, deer hunting is largely associated with Southern men. In the practice of deer hunting we find one way that Southern men reconcile the conflicting expectations on Southern men to be “aggressive” and “fun-loving,”\textsuperscript{22} as well as a pious, conservative Christian.

The references made to both classic and contemporary Southern literature draw attention to the continued potency of these ideas in the South. Although the circumstances around southerners have changed dramatically, southern understanding of life and the human condition have changed more slowly. These

\textsuperscript{16} Angela M. Hornsby-Gutting, “Manning the Region: New Approaches to Gender in the South.” \textit{The Journal of Southern History} LXXV.3 (2009), 663-76.

\textsuperscript{17} Craig Thompson Friend, \textit{Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction}. (Athens: University of Georgia, 2009)

\textsuperscript{18} Trent Watts, \textit{White Masculinity in the Recent South} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008)


references highlight both understandings of how religion is lived in the American south and the sanctity with which foodways are imbued in the region. My use of anthropology is due to the field’s long interest in food. Sidney Mintz traces the genealogy of food anthropology back to 1888 and 1889 through to prominent figures such as Claude Levi Strauss and Mary Douglas. Recent work in food anthropology includes Richard Wilk, Carole Counihan, Sidney Mintz, Donna Gabaccia and Carol Adams. This thesis engages cultural divisions that are essential to understand Southern identity, including race, gender, and class, however, in following with the nature of food studies, this thesis chooses to focus on exchanges between, not a focus on, the boundaries in question.

In addition to Robert Orsi, my work draw on other scholars of lived religion, such as Samuel Snyder’s study of fly fishermen and “lived religion.” My method is simple,

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32 It is important to acknowledge here that the majority of the sources quoted are written by white males and therefore that perspective is the most prominent in my arguments.

like many other scholars of lived religion; I try to find the projection of the sacred in
daily life. To do this, I cast a wide net, including literature, cookbooks, music, art,
film, and other foodways-related material expressions of the sacred, to demonstrate
how the divine penetrates the profane, and how there is little to which Southern
believers do not apply the language of the sacred. More broadly, I attempt to show
how food studies can offer a window into the most precious of a religious person’s
practices.

How people live out their religious beliefs is diverse, but food’s powerful links with
the body makes it rich with spiritual meanings and significance. “The disciplined
study of any subject is, among other things, an assault of self-evidence, on matters
taken for granted, nowhere more so than in the study of religion.”34 If we agree with
this statement, than the study of foodways is one way to defamiliarize ourselves
from our subject and discuss the fine line between sacred and profane activity in
people’s daily lives. “What we learn in all of this is a basic Durkheimian principle:
that even in the most profane activities such as eating, the underlying vital forces of
social life and of primordial human bonding find sacred expression.”35

American Religion in Popular Culture. (Routledge, 2010), 120.
Billy Sunday once quipped that standing in a church makes you a Christian no more than standing in a garage makes you an automobile. The humor in this joke emerges from the understanding that genuine belief cannot be assessed by church attendance or participation in church functions, but instead is measured by one's actions outside the church and in the community. Indeed, a “Sunday Christian” is a derisive term for individuals accused of only wanting to appear Christian but fail to carry out the values in their day to day lives. Believers, denominational or nondenominational, do not have a boundary between their religious lives and the rest of their day to day activities. Instead, their beliefs can be called on at any moment and they use spiritual language to make sacred many symbols and rituals in those things that mean the most in their daily lives. Approaching lived religion through food offers a particularly useful angle of analysis for several reasons. Food is universal and particular, sacred and every day, it is one of the simplest and most complex things in human culture. Food represents the continuous interplay between structure and creativity that is about how all humans negotiate identity, beliefs, and recipes. “Food...does not merely symbolize or represent in the static sense but rather moves, penetrates, and transforms.”

approach to lived religion can dissolve the boundaries of dichotomies, denominations and decades.

The study of lived religion attempts to capture daily experience and personal interaction with the sacred. Orsi proposes a rethinking of the term religion which moves away from a focus on tradition toward a focus on experience:

Religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life. Four things are necessary to understand religious practice: (1) a sense of the range of idiomatic possibility and limitation in a culture—the limits of what can be desired, fantasized, imagined, felt; (2) an understanding of the knowledges of the body in culture, a clear sense of what has been embodied in the corporeality of the people who participate in religious practices, with their tongues, skin, ears, “know”; (3) an understanding of the structures of social experience—marriage and kinship patterns, moral and juridical responsibilities and expectations, the allocations of valued resources, and so on; and (4) a sense of what sorts of characteristic tensions erupt within these particular structures.37

In addition to these four things I would like to add a fifth element to this definition, also from Robert Orsi’s understanding of lived religion—creativity and imagination in people's religious practices: “The study of lived religion situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches all religion as lived experience...Religion is always religion in action, religion in-relationships between people, between the way the world is and the way people imagine or want it to be.”38


Within anthropology, conversations about addressing human life in a way that represents the complexity and diversity of human experience, acknowledges the constructed nature of the boundaries we engage. The need for multi-sited research and multi-sited ethnographies, to move beyond boundaries, requires an “adaptation of long-standing modes of ethnographic practices to more complex objects of study.”

The question is how does one represent both the world-view, the larger systems of power and economy that connects us globally, without losing the depth, and detail, a local-focus provides? Anthropologist George Marcus proposes three ways in which anthropologists can conduct multi-sited research that can also benefit research in lived religion: "follow the people," "follow the thing," and "follow the metaphor." This thesis in particular is interested in "follow the thing," which "involves tracing the circulation through different contexts of a manifestly material object of study." In the case of religious studies, following an object like a rosary, icons, or a sacred book can reveal both the unity and diversity within a faith, across a wide timeline and geography. However, for the study of lived religion, it is helpful to move away from these more obviously sacred symbols, to something seemingly every day, and find the sacred projected there.

Food is also a creative act, like rituals and prayers; food reflects tradition, grapples with the present and can contain hopes for the future. Imagine an individual, just


trying to get a weekday supper out on the table; they might recall a recipe, but adapt it to work with what’s on hand. Their hope could be as simple as wanting the food to keep their loved one's bellies full and their bodies healthy, and as complex as trying to nourish the bonds between those at the table; a desire to make lasting memories, or an education on or reassertion of identity. In much the same way, individuals negotiate their religious tradition, or traditions, within the day to day experiences of their lives and dreams for the future. In contemporary religious practice, and contemporary American cooking, there are more ingredients available than ever before, creating new flavors and new faiths that cannot be described by one simple label.

FOOD ON THE MOVE: POSSIBILITY AND LIMITATION

Identity, religious beliefs, and food all share that they are in a constant state of construction. When Orsi discusses the “range of idiomatic possibility” as an element of how religion is lived, he captures the play between structure and creativity, tradition and the present, that occurs within all human culture. The metaphor for the construction of a belief from one religion, or several—“cafeteria style” religion, represents the choices at hand, the role of individual preference, and the endless variations that can occur on one theme, all situated within the larger frameworks of geography, tradition and time. Food allows us to discuss this interplay between past and present because it is one of the last things humans willingly change:

“Psychologists tell us that food and language are the cultural traits humans learn
first and that they change with the greatest reluctance...the food they ate as children forever defines familiarity and comfort.” As those children grow into adults, they comfort others with those foods and as that food passes from one set of hands to another's, small changes based on circumstances or preferences occur, but those changes do not mean that the underlying structure is lost. The staying power of food, along with its remarkable ability to adapt, can show us how religious persons “… appropriate religious idioms as they need them, in response to particular circumstances. All religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed, and improvised at the intersections of life.” The United States, as a country primarily of people from other places, is a particularly rich field to study how food and beliefs travel with humans, changing as they are carried with them.

Jualynne E. Dodson and Cheryl Townsend write about African religion in the context of the forced exodus to the Caribbean and the United States. To capture the complicated ways African customs were lost, survived and adjusted within the Christ-saturated South, Dodson and Townsend study the significance of church food in American Afro-Christian traditions. Chicken or “gospel bird” is particularly important in these communities and is considered a staple of “church dinners…a source of fundraising and of sociability.”


ways that African slaves “grafted onto and integrated with Christianity.” The significance of chicken in African Southern churches is a “recollection of U.S. African-American ancestral heritage. The Great Sacred Yoruba Hen was of major religious importance to a vast majority of nineteenth-century Africans imported to all of the Americas. In Cuba, Brazil, and other New World sites of African presence, the hen or chicken is still an important part of sacred rituals and ceremonies.”

Using something as deeply linked to memory as food to address diasporic religious contexts makes it possible to address both continuation and change, tradition and survival.

