

# ZADOK *REVIEWS*

## *Eating Heaven*

Simon Carey Holt, Acorn Press,  
Brunswick East, 2013

**Merridie Costello**

There are few people better equipped to write a book on 'spirituality at the table' than Simon Carey Holt. Especially when it involves the tables of Melbourne, and the food culture which all of us who live here proudly love.

Simon Carey Holt is a man of many gifts. He began his working life at 16 as a trainee chef, and then moved to studying theology, finding a passion for spirituality and discovering what is sacred in life. He now lives in the heart of the city of Melbourne, where he is a minister at the Central Baptist Church, and teaches theology.

From his family's apartment overlooking the colourful laneways of the city Holt emerges as a chronicler of daily life, with an eye for what makes food good, and what each table he sits at offers in his search for meaning and community. Spirituality, as he writes of it in this book, is the awareness of the sacred in the midst of life – in the ordinary, daily, routine things we do and the way we create fellowship with others.

I was captured from the outset, as *Eating Heaven* starts with the story of his humble home of origin in suburban Melbourne with the laminated narrow table at which the family of six sons would be fed, disciplined and nurtured. There was an intimate familiarity about life in an evangelical home in the '60s that resonated so closely with my own. I too shared a table with five siblings and imbibed faith through the sacredness of family worship and prayers at meal's end. I too saw my mother as less a lover of cooking than of the people who sat at our table, or sought counsel in our home.

From this heart-warming start the chapters move to cover a range of contexts: backyard barbeque hospitality, cafés, five-star dining, festive gatherings, work tables and the table at the heart of Christian church life. In each context Holt explores what is being valued, and what builds community and gives people meaning in their lives. There is the deft hand of a pastor at work in many of the conversations that are captured.

Each chapter concludes with a recipe which comes from the context that has just been described. To say that it enriches the experience is an understatement. For example, I felt like I had eaten 'Mum's Chocolate Pudding' and the 'Raspberry and White Chocolate Pavlova' simply by devouring the words.

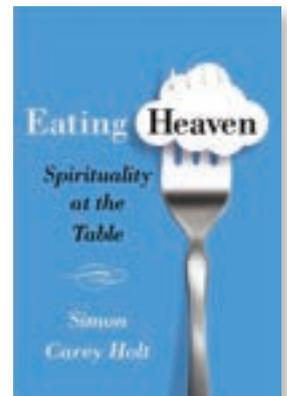
One cannot help but be struck by the recent rise of cooking shows with their competitive 'plating up', international gourmet delights or Nigella-ish gastronomic seduction. Holt acknowledges the complexity of writing about this topic in our gluttonous, privileged, food-obsessed culture. Not to mention the glaring injustice of the gross inequity of food distribution and supply in our globally-televised world.

In my eyes, *Eating Heaven* manages to tread the path of naming the dangers and excesses whilst still seeking to get to the heart of what is our essential human experience. No matter who we are or where we live we have to eat. And to do this well is not about the sad potential for excess and exclusion. Rather it is its opposite. It is to embrace the joyous inclusion and plentitude that is at the heart of the way Jesus embraced eating and being with others in his life. It is about taking the table seriously as a place to meet with others at a rich and life-enhancing level.

Simon Carey Holt has shared his heart here. I think *Eating Heaven* is a book that has been created by a genuine craftsman who knows and loves his material. It is a book to savour, to gift, to love. It will enrich every table in your life....

*'The table beckons... because, at its core, the table is about such fundamentally human things as intimacy and family, identity and communication, redemption and friendship, sustenance and celebration, beginnings and endings.'*

**Merridie Costello** lives in Elsternwick, Melbourne. She has worked with Urban Seed, associated with Collins St Baptist Church.



*Eating Heaven*