



Eating Heaven: Spirituality at the Table

by Simon Carey Holt

This is an easy, revealing and thoroughly enjoyable read about our place at the table and the table's place at the heart of family, community and culture. It evoked memories of my childhood and other significant events in my life as I sat around a table alongside friends, family and acquaintances – some I still eat with while others are long gone. And at the same time I felt a twinge of guilt that I haven't made more of my and my family's time at the table, or indeed recognised earlier the complex rituals, relationships and situations within which we prepare and consume nourishment for our bodies. Because, as Holt points out, this is where we find nourishment for the soul.

What does the dining table represent? While Holt is a Minister of Religion, he doesn't come at the subject with the intention of convincing us of his Christian viewpoint. Rather, he places the subject within the context of culture, ritual, tradition and family – which has something

to say to each of us regardless of our religious perspective.

The book would easily engage a wide audience, including those interested in food and eating, the place of food in our lives, spirituality in everyday life, families and relationships, community and modern Australian culture.

Holt describes a variety of tables at which he interacts with friends and strangers, intentionally or accidentally, often bringing a level of intimacy not found in any other place.

Holt explores where we eat, why we eat and with whom. I found the book enlightening and it moved me to be more aware and indeed curious about my own personal experiences at the table. For this is where our identity is formed, where we make meaning, where the sharing of 'iconic' food feeds our conversation, laced with a

generous dose of meaning, identity and values.

For every table he explores and illuminates for us, he offers a recipe – from his mother's simple chocolate pudding to the more complex Baumkuchen or 'tree cake' that he learnt to cook as an apprentice chef. Holt underpins his stories with a rich history of Australian eating places such as the café, the restaurant, and the multi-cultural table.

Our bodies crave for food, says Holt, while our souls crave for belonging. He easily convinces us that, religious beliefs aside, we will – and do - experience spirituality at the table.

Eating Heaven: Spirituality at the Table is published by Acorn Press and can be purchased at www.acornpress.net.au. RRP \$24.95 (also available in eBook format).

Reviewer: Wendy Rush