Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith

Fred Bahnson
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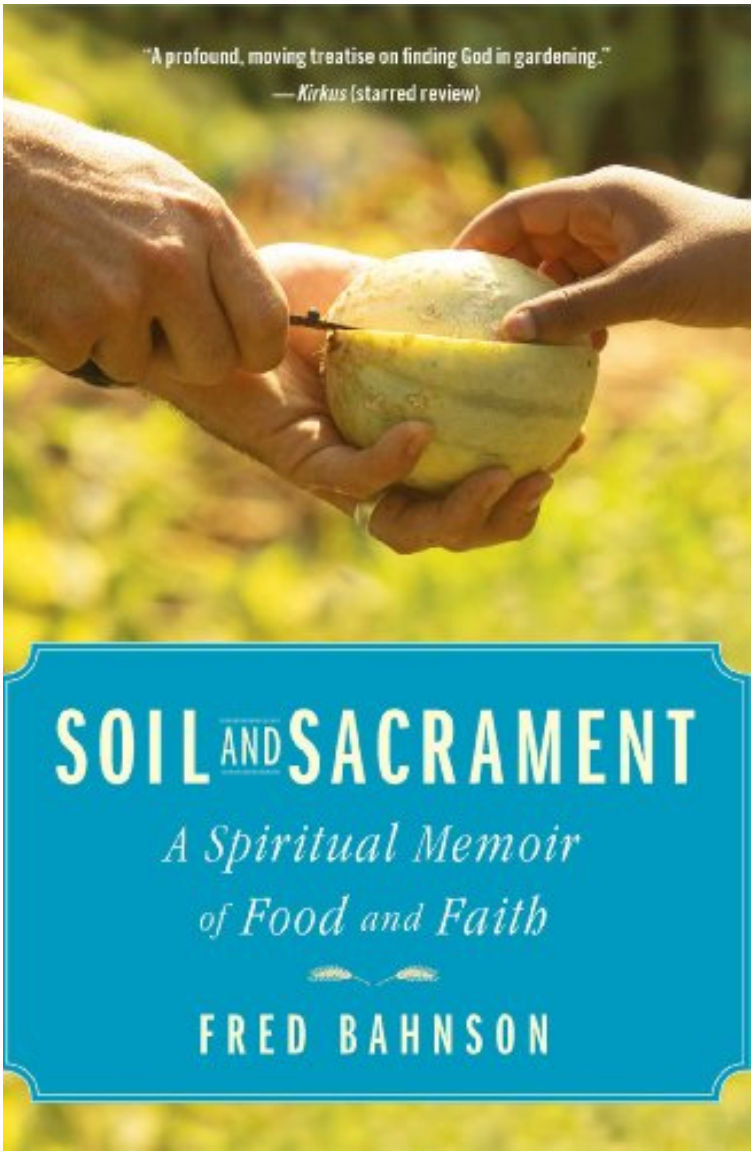

#97258 in Books Fred Bahnson 2013-08-06 2013-08-06Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.37 x 1.00 x 5.50l, .0 #File Name: 1451663307288 pagesSoil and Sacrament A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith | File size: 49.Mb

Fred Bahnson : Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Thoughtful and thought-provokingBy K. BrockA good read. A little slow start, but once I was engaged, it was quite interesting and thought provoking. Overall, I enjoyed it - interesting spiritual observations and experiences; well written, engaging style. Memorable, in a quiet way. Just a memoir, not a

tirade against the food industry, but it subtly brings into question why we have allowed ourselves to be so distanced from our food, and food sources.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Grateful for Bahnson's VoiceBy Nurya Love ParishI was so excited to read Soil and Sacrament that I pre-ordered it for Kindle so I didn't have to wait for the hardcover to ship. It's a combination of memoir and journalism, describing both Bahson's personal experiences as a church-based community garden manager and his visits to other faith-based gardens, including both Jewish and Christian communities. The pleasure of the book was twofold: the writing sometimes made me stop in my tracks just to admire his grasp of the craft; the content focused on what truly matters: right relationship with God, one another, and the earth, our home.My only quibble with Bahnson comes at the end of the book, when he describes what it takes to get started founding a garden like Anathoth or the others he visits. He devotes just a few pages in the Epilogue to this topic, which could easily be a book in itself. I know I'd love to read more on this topic and be connected with others pursuing this path. The good news is that Wake Forest Divinity School has hired Bahnson to direct their new Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative. Hopefully, we'll be hearing more from Bahnson: both the lyrical and the practical. I'll definitely be paying attention.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I love this book!By Cidney BarcellosAs I read the Prologue, it felt like my experience. I started a garden in 2009 at Davis United Methodist Church. At first it was so exciting to develop the 5/8 acre plot. I gave myself fully to developing the plots, planning an annual plant sale, creating a calendar for our fall fundraiser. The ground was hard clay and Bermuda grass. If I wasn't in the garden I was thinking about all the little details of making it go. My husband thought I was married to the garden. Our mission is to feed the hungry in our community. We have donated our harvest to Friday's Harvest at the Korean Church (a weekly give-away with the food bank) and to Davis Community Meals. God is the reason for this garden and has answered more prayers than I prayed. Donations of sheds, tools, equipment, and volunteers at the right time. I'm learning to let go and let God. And the results are so much better than just my ideas. It's a blessing.Thank you so much for writing this book. I'm loving every page I read.