FEEDING THE BODY, NOURISHING THE SOUL: EMBODIED PRACTICE

An approach to religion that contains an understanding of the body immediately brings our attention to daily practice. Knees that groan as they sink to meet the floor, the warmth of communion wine or the sweet taste of grape juice; the newborn body, the growing body, bodies joined in marriage, pregnant bodies, sick bodies and dead bodies. Different faiths have different ways of engaging the sacred with their bodies, but all living bodies share the same basic needs and those needs, as a starting place for inquiry, can reveal faith in the smallest of life’s details.

Using food studies to look at lived religion is immediately an embodiment approach to religious practice. Food can be about the pursuit of holy health, as in the


teachings of Elijah Muhammad or Gwen Shamblin, and other religious groups that emphasize specialized diets. Religious food can also be about body at its most vulnerable, the dying man or woman alone, maybe with only a hospital chaplain and a little broth. To the hungry, “God can only appear as bread and butter,” and all around the world religious communities feed others, fast and feast together.

Although an embodied approach to religion is frequently discussed in terms of ethnography, an embodied approach does not have to be limited to that context. Although it may be impossible for our bodies to physically interact with the dusty bodies of the past, those bodies had the same senses that we possess and if one is interested in “bringing the past alive,” histories focused on the body can do just that. By looking at primary source documents, from letters to law books, one can see the many assumptions that are made about food reveal much deeper cultural and religious beliefs. This is not just a biography of a few individuals: “[o]ur bodies are not in and of themselves separate from other bodies. Whether we like it or not, we are connected to a larger social body.”

“YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU EAT” SOCIAL LIFE & CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY

Food can symbolize social position, class, gender, religious and regional identities, and scholars have addressed all of them, and more, with foodways. The control of


food is the ultimate power and “Lappe and Collins make a strong argument that there is no more absolute sign of powerlessness than hunger.” Food can be used to mark class status, such as in Sidney Mintz's study of sugar and its history as a status symbol or William Roseberry's discussion on the recent “rise of yuppie coffees” as a “class conditioned process of marketing, promotion, and consumption.” Studying national identity, “Countries are what they eat, or, at the very least people tend to think of nations in culinary terms...Consider the people of Japan, whose collective identity is firmly placed in rice, or those of Scotland, who take pride in their distinguished tradition of distilling fine whiskey.” Within these countries, different regions and states become associated with certain foods as well. Finally, faith is often represented by what one does or does not eat, when one abstains and when one feasts. Sacred meals unite communities in remembrance, such as communion in Christianity, the Sedar meal in Judaism or Eid-al-Fitr in Islam.

Richard Wilk's *Home Cooking in the Global Village* captures how food can be used to construct identity by studying the creation of a national cuisine in Belize. Likewise, religious communities, big and small, construct individual and shared identities through food. The tradition of American church cookbooks captures how

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communities are constructed simultaneously with the construction of individuals. Members of a congregation display their pride in their community by submitting their best recipes and the community reciprocates by bringing attention to their pride in their individual members by publishing not just a recipe for “potato salad” but instead, “Miss Margaret's potato salad,” not just Chocolate Chess pie, but “Aunt Robin's Chocolate Chess Pie.”

“GUESS WHOSE COMING TO DINNER?”

TENSION & CONFLICT

The study of tension and conflict, within and between religious groups, and other identities, are marked by food. “Precisely because eating and intercourse involve intimacy, they can be dangerous when carried out with the wrong persons or under the wrong conditions. Hence food and sex are surrounded with rules and taboos that both regulate their use and reinforce beliefs basic to the social order....”

Food and drink as a divider between blacks and whites was taken to extremes in the Jim Crow South. Separate drinking fountains and white-only dining counters offered poignant places for the staging of Civil Rights protests. Foodways also mark gender boundaries in how food is obtained, prepared, and consumed, and in many cultures, gendered foodways, and faith, are mutually reinforcing. Marcie Cohen Ferris who works on Southern Jewish culture asks: “Since many traditional southern dishes required lard for frying and butter as shortening, observant Jews faced a special


53 Carole Counihan, The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power (New York: Routledge, 1999), 63
predicament. How can one not serve fried chicken, pies, and cakes and still be considered a loyal southerner?”

54 This solution for this problem came in 1912 when Procter and Gamble introduced Crisco announcing: “The Hebrew Race has been waiting 4,000 years for Crisco.” And for observant southern Jews who lived within a culinary culture of cast-iron frying pans in which foods were fried in lard, it felt like 4,000 years.”

55 Where Jewish Southerners have become a part of the South, religious food taboos are still being used to exclude Muslims. When a repair shop owner posted outside his shop “BBQ pork restaurant is safest. No Muslims Inside.” in 2010, it created controversy in the community and made Birmingham’s news.

56 Food is not only a point of dispute between religions, but religious denominations as well. “The need to form clear and distinct identities prompts American religious groups to engage in...boundary-setting’ behaviors,” for example, light-hearted joking is common between denominations, a friendly reminder of the ways in which they consider their group to be different. Robert C. Fuller, for example, approaches boundaries between American religious communities through wine. “The distinctive patterns of use—and non-use—of wine by a wide variety of religious groups provide an additional perspective on the continuing creativity of American culture in giving


rise to new forms of religious enthusiasm."58 One of the most powerful ways we label the “other” is through their foodways. Despite boundaries constructed through food, many Americans, "...quite willingly 'eat the other'—or at least some parts of some others, some of the time. Eating habits like these suggest tolerance and curiosity, and a willingness to digest, and to make part of one's individual identity...."59 Food can divide but eating can unite.

STORIES OF FOOD & FAITH: CREATIVITY & IMAGINATION

We do not often think of survival as a creative act, but the cultivation and pursuit of food often involves many creative tricks and personal rituals. But humans go beyond mere survival with food: they find ways to make foods more flavorful, and sometimes use the ingredients on hand to make beautiful looking food as well. For something as necessary as breathing to be imbued with so much meaning speaks to our special need for not just the nutrition of food but also the intimate gestures and symbolical meanings that food is steeped in. Humans invest huge amounts of creativity into their religious practices and their practices in the kitchen. The material expressions of faith are vast and various, as well as the ways practitioners approach them.

Existing in this world are rituals that are hundreds of years old but many religious peoples do not limit themselves to these practices. They create their own rituals and


meditations that fit into their day-to-day struggles and pleasures, and offer up all as expressions of faith. Lynn Coffey from Love, Virginia shares how all experiences are experiences within the story of her faith: “I can honestly say that I’ve enjoyed bear hunting through the years, but since I’ve become a Christian, I’ve enjoyed it even more… I always try to thank Him for the forest and the animals, and especially my health as I go out to hunt. God changed my life, and I give all the credit due Him for that miracle.”

LIVED RELIGION IN THE SOUTH

The untidy study of lived religion is always a challenge; in the particular context of the American South the influences of Native tribes, Europeans, Africans and people from the Caribbean all contribute to Southern faith and Southern food. Although Christianity came to overshadow the Southern landscape, many of these other traditions still found ways to survive, in some cases, assimilating and becoming a distinct part of many aspects of Southern religious practices and Southern cooking practices. Orsi’s five elements of lived religion that I have addressed are necessary to study Southern religion. Southern identity cannot be understood without understanding the religious landscape that shapes it, and this is why Bill Neal might not be wrong when he says that “Certain dishes give identity to entire

communities...When we no longer eat these foods, we will no longer be Southerners.”⁶¹

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CHAPTER 3

THE PIG AS A LIVING SYMBOL: THE BARBECUE JOINT & EATING IDENTITY

Pull up to the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, just two miles from the shore in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and a statue of a tall cross and Jesus might catch your eye. Jesus’s gaze is directed down to his right, where a small bronze pig looks back up at him, locking eyes. When looking at the pig as a cultural symbol, one immediately discovers two things, first, that a multitude of traditions and meanings surround the pig, and second, that "Pigs...seem to evoke strong religious emotions...the world can be divided into two types of people, pig lovers and pig haters." An illustration of the contradictions that arise when trying to pin down a meaning for the pig is the association of the pig and wealth. Calling someone a “pig,” or a “Capitalist pig,” is considered negative, but “living high on the hog,” “on the pig’s back,” or “bringing home the bacon,” are generally considered positive. The less common saying, “Pigs get fat, hogs get slaughtered,” captures both interpretations, the pig for prosperity, and the hog representing greed, and the thin line between them. The pig can be found associated with the devil and demons, just as the pig can be found as a representation of Gentiles and Jesus. Southerners are


definitely a community of pig lovers. Despite pork barbecue's deep roots in Africa, the enslavement of African-Americans and the South's troubled history, barbecue still, in many ways, represents the careful balancing act southerners attempt between history and progress, Christian faith and Southern custom. The pig, or barbecue, represents many things, to many southerners, but barbecue as a symbol gets its power by standing in the crossroads of the South's violent history and its hope for progress: Christianity and Southern cultural practices.

