

*Is God a Vegetarian?* by Richard Alan Young

reviewed by [Stephen H. Webb](#) in the [December 2, 1998](#) issue

*By Richard Alan Young, Is God a Vegetarian. (Open Court, 187 pp.)*

The pastor of my church was surprised when I suggested that Adam and Eve were vegetarians. I was even more surprised by his insistence that I was wrong. Why do so few Christians--including clergy--know what the Bible has to say about animals? Why is the Bible's vision of an original and eventual vegetarian world seldom encountered in the church? Meat predominates at church potlucks. And even atheists believe, so goes the joke, that God gave us the right to eat meat.

Richard Alan Young, a professor of New Testament at Temple Baptist Seminary, has written an accessible and comprehensive book on vegetarianism. Without making outlandish claims, he sorts through the Bible's many references to animals and diet in order to articulate Christian vision of food. He takes as his principle a twist on an old saying: the unexamined meal is not worth eating.

The biblical story begins and ends with a noncarnivorous creation, but in between, God explicitly permits meat eating after the flood, Jesus eats fish, and Paul seems to condemn vegetarianism (1 Tim. 4:13). Can one come to a consistent theological position on this issue? Certainly, no Christian theologian can argue that the Bible condemns meat eating altogether. However, a good case can be made that vegetarianism is a valid and valuable way of anticipating the kingdom of God by practicing what God most intends for the world.

It is much easier to persuade people that vegetarianism is valuable than it is to empower them to change their lives. Young includes some recipes to help with that process. Nevertheless, although I agree with Young's reading of the Bible, I also think that the Bible is realistic about most people's ability to change their diet. While the Israelites ate manna, they continued to long for the fleshpots of Egypt. Dramatic change in our diet will come only when the church begins to take eschatology seriously and people come to see that vegetarianism is not a fad but the evidence of a total transformation--a conversion away from the values of this world and toward the world as God originally created it and will one day create it anew.