

Christianity and Vegetarianism

ONE WONDERS whether Max Heindel read Tertullian, the Church father living in the third century after Golgotha. Neither man minced words when it came to meat eating. Heindel experienced “disgust at the thought of making our stomachs the burying ground of the carcasses of murdered animals.” Tertullian brings God into the picture: “It is not consistent with truth that a man should sacrifice half of his stomach only to God—that he should be sober in drinking, but intemperate in eating.” Of the carnivore and glutton he charges: “Your belly is your God, your liver is your temple, your paunch is your altar, the cook is your priest, and the fat steam is your Holy Spirit; the seasonings and the sauces are your chrisms, and your belchings are your prophesizing...[such] a grossly-feeding Christian is akin to lions and wolves rather than God. Our Lord Jesus called Himself Truth and not habit.” Actually, there is a Christian tradition of vegetarianism, dating from the time of the Essenes, whose mission was to prepare a pure physical vessel for the Archangel Christ by, among other things, abjuring the carnal diet. Clement of Alexandria (AD ?150-?215) wrote: “It is far better to be happy than to have your bodies act as graveyards for animals...The unnatural eating of flesh meats is as polluting as the heathen worship of devils, with its sacrifices and its impure feasts; through participation in it a man becomes a fellow eater with devils...Those who use the most frugal fare are the strongest, the healthiest and the noblest.”

The founder of Methodism and Wesleyanism, John Wesley, wrote in 1747: “Since the time I gave up the use of flesh-meats and wine, I have been delivered from all physical ills.” Partly inspired by Isaiah’s vision of the Kingdom of Peace, where “on the new earth, no creature will kill, or hurt, or give pain to any other” (Is. 11:6-9), Wesley further taught that animals “shall receive ample amends for all their present sufferings.”

What’s the news here? In a sense, nothing. The same breaking news has broken out before, in different times,

in other climes. Vegetarianism is not what its detractors describe as the modern invention of extremists, martyrs, and misfits. But what is new is that some Christians have banded together to form the Christian Vegetarian Association to encourage and support living a scripturally obedient life, which includes being harmless as doves. Its members believe that vegetarianism can add meaning to one’s faith, aid in one’s spirituality, enhance one’s moral life, and demonstrate responsible Christian stewardship for all God’s Creation. Such a diet, the members maintain, “is ecologically sound, helps alleviate world hunger, and benefits human health.”

The Association’s website (*christianveg.com*) cites the apostle Paul’s words that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), and “it follows that we should care for our bodies as gifts from God.” In fact, our bodies are largely gifts from ourselves. Best we give ourselves what we want to receive. How? By eating wisely. According to the American Dietetic Association’s comprehensive review of the scientific literature, vegetarian diets are associated with a reduced risk for obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus, colon cancer, lung cancer, and kidney disease. In contrast to the predominantly plant-based Mediterranean diet that Jesus ate, modern Western diets (heavily laden with animal products) put people at risk.

The difficulty of surrendering flesh foods is shown by the results of an April 2000 survey of 1,244 adults, reported by Neal Barnard, M.D. in the Summer 2003 issue of *Good Medicine*: One in four refused to give up meat for a week, even if they were paid \$1,000! Can meat be addicting? From the occult viewpoint, it can feed the passions, which themselves are addicting. From the physiological/psychological angle, meat may contain opiates. Cheese definitely does, as Dr. Barnard states. The cheese protein *casein* breaks down into a class of opiates called *casomorphins*. The upshot? If we eat sanely, we exercise mind over matter—and appetite. The mind, working through the intestines of the brain, determines what goes into their ventral counterpart. □