SETTING THE SOUTHERN TABLE

Since the beginning of the idea of the American South, it has had a relationship with the pig, and barbecue. "In eighteenth-century colonial America, Virginians and Carolinians were cooking whole hogs and basting them with saltwater with butter, and this is likely the type of simple meat moisturizer that George Washington was fond of using on his barbecue."64 During the Civil War, General Stonewall Jackson “oversaw the pork preparation for his boys in grey.”65 Pork barbecue is synonymous with the South, and in its many incarnations: pork, beef, and in some parts of Kentucky, mutton—smothered in mustard, molasses, or vinegar-based sauces, it represents both the unity and diversity of southern identities. The sacred language that is invoked when discussing barbecue is better understood when you discuss how southern cultural beliefs and symbols, and devotion to Christian belief and


symbols, go together like red beans and rice; they are two inseparable parts of the same dish.

Whether an individual embraces it, tolerates it or rejects it, the religious landscape is a large element of Southern identity. Faulkner captures this aspect of the religious landscape of the South and the influence of that geography: “My life was passed, my childhood, in a very small Mississippi town, and that was part of my background. I grew up with that. I assimilated that, took that in without even knowing it. It's just there. It has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve—it's just there.” The fact that Southern identity is intimately bound up in multiple symbols and spaces imbued with sacred or supernatural meaning makes it a rich field to try and express the inseparability of a person's daily life, and the symbols and rituals that make up their or their neighbor's expression of religion. Scholars such as Wade Clark Roof, Ted Ownby, Samuel Hill, and Charles Reagan Wilson all observe that the South has “two-overlapping ritual systems”

...one, celebrating regional and folk values and, the other, affirming historic Christian beliefs and practices. Much of southern tradition...is a playing out of tensions between these two ritual systems. The fact that the love ethic of Christianity was muffled in popular religious life, forced to accommodate a prideful and racially sensitive regional culture, is a big part of what makes southern religion so distinctive; in effect, social justice took back seat to a more personal, Christ-centered piety. Added is a particular guilt-oriented

theology paralleling regional experiences of slavery and war which brought to prominence themes of sacrifice and atonement through the blood of Christ.67

This guilt-oriented Christianity, and the South’s violent history, create a culture that has had intimately pressed upon it the human capacity for depravity and violence. Scandals involving public figures such as politicians or ministers only reinforce the Southern belief that “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”68

The American South has a tradition of an individualistic Christianity where “morality is defined primarily in individualistic and interpersonal terms.”69 What I mean by this is several things, most importantly, that southerners may attend church, but they are generally uninterested in a mediator in their relationship with God. As early as 1785, Thomas Jefferson in a letter remarked that religion in the North was “superstitious and hypocritical” in contrast to the Southerners, “without attachment or pretensions to any religion but that of the heart.”70 Nationally popular southern band The Avett Brothers, in their 2003 album, A Carolina Jubilee, capture well that “religion of the heart” still prevails in the American south. “Well I found God in a soft woman's hair /A long day's work and a good sittin' chair /The ups and downs of the treble clef lines /And five miles ago on an interstate sign /My God, my God and I don't need a middle man.”71 This individualistic morality may at first

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seem to contradict the devotion to the Bible as the “...the sole reference point of belief and practice,”\textsuperscript{72} but as the Civil War film Cold Mountain remarks, “I imagine God is weary of being called down on both sides of an argument.”\textsuperscript{73} So when the Avett Brothers sing, “Now I don’t doubt that the good book is true/but what’s right for me may not be right for you,”\textsuperscript{74} we can glean the understanding that the Bible as the sole religious authority, as opposed to a particular person, also means that it is recognized that there are as many opinions on the subject as there are Southerners.

The disinterest in a religious mediator also manifests as a suspicion of religious authority which is revealed in the Southern literary tradition of the southern preacher. “Southern writers have populated their work with hypocritical preachers, self-righteous congregations, rigid Calvinists, and spiritually twisted fanatics. They have, nevertheless, drawn their vision of human limitation and a world in which good and evil contend from the most basic beliefs of southern religion.”\textsuperscript{75} The development of the Southern frontier brought with it camp meetings, which Southern authors satirized gleefully. Johnson Jones Hooper and Mark Twain especially targeted the minister in charge. Continuing the South’s literary tradition of questionable, if not outright sinful preachers, William Faulkner created figures


\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Cold Mountain}. Dir. Anthony Minghella. Perf. Jude Law and Nicole Kidman (Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2004) DVD.


such as the adulterous Reverend Whitfield in *As I Lay Dying* and the detached Reverend Hightower in *A Light in August.* In Randall Kenan’s 1992 short story, “Ragnarok! The Day the Gods Die,” the Reverend Barden officiates over the funeral while graphically reminiscing about his affair with the deceased. The portrayal of ministers in this way, and the actual scandals within the Church, does not diminish Southern faith, instead, it reinforces the belief that all are lost without Jesus.

The devotion to a personal relationship with the divine may explain why so many regional religious practices permeate the region and remain popular. Charles Reagan Wilson’s book *Judgment & Grace in Dixie* finds Southern faith in music, football, literature, beauty pageants and “how the dominant strain of southern religion seeped into many features of regional life.” When organized religion is held suspect, traditions that exist outside of the "mainstream" church authority increase in significance.

The official religion of modern southern churches increasingly becomes routinized and bureaucratized; the passion of evangelical religion then survives best as part of popular, extraecclesial religion. Popular religion in a modernizing South may represent, though, a countermodernization, a

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reassertion of supernaturalism in a region increasingly incorporated into a homogenized, desacralized national culture.\textsuperscript{81}

Even within non-Evangelical denominations that prefer formality in their worship service, many informal services and gatherings exist in addition to the central service and are considered important to the community. Within Catholicism informal traditions such as shrimp fleet blessings in Charleston and New Orleans, bingo hall gatherings and children’s services, and in the Episcopal Church, the blessing of the animals, church camp retreats and pancake suppers all represent how informal worship in the South is not just important to evangelical Christians. The ways of worshipping in the South are diverse, but the love of food is present in all of them; “foodways…connect church to the rest of life.”\textsuperscript{82}

It is ironic that perhaps what unites Southerners most of all is the love of divisions: the jokes about Yankees or any other person "not from around here"; small towns and cities, with more church pews than people; the self-segregation that occurs between blacks and whites; and last, but not least, the division over the beloved food—barbecue. “William Schmidt...has described barbecue as 'a cultural ritual, practiced with a kind of religious fever among barbecue sects, each of whom believes their particular concoction of smoke and sauce and spices is the only true way to

\textsuperscript{81} Charles Reagan Wilson, \textit{Judgment & Grace in Dixie: Southern Faiths from Faulkner to Elvis} (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1995), xxvii.-xxviii.

\textsuperscript{82} Corrie E. Norman ,"Religion and Food." \textit{Foodways}. Ed. John T. Edge (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007), 95-100
culinary salvation”83 or in the words of John Egerton, "There are more barbecue factions and smoked-meat sects around here, each with its own hair-splitting distinctions, than there are denominations in the far-flung Judeo-Christian establishment.”84

THE SACRED PIG

Stephen Smith presents the work of Charles Brightbill which suggests that religion and recreational activities are often deeply tied. Making a meal, especially a meal like barbecue, which is typically shared with large numbers, is both fulfilling the daily necessity of food, and desire for recreational fun. Smith draws a parallel between “the old-time camp meeting and the contemporary barbecue cook-off contests,”85 noting that contained in both we find “a reverence for tradition and the heritage of the past, the vestiges of rural camp meetings, a chorus of regional chauvinism, a pulpit for oratory and opportunity, and subtle interracial respect.”86

Historically, the isolation of the Southern frontier made camp meetings a magnet for all Southerners, religious or not, so frequently, while believers crowded around the pulpit, experiencing conversion, marked by glossolalia and other bodily


exercises, the more secular-minded Southerners stayed on the outskirts, traded goods and socialized with their distant neighbors. In addition to this convergence of interests, “The meetings were not segregated by sex or in many instances by race, and several black preachers earned their initial reputations speaking at these gatherings.”87 In their time, many critiques of these camp meetings were made because of these secular activities, and the dissolution of the gender and racial boundaries many Southerners thought absolutely necessary.

The “subtle interracial respect” present in the Camp Meeting tradition is also found within the barbecue tradition, and other food traditions of the South. This made some restaurants neutral ground between the races, and others battlegrounds in the Civil Rights Movement. Some white restaurants would serve blacks out the back door of their restaurants, but in a reversal of Jim Crow, whites would cross the “proverbial tracks to a barbecue shack...At the back door, out of sight, racial barriers were relaxed, and white dollars were welcome.”88 Sharing food was a small wedge in the segregation of the South, but not until all Southerners could sit down at the same table could the long, hard road to healing that the South walks now, begin.