Part spiritual quest, part agricultural travelogue, this moving and profound exploration of the joy and solace found in returning to the garden is inspiring and beautiful.A POWERFUL, PERSONAL STORY OF HOW GROWING AND SHARING FOOD PULLS US CLOSER TO GOD Like many seekers of the authentic life, Fred Bahnson sought answers to big questions like What does it mean to follow God? and How should I live my life? But after divinity school at Duke, Bahnson began to find answers not in a pulpit, but at the handle of a plow. After his agrarian conversion, Bahnson started a faith-based community garden in rural North Carolina to help its members grow real food and to feed his own spiritual hunger. Soil and Sacrament tells the story of how Bahnson and people of faith all over America are re-rooting themselves in the land, reconnecting with their food and each other, and praying with their very lives the prayer of the early Christian monks: We beg you, make us truly alive. Through his journeys to four different faith communitiesCatholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, and JewishBahnson explores the connections between spiritual nourishment and the way we feed our bodies with the sensitivity, personal knowledge, and insight shared by Wendell Berry and Bill McKibben. Soil and Sacrament is a book about communion in its deepest sensean inspiring and joyful meditation on what grows above the earth, beneath it, and inside each one of us.

A profound, moving treatise on finding God in gardening. (Kirkus s (starred))Fred Bahnson had me at the hairy vetch and crimson clover. He bumped me off the couch and into the garden even before I could finish the book. Im all for seekers who sit around asking, What does it mean to be fully alive? But its even better when they stop asking and start doing. Faith, it turns out, is not unlike a hand-cranked spreader. Works on all kinds of soil. Plants where you put it. Amen. (Rhoda Janzen author of Mennonite in a Little Black Dress)This book is profoundly, beautifully down to earth, which is almost certainly where we all need to spend more time on a planet in crisis. (Bill McKibben author of Oil and Honey and Eaarth)Fred Bahnson believes that faith is expressed in the work of our hands as well as our minds and hearts, and that in community we can meet the needs of a hungry world. After reading his beautifully written book, I believe these things, too, and see new ways to put my beliefs into action. Soil and Sacrament is about new lifefor ourselves, our descendants, and the earth on which we all depend. Read it, let it move you, and shelve it next to Wendell Berry, Annie Dillard, and Kathleen Norris. (Parker J. Palmer author of Healing the Heart of Democracy and A Hidden Wholeness)Soil and Sacrament is a journey of return toward the founding Christian fact: spiritual life is not divorced from natural life, it is natural life bowing to an extra-natural, life-giving, never-ending miracle. (David James Duncan author of The Brothers K and The River Why)This is a very moving as well as a wonderfully intelligent meditation on what is involved in care for our earth. Fred Bahnson succeeds in showing how our practices of cultivating the environment and producing our food can become an integral part of a gospel for all creation. In a culture obsessed with both growth and control, his spiritual insight is a gentle but clear challenge. (Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury)This is a spiritual memoir with real dirt under its fingernails, as deep and gritty and rich as well-tended soilor Holy Scripture. Fred Bahnson's vision matters, and the work he writes so beautifully and unsentimentally about has the power to change communities. An important and moving book. (Sara Miles author of Take This Bread and City of God)Like Anne Lamotts spiritual writing, Bahnsons essays introduce people of deep