Separating the practical concerns from the spiritual concerns of Southerners, recreational fun from religious expression, would be an attempt to make a division


in the Southern character that few of them would make themselves. Wade Clark Roof, remembering his childhood in South Carolina, writes: “In many rural areas and small towns radios still carry, often at noontime, daily reports on local stock prices interspersed with gospel music—‘hogs and hymns’ as we called it....” At one of the world’s largest barbecue competitions, Memphis in May, one can find offered “... not just great barbecue but a complete barbecultural experience, including Elvis impersonators, vendors of plastic pig snouts, campaigning politicians, and evangelists distributing leaflets on ‘What to Do in Case you Miss the Rapture.’”

One does not have to travel through the South long to see how religion is invoked in almost everything, from beauty pageants to football, and food especially expresses “the sacredness of southern culture.”

Although pork is now available year round in the South thanks to innovations like refrigeration, hog-killing used to be set apart as a sacred time which “usually took place during the first spell of cold weather that seemed likely to last for several days,” to prevent spoilage. Even though pork barbecue is no longer bound by the need for nature’s refrigeration, it still stands apart as a special or “sacred” time. The often all-night vigil that occurs around a barbecue pit marks it as a special food. For those who take up the mantle of barbecuing full-time, becoming barbecue

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monastics, barbecue frames the majority of their day to day lives. Barbecuer “James Jones doesn’t live upstairs like his parents did before him. But on the nights he cooks shoulders and hams, he sleeps in what was once their apartment. ‘I can’t remember when I didn’t smell like smoke,’ he tells me. ‘That’s the price you pay. That, and a lack of sleep for going on twenty years.”93 “The action of barbecuing is more than a process of cooking; the pit masters create or brand a distinct identity through the keeping of secret recipes and the intense labor and danger associated with this special species of barbecue.”94 Indeed, an individual’s personal preparation techniques, and particularly their sauce recipes, normally do not vary greatly, but almost all claim their “secret ingredient” makes all the difference. An individual’s beliefs in the South can be addressed in much the same manner, with almost everyone embracing their own personal additions to the recipe for a Southern Christian.

A TABLE DIVIDED

Like all things in the South, the history of pork barbecue is marked by race. "The first barbecuers were usually African slaves who combined their native methods of roasting meat with know-how picked up from their passage through the West


Indies...and a disproportionate number of the cooks are still African American.”

The etymology of the word barbecue and the invention of the barbecue tradition, according to Andrew Warnes, unveils European racist assumptions that are rooted in the new world. In *Savage Barbecue: Race, Culture, and the Invention of America’s First Food*, Warnes argues “that the barbecue mythology arose, neither from actual Arawakan life nor any other indigenous culture, but from a loaded and fraught colonial representation that sought to present those cultures as the barbaric antithesis of European achievement.” African Americans were the pit masters for the plantation barbecues of the South, meaning the barbecue that Scarlett O’Hara would have consumed at Twelve Oaks would not have been made by white hands. The historical association of African-Americans and the specialized knowledge of barbecue is interpreted by some scholars as “subtle interracial respect” and by other scholars, as a racist European projection on the African people, but in the complex reality of race relations, both interracial respect and deep racist assumptions undoubtedly existed side by side.

Where the love of pork may have created a bond between the black and white communities of the South, food rituals can also be about exclusion. In addition to the 2010 news story mentioned earlier about a Southern sign proclaiming: “BBQ

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pork restaurant is safest. No Muslims Inside,” Southern anti-Islamic sentiment can also be found expressed in the linking of Islamic imagery deliberately with the haram pig. Examples of these offensive images include a sultry pig, sprawled out on its side on top of the Ka’ba in Mecca. Another image features a large pig in a chef’s hat, barbecuing a Muslim, on top of a flaming Qur’an. In addition to these, several images can be found of pigs with turbans or pigs labeled Mohammed. In these images, the pig does not represent “salvation for all” but instead the denial of respect for Muslims.

Despite the progress that has occurred in the South, there is also no denial that divisions and differences exist. Where barbecue restaurants are run primarily by African-Americans and some whites, barbecue competitions and judges are almost exclusively white. Despite the South’s history and the divisions between barbecuing as a livelihood and barbecuing for recreation, the reverence for barbecue is present in both races, and has brought Southerners from all backgrounds together, eating at the same table.


SITTING DOWN TOGETHER

Just as pork barbecue can tell us about the history and reality of the racial, religious and class differences in the South, it can also speak on the progress toward a New South. Good advice to a novice, or out-of-towner, looking for a barbecue joint is to instruct them to check out the parking lot: “If you can spot an equal number of Mercedes sedans and Ford pick-ups, you’ve found a good place. Too many expensive new cars and the joint is likely to be a fake; too many pickups and it’s liable to be a dive. Balance is the key word.” Wade Clark Roof writes on this side of barbecue, “Like in any liminal moment or setting, old boundaries tend to lose force and a new basis of social solidarity emerges... ‘A good barbecue place might be the one place you’ll find Southerners of all descriptions—yuppies, hippies, and cowboys, Christians and sinners, black and white together.”103

Despite barbecue’s origins in the mass enslavement of Africans, barbecue has always been a part of the progression of Southern history toward equality for all. In Virginia slaves gained some autonomy by raising “their own livestock, and they would frequently barbecue one of their pigs for their own entertainment.”104 These freedoms were “greatly curtailed and then put to an end altogether as a result of two notable slave revolts—Gabriel’s Rebellion in Henrico County in 1800 and Nat


Turner’s Rebellion in Southampton County in 1831—both of which involved slave barbecues used as a cover for planning the uprising.”  

Barbecue’s involvement in Jim Crow is behind it barbecue being called “…raceless…during the Jim Crow period, many such joints were among the few places where black and white southerners could eat together.”

Barbecue does not only provide a bridge between the barriers of race in the South, but religious barriers as well. Marcie Cohen Ferris asks: “Did a higher power place these Orthodox Jews in Memphis to test their faith? Is Memphis barbecue in some way responsible for the fact that one of the nation’s largest Reform congregations is also located in the city?” A popular barbecue chain from Memphis, Corky’s, is owned by reform Jewish couple, Berry and Don Pelts and the Orthodox congregation Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth holds “The World’s Only Kosher Barbecue Contest.”

Although the Jews and Christians of the South have found many ways to share and support each other’s cultures, food is one of the many things that make them all Southerners. “Memphis Jews, like their Gentile neighbors, longed for the camaraderie that could only take place near a smoking


106 Andrew Warnes, Savage Barbecue: Race, Culture, and the Invention of America’s First Food (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2008), 102-103.


barbecue pit or at a table laden with a ‘mess of ribs’ and sides of coleslaw, baked beans, and potato salad.”

John Shelton Reed “once suggested half-seriously that if the South needs a new flag—as it surely does—we could do worse than a dancing pig with a knife and fork. You want to talk about heritage, not hate….That represents a heritage we all share and can take pride in. Barbecue both symbolizes and contributes to community.”

By looking at how barbecue is both a symbol of the South’s deep divisions, as well as the desire for Southern unity, we can show that desire for progress in the South is balanced by a reverence for history and tradition. Barbecue also shows the two belief systems of the South, the infusion of Southern Christianity and Southern cultural practices, and the devotion to both. Stephen Smith writes, “… the barbecue ritual is the perfect antidote for overcoming the pessimism and sense of failure inherent in the burden of Southern history.” In the mortmain culture of the American South, perhaps nothing represents these hopes, and Southern pride, more than the pig and pork barbecue. The Good Shepherd Lutheran Church’s statue represents the Southern belief that “direct and dynamic access to the Lord is open to all.” When you ask, "Why the Pig?" at the Good Shepherd Lutheran church in Virginia Beach, they answer, “The pig in our statue is an illustration of God's desire


to include the whole world in the plan of salvation...all of heaven rejoices when “outsiders” become “insiders,” and those who are lost are found – Jews, Gentiles, lambs, and pigs alike.” 113

CHAPTER 4

MEAT AS RITUAL, THE SMOKEHOUSE & GRILL, COOKING OUTDOORS AND THE ASSERTION OF WHITE MALE PATRIARCHY

In the United States, the identity of the cook, the location of the preparation, and how the meal is served, reflects beliefs in traditional hierarchies and the ritual separation of the gender spheres. The roots of the pit barbecue ritual come from the forced African diaspora to the southeastern United States and the Caribbean, but when barbecue crosses race boundaries, it remains a male gendered activity in southern culture. Those Southern women who do barbecue can be considered the exception which proves the rule. While domestic cooking is a symbol of being supportive and nurturing, “public and outdoor cooking with a male head is important because it reaffirms the traditional social order, the unity of all things past and present.”114 Where eating barbecue is a symbol of Southern identity, preparing it is a ritual that reaffirms the white Southern male’s place in Southern society and the maintenance of divisions between masculine and feminine spheres:

In many ways, the Barbecue Eucharist serves as the perfect metaphor for understanding contemporary Southern society...The community values represented by the high priest cooks and the dedication of their congregations suggest that the rhetorical ritual of barbecue, characterized by hyperbole and

boastful humor among friends, may also serve to further human understanding and humanitarian values among the faithful.\textsuperscript{115}

To look at barbecue as a ritual that reasserts divine-sanctioned male patriarchy and affirms community values, this chapter engages Rebecca Swenson's study of presentations of male cooking. One way in which male cooking is separated from domestic cooking is that it is presented as "specialized" or "professional." One of the aspects of pit barbecue that makes its makers stand out as craftsmen, and its consumption a special occasion, is the amount of time it takes to do properly. Barbecue competitions highlight male competitiveness and barbecue is presented as arcane knowledge by carefully guarding ingredient lists and preparation techniques, the myth being that only men know how to slaughter and properly cook a pig slowly over coals until the smoke infuses into its meat.

When barbecue was prepared by enslaved African Americans, indeed all Southern food historically, it represented white domination over African Americans. However, outdoor cooking was also the creation of a male sphere of influence outside of the sacred hearth of the southern home. While women were in charge of the household, beyond that threshold was still the domain of southern men:

Cooking in this region is commonly women's work, but not so with pit barbecuing. It is viewed as a special act, set apart from regular cooking, requiring special knowledge, and hence a man's job. This ritual reversal of cooking responsibilities signals an enduring male authority and locates the

artistry and craft of turning pork into barbecue clearly within a quasi-sacred province for which only men may take charge...It is not uncommon to hear stories praising the best barbecue cooks in a community and conferring upon them great respect and status, defining them as functional equivalents to a high priest officiating a sacred feast.\textsuperscript{116}

The Durkeheimian approach to religion establishes that if something can be profaned, we can treat it as sacred. Durkheim also brings out attention to the concept of sacred time and sacred space. There is no doubt that barbecue can be profaned. Several southern states hold on to blue laws to protect the sanctity of Sunday as a “day of rest,” but to preserve the sanctity of barbecue in 1986 South Carolina passed a “truth in the barbecue” law requiring restaurants to disclose whether they used authentic hardwood smoke or attempted to hoodwink the public with gas.”\textsuperscript{117} In the South, “God approves of barbecue... Just about every First Presbyterian church has a cookbook and, for sure, the biggest Southern Baptist and United Methodist churches in every city have one, and all have recipes for barbecue sauces.”\textsuperscript{118}

THE PRIESTS OF BARBECUE

The use of Eucharistic language to describe the barbecue ritual can be found used by poets, food writers, and scholars. James Applewhite’s poem, “Barbecue Service”


captures the trans-elementation of pig to barbecue: “...The transformation may take place/At a pit no wider than a grave...These weathered ministers/Preside with the simplest of elements.”  

119 Barbecue expertise is considered esoteric knowledge and “to be initiated into the mysteries of barbecue methods is the desire of everybody who has enjoyed communion with the product.”  

120 Barbecue sauce makers guard their recipes as closely as Coca-Cola and only share their secrets with a few lucky initiates. Those who unlock the secrets to moist, smoky barbecue are held in high regard, and one of the “areas of disagreement” amongst Southerners is what town can claim “the highest shaman” of barbecue. Southerners are quick to defend their preferences in pit master, Maude Andrews writes, that: “When Julian Ralph found 'the best cook in the West' in New Orleans he had not made the acquaintance of the Sheriff of Wilkes County, Georgia...The Sheriff of Wilkes is the patron saint of barbecue as it is known in Georgia.”  

121 Stephen Smith, "The Rhetoric of Barbecue: A Southern Rite and Ritual."  

122 Maude Andrews, "The Georgia Barbecue."  

Those men who have not been brought into the priesthood of barbecue makers will make pilgrimages to eat the smoked flesh. Southern food writer John Edgerton writes: "...having eaten barbecue in more than sixty restaurants in eleven Southern states and in Texas in 1985 alone, and having consumed it in countless other

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locations in and out of the South in a lifetime, I feel compelled to state candidly my personal preferences on the matter...I am an ecumenical pit follower who on occasion has found ecstasy in ribs, whole hog, beef brisket, chicken, mutton, goat...."123 Jeff Daniel Marion writes about sharing with his son “the common bond of barbecue brotherhood” by taking him to “that deep-down, soul-satisfying, ultimate barbecue, the wellspring where I would bring my son for communion.”124

It is hardly the first time that sacred food has been used as a boundary to symbolize the authority of males over tradition. Caroline Walker Bynum in her study of the significance of food to medieval holy women points out that communion within the church was exclusively a rite performed by males. However, in hagiography these women could challenge this authority by spitting up or refusing to consume communion. The work of Carol Adams125 126 suggests that meat consumption is frequently a symbol of patriarchy and that vegetarianism among women can be a rejection of male dominance. The Nation of Islam movement led by Elijah Muhammad in the 1950's and 60's was simultaneously a conversion to Islam and a rejection of white dominance, and they both were represented by the forsaking of pork products. In a literary rejection of southern male dominance, Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*127 has character Idgie, with the help

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of her African American friend Big George, symbolically barbecue the abusive husband, Frank Bennett, of their friend Ruth. They dispose of the barbecue by feeding it to the Georgian detective investigating Frank Bennett’s death and as he consumes his case he declares that it is the best barbecue he has ever had.

The impact of the Civil War, particularly on Southern constructions of gender, is profound and it leads us to the question of why so many fought for an institution that benefitted so few. Stephanie McCurry compares the rhetoric used by subsistence farmers and slave-owning plantation owners to demonstrate that: “Both group spoke of duty and responsibility towards their households, and both understood that marriage and manhood gave them these rights and obligations. The hardworking farmer, as master of his wife and children, spoke the same language as the master of a complex plantation household...Their shared identity as the male heads of households united them in unexpected ways that transcended social differences.”128 This powerful shared identity can be explored through the use of Eucharistic language to describe the ritual of barbecuing; where “the hog becomes the host for the community's communion.”129 The long association between males and meat in symbolic language of Western culture here represents a bond between men, one that continues to this day. Women are still more likely to be vegetarian then men and the association of vegetarianism and effeminacy is so strong that

when activists attempt to convince men to go vegetarian they often employ hyperbolic presentations of manhood in an attempt to make their sell.

**SACRIFICE & HISTORY**

Mary Douglas brings attention to "foods which are seen as necessary to the efficacy of the ritual";\(^{130}\) the bond-reaffirming ritual of church, family, or neighborhood cookouts or barbecues would be considered inefficacious, by many, if meat was not featured. When television's Lisa Simpson inquires of her father, Homer: "Dad! Can't you have some other type of party, one where you don't serve meat?" He replies, "All normal people love meat. If I went to a barbeque and there was no meat, I would say 'Yo Goober! Where's the meat?' I'm trying to impress people here, Lisa. You don't win friends with salad."\(^ {131}\) This commentary on social ritual highlights the perceived importance of meat in social rituals reaffirming familial or community ties. Even in the daily ritual of eating, the association of the "meat and three" plate with Southern comfort food, and comfort food in general, speaks to the pervasiveness of the idea that it is necessary you have meat to make a meal. The tradition of church picnics or “dinner on the grounds” shows how this belief resonates within church communities: "Dinner on the grounds...[is] a type of feast that celebrates the idea of divine blessing on a particular land and people...Feasts usually involve sacrifice, the ritual slaughter of an animal that invokes the divine.


Overtones of sacrifice remain in church suppers, where game and barbecue are the main dishes."\textsuperscript{132}

Southern religion evokes themes of blood, guilt, and sacrifice, which all reflect the South's particular history and the construction of the "model Confederate soldier, placing him through his blood sacrifice in a lineage of American patriots."\textsuperscript{133} This sacrifice and guilt-oriented theology fuels Southern life and Southern literature; the Southern "rage to explain is understandable, even inevitable, given the South's traditional place in the nation—the poor, the defeated, guilt-ridden member, as C. Vann Woodward has written, of a prosperous, victorious, successful family...he has often been preoccupied with Southern racial sin and guilt, with the burden of the Southern past...."\textsuperscript{134} This focus on the acceptance of guilt leads to an intense focus on individual conversion that overshadows the ritual of Communion, which is held rarely in most Southern churches, but the rhetoric of Communion and the remembrance of suffering resonates deeply in Southern culture. "[I]t is clear that public rites of Christian sacrifice were a critical component of southern Protestant cultures in the New South...the nobility of the Confederate soldier was measured by his loyalty to local family, protecting them from all enemies, even when the reasons for war was unclear."\textsuperscript{135} In literature, this "rage to explain" fuels the plot of


\textsuperscript{133} Chad E. Seales, \textit{An Industrial Confederacy Religion and Nationalism in a Southern Protestant Town, 1885-2006} (2007)

\textsuperscript{134} Samuel S. Hill et al. \textit{Encyclopedia of Religion in the South} (Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 2005)

\textsuperscript{135} Chad E. Seales, \textit{An Industrial Confederacy Religion and Nationalism in a Southern Protestant Town, 1885-2006} (2007)
Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* in which the burden of Southern history passed on to young Quentin Compson by Miss Coldfield is more than he can bare, taking his own life at the end of the novel. As he recalls the long nights listening to her tell the history of the Sutpens he thinks,

> It's because she wants it told...so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the war: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth.”

Wade Clark Roof explores themes of blood and communion in his piece on Southern barbecue and religion. “No blasphemy is intended when I say that loving Jesus and loving pigs have much in common: both types of love are expressed in feasts, and even more importantly, in both the act of eating is symbolically related to the crucial flow of vital life forces.” To add to Roof’s comparison of the themes of sacrifice in both the worship of Jesus and the obsession with barbecue, the idea that Jesus was a willing sacrifice, and the pig is frequently represented as more than willing to be put on the fire. In “An Ode to Pork” the anonymous author writes: “Sustainer of the South/The Pig doth yearn to sacrifice and serve.” The images of pigs that can be found in the South are endless, include “pigs with bibs, with knives and forks...a pig reclining in the skillet; another on a grill, drinking a beer”; indeed, many barbecue signs feature pigs with wide happy grins, as if to express their approval of

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their consumption. It is not rare to see pigs on signs, cooking and serving their brethren.

In the South the rhetoric of “blood” has been used as a way to discuss kinship and “the unity among people, especially in the face of an external threat.” As the idiom on kinship goes, “blood is thicker than water.” Blood is also a way to discuss divisions between races, class status, and ethnicities and the rhetoric of “blue blood” or blood “purity” has been used to support those divisions in the South. “This regional psychology would perhaps reach its apex in the veneration of the southern “soldier saint” who fought valiantly and spilled his blood on behalf of a way of life.”

Roof’s examination of the idea of sacrifice, blood, and barbecue, especially as embodied by the “southern ‘soldier saint’” can be seen reflected in writings on barbecue. “Near the site of a Civil War Surrender/...The graveplot stunned by the sun/In the woods,/We men still living pass the bottle./We barbecue pigs./The tin-roofed shed with embers/Are smoking their blue sacrifice/Across Carolina.” The connection of the sacrifice of confederate soldier’s lives in battle, and the pig being barbecued, represents how the South has been “baptized in blood,” both the blood of the enslaved, brought cruelly to the surface by whips and chains, and the “blood-


soaked battlefields that swallowed up a generation of young men.” With that said, it can be understood that when barbecue pit masters say things like “barbecue sauce is in my veins,” or “barbecue is in my blood,” they are invoking a language that expresses Southern commitments to the construction of its own mythic history, the invocation of blood to represent kinship and the South’s “guilt-oriented theology…which brought to prominence themes of sacrifice and atonement through the blood of Christ.”

BARBECUE TIME; SACRED TIME

Hog killings and the associated barbecues were historically held in the late fall when the first frost enabled Southerners to butcher their hogs without fear of spoilage. This would be a time for more than just barbecue, as “everything but the squeal” was transformed into sausage, pon hoss, scrapple, cured hams, Brunswick stew, chitlins, pork rinds, hash, and pickled pig’s feet. Traditionally, even the pig’s bladder was inflated as a balloon, for the children to play with. If a whole pig was slaughtered at any other time it was for a special event, such as the fourth of July, family reunions or a church-fundraiser. Even now, with mass-production and

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refrigeration, part of the significance of barbecue is that short-cuts cannot be taken; “The secret to barbecue is patience and more patience... it should be allowed to cook and drip for twelve hours over an outdoor fire of hardwood coals.” While the meat slowly cooks, one must be vigilant and frequently the pig is basted to keep the barbecue moist.

The amount of time to properly barbecue is enriched by the type of time involved in barbecuing. “A vigil-like atmosphere prevails as the meat cooks slowly...It is a time of watching and stroking fires, of telling and sharing stories. Even today, when backyard grills have taken over much of the barbecuing and turned it into a private or family-based activity, good old boys still come together to watch the pits overnight as they prepare meals for the Lions club, a church, or a political rally.” The sleep-less nights spent laboring over the slowly cooking pig are a physical initiation, young men will remember their first time, while seasoned-veterans remember the old and renew their devotion to the grey glowing coals.

THE PIT ALTER; SACRED SPACE

In some cases it is very easy to label the barbecue pit as a sacred space, especially if the church and the barbecue pit are one and the same. Barbecues are still a popular way to create fellowship and fundraise in many churches. “As far back as the 1830s,
churches in the vicinity of Owensboro\textsuperscript{148} were having barbecues as a social adjunct to their religious activities...The first recorded affair was at a Baptist church in 1834, but it was Catholic parishes that turned the casual practice into an annual affair... (“It takes teamwork to make good barbecue,” the whimsical explanation goes, and there's too much free will among Protestants to do it right.”)\textsuperscript{149} Despite the joke, it is hard to find a Christian denomination that does not have an annual cook-out or barbecue. In North Carolina, the Mt. Pleasant Presbyterian Church barbecue has been running for 27 years.\textsuperscript{150} The Richmond Hill United Methodist Church in Savannah has been running for 61 years, “a tradition that spans almost three generations” where “some people chose to eat at the church, others took their whole hams, chopped ham, Boston butts, whole racks of ribs, quarts of potato salad and apples home, while some probably did both.”\textsuperscript{151} Where church barbecues are important events, even when barbecue is separate from a church function, it still holds deep spiritual meanings, and strong connections to the terroir of the South. As discussed earlier, a certain atmosphere is expected of a barbecue restaurant; Lolis Eric Elie describes a South Carolina barbecue joint as a church dining hall off of church grounds:

\textsuperscript{148} Owensboro, Kentucky

\textsuperscript{149} John Egerton, \textit{Southern Food: At Home, on the Road, in History} (New York: Knopf, 1987), 115.


...I understand then why South Carolina barbecue places are set up this way...There are no private booths or small tables in these places because, as in church, there are only the friends that you've met and those that you haven't. In either case the thought of not sitting with your Christian neighbors is unheard of. And it's buffet style because, as at church, part of the point of serving food is to encourage fellowship and perhaps to allow cooks to bask in the warm feeling all cooks get when diners ask for seconds or thirds.\textsuperscript{152}

In addition to the expected atmosphere of the barbecue joint, the pit also has its own significance. "The pit qualifies as a sacred space of sorts, and hence is usually covered when not in use. When in use it is a place of awe and mystery, the primordial depths from which things come. Amid the smoldering logs and smoke steaming from the bottom of the pit, magical forces turn the raw meat into something mouthwatering and delectable."\textsuperscript{153} The physical dimensions of the barbecue pit depend on the size of the crowd in attendance: “The barbecue pit was usually a long, shallow trench dug in the earth. It was four to six feet wide and...might run up to two or three hundred feet in length.”\textsuperscript{154} Maude Andrews paints this picture of the pit side, “...like the great ebony organ arises his deep resonant voice, and so religious and solemn are his refrains that as he lifts the great logs into the pit one might fancy him some barbaric high priest feeding the sacrificial fires.”\textsuperscript{155} In the South, pits and smokehouses are all thought to have

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unique flavor personalities, imbued as they are with their specific geography and the memory of many feasts; “Southern barbecue is the closest thing we have in the U.S. to Europe’s wines or cheeses; drive a hundred miles and the barbecue changes.”

CHAPTER 5

HUNTING AS LIVED RELIGION: SEEKING MEAT, SEEKING GOD

In the South, hunting a wide variety of game remains popular:

...Lindsey’s Barbecue, [which was] started by Church of God in Christ Bishop D.L. Lindsey in 1955...is a teetotaling house of barbecue exotica—not just beef and pork, but duck, turkey, goat, rabbit, deer, beaver, raccoon, and whatever else local hunters and others bring in to be custom-cooked.¹⁵⁷

Despite this variety, no hunting season is as singled-out as deer hunting. A profound symbol in Christianity and a popular subject in the South, the deer represents a nature-based Christianity, that is masculine in description and an alternative to the worship found within the four walls of a church. Pull off a Southern highway, preferably one a good distance from a major city and go to the truck stop, there you normally find a collection of t-shirts with statements such as: "And on the SIXTH day GOD created HUNTING,"¹⁵⁸ "There's a place for all God's creatures ...Right next to the Potatoes & Gravy!,"¹⁵⁹ and "Southern by Birth, Deer Hunter by the Grace of God."¹⁶⁰ These t-shirts frequently include images which overlap Christian symbols with symbols of the Confederacy and images of hunting and animals, linking the sacrifice of the animal to the themes of sacrifice present in Civil War


remembrance. There is a comedic element to these t-shirts but they reflect an important aspect for many southern hunters, their beliefs in the land, history and God.

Samuel Snyder’s article “New Streams of Religion: Fly Fishing as a Lived Religion of Nature” examines how many outdoorsmen use “terms such as religious, spiritual, sacred, divine, ritual, meditation and conversion. Further, drawing on religious terminology, fly fishers will refer rivers as their church and to nature as sacred.”161 This language all can be found surrounding deer hunting, and many other recreational pursuits. Christian deer hunters have a wide field of literature and many organizations which they can join. Some devotional hunting books include *A Look at Life from a Deer Stand Devotional* by Steve Chapman, *Deer Hunter’s Devotional: Hunting for the Heart of God* by Sean Jeffries162 and *Parables of the Deer: A Journey Toward Christian Maturity* by Carl Schmuland.163 Although organizations exist nationwide, specifically Southern organizations include: The Fellowship of Christian Hunters in Pulaski, Tennessee;164 Christian Sportmen’s Fellowship from Atlanta, Georgia; The CrossHeirs Retreat Center in Humphrey, Arkansas165 and the Christian Whitetail Hunters of Lindside, West Virginia.166

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Similar to interpretations of the pig as a symbol of the Gentiles, the deer has long been a symbol in Christianity and a particularly potent one for male Christians. Saint Hubert's, Saint Giles's and Saint Gregory of Tours' hagiographies all include mystical interactions with deer. The deer, or stag or hart, appears in the Old and New Testament multiple times; this passage from Psalms is particularly popular with hunters, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God."\textsuperscript{167} The parallel these hunters draw between themselves and their need and desire for God in their lives, and the deer's need and desire for water, represents something more complicated than a human-nature dynamic based on domination. Again, the language of the sacrifice is used to talk about the loss of life involved in hunting: “When people buy meat in the store, what they’re paying for is the comfort of denial...They don’t know that the harvest yokes, brings you closer to your prey and that, after the cold and day’s length and the hunger and the bloodrush, the weight of your need to give thanks for the animal’s life can feel so profound that you fall to your knees. They don’t know the first hand meaning of sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{168}

Robert Orsi understands religion as “a network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages and many different sacred figures together. These relationships have all the complexities—all the hopes, evasions, love, fear,
denial, projections, misunderstandings, and so on—of relationships between humans.”¹⁶⁹ This understanding of religion is useful in that it captures both the give and take that occurs between an individual and their faith, and opens up the definition of religion to include any symbol and ritual that an individual uses to mediate their relationship to their concept of the divine. “The key questions concern what people do with religious idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them, and how, in turn, men, women, and children are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making as they make these worlds.”¹⁷⁰ One outlet for religious expression in the American South is hunting, an activity mostly dominated by males, this pursuit when framed in spiritual terms, can offer a socially acceptable alternative to Sunday morning church for the devoted hunter.

RAISED AS A DEER HUNTER

Initiation into the religion of southern male outdoorsmen is captured in picture books such as My First Deer or My First Hunt, as well as trophies in the form of mounted heads or antlers. The first kill is frequently described in language that mirrors sexual initiation, so that references to a young man’s “first time” can be talking about a date or a deer hunt. Christopher Mohar writes about this aspect of deer hunting in his piece, “Communion.” The first hunt in this community “…is


suppose[d] to happen on the third weekend in November, the autumn after you turn twelve...Like losing your virginity, everyone was doing it but me. We talked in the football locker room—sizes and numbers, secret techniques, clandestine locations.”¹⁷¹ Unlike sexual initiation, a man’s first deer does not receive the censure from the church that their sexual exploits would receive. Ted Ownby writes about the culture of masculinity in the South which “was an intensely competitive status system in which the most prodigious drinker or the strongest arm wrestler, the best tale teller, fiddle players, or log roller, the most daring gambler, original liar, skilled hunter...was accorded respect by others.”¹⁷² This male culture was decidedly separate from the sacred home and ideas of Christian piety that existed simultaneously with these recreational activities. However, few men wanted to fully embrace one, at the exclusion of the other. “If we see hunting as situated in an arena where the two extremes of Southern culture—masculine combativeness and evangelical self-control—were in conflict, we can understand the hunt’s function as a respectable outlet for excitement and self-indulgence. Most men and boys wished not to reject either evangelical religion or male aggressiveness but to find a way to balance the two.”¹⁷³

In many religions rituals are used to mark life events: birth, coming-of-age, weddings, and death, framing a person's whole existence in terms of their faith.


Some Christian deer hunters in the South layer their commitment to hunting onto the rituals of Christianity. One grandmother, Nanette W., recounts the story of her grandson’s baptism, and the gift she gave him. For each of her grandchildren she gave a bible cover for the scripture they receive from their parents on their day of baptism. When her daughter chooses a camouflage cover, at first, to Nannette, “It seemed a little irreverent to me.” However, she comes around to the idea of camouflage bible covers:

…the more I think about it, maybe it’s time for us to all get camo covers for our scriptures. Camo is rugged. It can take the challenges of last-days living. It doesn’t come out once a week on Sunday and go back to its spot on the shelf on Monday. Camo is for every day. Camo goes everywhere. That’s exactly where the Lord wants us to take his word—everywhere! Everywhere we go He wants to go too.175

This story of Nannette's grandson's baptism is not the only story of religious life events marked by symbols of the hunt. More common than hunting themes being present in baptisms, is hunting related gear for infants. Nursery decals reading “To go to sleep I count antlers, not sheep,”176 hunting-themed onesies, bibs, socks and hats, and camouflage crib covers can all be found. On top of this gear, hunting baby shower themes feature hunting-themed shower invitations, hunting-themed decorations and hunting-themed cakes, not to mention target shooting games for


the guests.\(^{177}\) As a child gets older, the kill of the first deer is a celebrated occasion. Normally, the first deer is killed somewhere between the ages of eleven and sixteen, but accounts from adults experiencing their first kill are just as poignant as those who were born into hunting. Different families in the South have different ways of celebrating the first kill, but it is always a special occasion. As life moves on, weddings can be celebrated with camouflage formal wear,\(^{178}\) taxidermy, and deer hunting wedding bands.\(^{179}\) In remembrance of the committed deer hunter, camouflage urns\(^{180}\) and caskets,\(^{181}\) and stone memorials etched with peaceful deer scenes exist for the deceased.\(^{182}\) Life events can be marked with the symbols of hunting, just as hunting can be a life event.

**TAKING SIGHT**

Churches in areas with strong hunting cultures, such as the American South, recognize the spiritual significance of the hunt to the hunters of their community. In Louisiana, “Bayou Black resident Trent Ellender likes the idea of blessing local hunters, just like local churches do in the spring for the area’s Blessings of the

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In West Augusta, Virginia, the “West Augusta United Methodist church has been holding its annual “Hunters Service” each year since the early 1960s.” This services pulls in “…about 65 people…Of this group, between 15 and 20 were church members and the rest were visitors. A large group of hunters came from Pennsylvania and others came from the Tidewater area in Virginia. There were also a number of local people who weren’t church members.” At West Augusta Methodist Church, they pray not only for the safety of the hunters but also in hope that the hunters will feel God’s presence while out in the woods. After the service, the church holds a fellowship meal where “church members and local visitors…talk to each other… They hug the men and greet them warmly, almost like family, illustrating that members of a small, rural church have found a way to reach out to others – even those who only show up once or twice a year.”

The blessing of the hunters may be a newer tradition in churches such as the West Augusta United Methodist Church, but the tradition of blessing the hounds in fox hunting is “a practice that dates back to the sport’s origins.”

The blessing typically occurs around November 3rd, the feast day for Saint Hubert.


188 Patron Saint of hunter
Iroquois Hunting Club from Lexington, Kentucky, prides itself on “upholding the hunt’s centuries-old traditions, from the ritual riding attire to a pre-hunt toast of port or sherry served in silver stirrup cups.” Although these different services vary in levels of formality, the spirituality of the hunt and the Southern connection to animals and the land is apparent in all.

WORSHIP IN THE WOODS

Young men who have killed their first deer are “blooded,” a reference to the tradition of smearing the blood of the deer on the face of the hunter. This ritual, like many Southern rituals, has multiple origin stories reflecting the convergence of the multiple cultures of the South. Some hunters attribute the ritual to the influence of the Native American; others trace it back to the medieval veneration of St. Hubert, patron saint of hunters. This ritual marked both bonds between the members of the hunting party and an initiation into manhood, particularly the idea of the Southern man as the head of the household. William Elliot writes about one new initiate of a hunting party preparing to clean the deer blood off his face. His fellow hunters cried out “‘Wash it off!...who ever heard of such a folly. He can be no true sportsman, who is ashamed of such a livery’” and he was also warned that bad luck would befall his hunting endeavors. More important than the superstitions involved with this tradition is the language Elliot uses to describe the return of the man from the

189 Nicolas W. Proctor, Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2002) qtd. William Elliot

190 Nicolas W. Proctor, Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2002) qtd. William Elliot
hunt to the domestic sphere. “Thus beset...he wore his bloody mask to the close of
the long day’s sport, and sooth to say, returned to receive the congratulations of his
young and lovely wife, his face still adorned with the stains of victory.”191 The
separation of male and female spheres, the home and the woods, meant that,
“because of its physical and ideological sphere from the domestic sphere, the hunt
provided an effective testing ground for new male members of a community.”192 If a
male proved himself in the woods it was a sign he was able to take up the mantle of
duty and responsibility to his household.

In Faulkner’s short story “The Old People,” we return to themes of history, sacrifice
and the supernatural. Sam Fathers, the son of a Choctaw chief and a slave girl,
takes Isaac McCaslin, the grandson of plantation owner Carothers McCaslin, out to
kill his first deer. The scene begins in late November; Sam Fathers is standing
behind Isaac, “as he had been standing when the boy shot his first running
rabbit...Then the buck was there. He did not come into sight; he was just there,
looking not like a ghost but as if all light were condensed in him and he were the
source of it....”193 After he takes the shot, he “drew Sam Father’s knife across the
throat and Sam stooped and dipped his hands in the smoking hot blood and wiped
them back and forth across the boy’s face...the white boy, marked forever, and the
old man sired on both sides by savage kings, who had marked him, whose bloody

191 Nicolas W. Proctor, Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia,

192 Nicolas W. Proctor, Bathed in Blood: Hunting and Mastery in the Old South (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia,
2002)

hands had merely formally consecrated him to that which, under the man’s
tutelage, he had already accepted...joining him and the man forever.” Like the
barbecue ritual, here we find both white racist projections on the character of Sam
Fathers, as well as subtle interracial respect, as it is understood that multiple
generations of McCaslin men have learned the skills and traditions of hunting from
Sam Fathers and respect the knowledge he has to share.

LAYING PRONE

If you can imagine the feeling of fresh hot blood on your face or just your hands you
understand that hunting is a whole body experience incorporating the need for
stillness, the silent motions, and the tension from head to toe as one lets out a
steady breath and pulls the trigger. Hunters, especially those who field dress their
deer, still prefer to hunt in cold weather to decrease concerns about the meat
spoilage. For these hunters, the cold is also an unforgettable part of the hunting
experience. In Christopher Moher's piece on deer hunting he describes his hands
being so cold they stick to the metal muzzle of the gun, which he contrasts to the
moment after the kill, when “[t]he blood steams. Let it wash over your hands.”¹⁹⁴ No
matter how one field dresses a deer, or any animal, certain procedures always have
to be followed to avoid contaminating the meat. The physical boundary between the
hunter and their prey becomes hard to define when the hunter's hands are covered
in blood as he works carefully to remove the organs and prepare the animal to be
hung to dry. This level of intimacy experienced with the deer, with food, is

expressed in poems and prayers for the cleanest shot possible and the deer’s peaceful departure, as well as images that depict hunters, giving thanks in the woods by the animal’s side.

SAYING GRACE

The demarcating of sacred space and sacred time, religious and secular, can be useful for analysis, but the times when belief is the most potent are frequently the times it is least likely to be noticed: when it is called on in an instant of grief or fear, or jubilation. The murmur of the rosary when the power goes out and the storm is hitting; the believer’s pleas for employment; the supplications for peace; the giving of thanks for the health of a loved one and the knee-jerk prayers in moments of fear, not to mention the daily quiet graces before a meal and the gratitude of a hunter when he realizes he can feed his family that evening. If we do not address religion in the moment, religion in the most basic of human struggles and triumphs, than what we are studying is the church, not faith. The difference between the institution and traditions, and how an individual negotiates that tradition into their faith and daily life, is the difference between religion, and religion-as-lived. Jackson Landers, a father struggling to provide for his family, tells the story of his first hunt, and the miracle that occurred that day. At the beginning of this story, Landers’s dog, Simon, has a spinal injury and Landers is struggling with the decision to put Simon down. This is what happened to Landers after he made his shot:
I was grateful to the deer that I killed. As the time, I had very little money for groceries, and we needed the meat badly. My gratitude increased tenfold after I realized that Simon had been cured. What I never felt that day was guilt. Having just witnessed a miracle set in motion by my shot at the deer, it was in fact the happiest day of my life thus far. Magic and miracle volunteered to intertwine themselves into my hunt, and since that time they have never really left.

Many hunters feel this “magic and miracle” in their hunt, and also take pleasure from the ability to bring home meat to their families. After providing for their families, hunters will turn around and hunt for others. In every state in the South, and almost every state in the United States, programs such as “Hunters for the Hungry” exist for outdoorsmen to help out those in need with their game. Even without the need for hunting to supplement a grocery budget, or any limitation of meats available, venison still has its following:

Your local grocer stocks the flesh and bones of cows, pigs, goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, geese—some of which, praise be, are raised free of chemicals and confinement and are nearly as free to romp and roam as, well, a whitetail deer. Yet despite all of this, some of us still choose to kill a deer, disassemble its limbs, fuss over freezing methods and trade recipes with hunting buddies like ladies planning a church bazaar.

The relationships between friends and the bond forged between generations of grandparents, fathers, and sons, as well as mothers, wives, and daughters gives


special significance to this ritual for all hunters, but for Christian hunters, the hunt for the next deer, the next meal, can also be a search for the heart of God.\textsuperscript{197}

**IN CLOSING, PUTTING PRACTICE ON THE TABLE**

In Mary Douglas’s introduction to the anthropology collection, *Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities*, she cites Amatya Sen’s “...study of the four great famines in Bangladesh, Bengal, Sahel, and Ethiopia...” which “demonstrates the famines cannot be explained by food shortages: famines are liable to occur with food harvests and even in prosperity. People die of starvation in front of food-filled shops.”\textsuperscript{198} This volume published in the 1980s was compiled based on the idea that the study of foodways is necessary. “To be effective in our good intentions to the hungry we need to stop thinking about food as something that people desire and use apart from social relations. The idea of separate physical needs can be demythologized. Then we can stop wondering in amazement how hunger arises in the midst of plenty.”\textsuperscript{199} In the United States, the land of plenty, we too have families that go hungry, despite our overwhelming abundance compared to the rest of the world. The plethora of issues that surround food is endless, but to address them, we have to address food in a more complicated manner, not just nutrition, but the society that surrounds the food as well. Just like

\textsuperscript{197} Sean Jeffries, *Deer Hunter’s Devotional: Hunting for the Heart of God*. N.p.: (CreateSpace Independent Platform, 2010)

\textsuperscript{198} Mary Douglas, *Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984)

\textsuperscript{199} Mary Douglas, *Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984. 35)
food, religion is for many people in the United States, a part of their struggles and triumphs, their anxieties and their celebrations, their most basic of needs and their highest callings.

If, “[t]he disciplined study of any subject is, among other things, an assault of self-evidence, on matters taken for granted,” scholars of lived religion should take a recipe out of anthropology’s cookbook and embrace the methodology of studying a single commodity. The study of lived religion and the anthropological “follow the thing” approach suggests that perhaps the most powerful symbols and rituals in our lives are those performed without a second thought. From where we place our silverware, to what we eat for dessert, food is a marker of who we are, where we come from and the history in our own backyards. This thesis tries to demonstrate some ways in which food can be employed in a discussion of religion, both regionally and in the context of human migration. The everyday nature and special importance of food in culture makes it a window into people’s daily lives, as well as a way of addressing the beliefs they hold most dear.

In addition to the discussions present in this thesis, food studies can be used to talk about religion and memory; the connections between food and sex; how food relates to speech and metaphor; the ethical debates surrounding contemporary foodways; and how food “epitomizes the ecstasy of ‘Paradise’ and the torments of ‘Hellfire’ and

Food takes all theoretical approaches and roots them in the body and daily life. These attributes also make food a powerful way to teach and a path toward common ground from the most opposing world views. Dr. Corrie Norman's piece “Savoring the Sacred: Understanding Religion through Food” reflects on the vividness of her students' experiences when they are connected to religious practitioners through food.

What I hope to do as a religious studies professor is to heighten their awareness...to train their palates in a sense. I want to help them understand how the rumblings of their stomachs and hearts might be related. I want to help them get a taste for the depths of flavor that religions across time and culture express. I want them to become aware of the bountiful variety of religious expression in the United States today.

The ways people eat and the ways they construct their beliefs are similar in that the variety is endless. There are traditions that survive through the ages, as well as constant innovation, people go to extremes, people fuse things into something new, people preach and teach what they believe in. If we want our students, our readers, and ourselves to understand the religious lives of others, then we must have something to sink our teeth into, leaving behind the rhetoric of boundaries, and appreciating the different ways people make their daily lives special, spiritual, and survivable.


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