faith, imprisoned pasts, ticklish humor, and hope-filled vision, farmer/priests being church by feeding the hungry and praying in the dirt. (Publishers Weekly)About the AuthorFred Bahnson is a writer, permaculture gardener, and the cofounder and former director of Anathoth Community Garden. The coauthor of Making Peace With the Land, his essays have appeared in Oxford American, Image, The Sun, Christian Science Monitor, and Best American Spiritual Writing 2007. He is the recipient of a Kellogg Food Community fellowship and a North Carolina Artist fellowship in Creative Nonfiction. He lives with his wife and three sons in western North Carolina and is the director of the Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative at Wake Forest University School of Divinity.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Soil Sacrament Prologue Cedar Grove, North CarolinaDecember 2008 Winter is my favorite growing season. Anyone can toss down a few seeds in June and get a crop, but it takes a disciplined hope to garden in the dark of December. And what rewards. After several frosts, plant starches become sugars. Carrots attain the sweet crunch of apples, and kale loses all hint of bitterness. Turnips become so sugary you can eat them raw. Mid-morning on the first Sunday in Advent, I stood beside the red-roofed barn and looked out at Anathoth Community Garden. Down the hill the greenhouse was shedding its frost in the first light. Along the creek sat the childrens playhouse, and beyond that the site of our future orchard. But the sight that always drew my eye was the wide expanse of the field itself, a wave-and-trough succession of raised vegetable beds lying dark and still in the low winter light, pregnant with life waiting to be born. Soon I would need to drive a mile down the road to the little Methodist church where my wife and sons would be arriving for the morning service, but first I needed to come here, to this five-acre piece of land that had come to feel like an extension of my own body. Over the past three years of working here I had grown attached to this garden and its people. They had fed me in so many ways. Perhaps too many ways. I walked downhill to the greenhouse, a Gothic arch structure where we grew most of our winter crops and started all our seed. Heated entirely by the sun and ventilated by wax pistons, it was off the grid. This was my favorite of winter places, my sanctuary; I could lose myself in here for hours. What a thrill I received each morning as I entered this congregation of plants, lit as if from within by the low winter sun. The world outside the greenhouse was nineteen degrees cold; dry and lifeless. Once I stepped across the wooden threshold, the temperature rose to a balmy forty, lush and humid and alive with the earthy aroma of plants seeking light. The soil here was deeper than in the rest of the garden, the color and consistency of chocolate sponge cake. Even on the coldest of winter days, black organic matter in the soil absorbed the suns heat and slowly released it at night, keeping the plants alive. The beds, each four feet wide and thirty feet long, were double-dug. While the topsoil of a rototilled garden descends a mere eight inches, our greenhouse beds reached a depth of at least two feet, mimicking the fertile, loamy soils of the American prairie or the Russian steppe. With such deep beds, roots have better access to water and minerals deep in the ground. Plants can be spaced closer together, quadrupling yield. Thousands of years ago the Greeks realized that plants grew better in mountain landslides. The deep soil there was loose and friable, allowing the roots easy access to nutrients. A double-dug bed is like an underground landslide. Roots flourish in such deep tilth, creating a vast subterranean network that feeds aboveground life. I spent much of my time at Anathoth preparing and working and thinking about the soil. There is an entire ecosystem in a handful of soil: bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, earthworms. Through their breeding and dying such creatures vivify the world. This pattern of relationships I find a captivating mystery; I love plants, but I am most attracted to the fervent and secret work that goes on beneath the surface. Soil is not dirt. It is a living organism, or rather a collection of organisms, and it must be fed. Soil both craves life and wants to produce more life, even a hundredfold. The true profundity of our soil was difficult to gauge. One day I slid my hand into one of the greenhouse beds. I gently pushed down and kept pushing until my arm vanished and my shoulder touched the soils surface. It had seemed then as if I could keep burrowing downward, until my entire body was swallowed by the warm, dark earth. Soil is a portal to another world. That Sunday morning I was alone in the garden. Anathoth was a food garden for the communityour sixty members worked the land in common and shared its bountyyet more and more I had found myself going there at such times to escape people. I was by nature reclusive, yet my role as Anathoths director required me to act as a public figure, putting on a smile and chatting up the members, who worked a minimum of two hours a week in exchange for produce. The truth was that I had less and less energy for peopleeven my own family. Increasingly I felt accosted by so many people needing something from me, and no matter how deeply I wanted to give them what they needed, all I wanted to do was withdraw. The Sunday morning service down the road at Cedar Grove United Methodist Church would begin soon, but I remembered that there were beds that needed cover cropping; I had a sudden desire to plant. Leaving the greenhouse I walked back up to the barn and reached for the blue hand-cranked seed spreader, opened a bag of rye, and poured in the seed. I mixed rhizobium inoculant into a bucket full of hairy vetch and crimson clover seed, added a few drops of water, and stirred them together with the rye. Vetch and clover are legumes, plants that form a beneficial relationship with rhizobium bacteria. Their roots would supply nitrogen not only to the rye but also to the crops that would follow in the rotation. Its a beautiful symbiosis: legume roots provide the bacteria with sugars and in exchange the bacteria fix nitrogen into tiny pink nodules that cling like barnacles to the legume roots. The bacteria and legumes serve one another. The rye stalk provides a structure for the legumes to climb, and ryes fibrous roots mine minerals from the subsoil, reaching ten feet down into the earth. Its a trinity of abundancerye, vetch, and clovereach freely giving up its body for the others nourishment, each dying so that the other

may live. I knew something of that sacrifice. For years I had labored for Anathoth, but only recently did I realize the toll it had taken on me and my family. There were too many days when I would come back to our farm and instead of being with the family who needed me, I would retreat to my little shack in the woods. My wife, Elizabeth, sacrificed her own needs for the needs of Anathoth, and mostly suffered my absences in silence. But our young sons were confused. Why does Daddy need so much time alone? they asked. I had started to ask that question, too. By early May the cover crops would be five feet tall. When the rye reached milk stage and the vetch and clover flowered purple and crimson, I would walk up and down the beds swinging a scythe, the stalks falling before me, the air growing redolent with grassy perfume, and then I would rake up the cuttings to make compost. First the green layer: fresh rye, vetch, and clover stalks. Then a brown layer: old hay or leaves. The third layer would be a dusting of garden soil, containing the spark of bacteria that would set this biological pyre aflame. In a week the tiny hordes inside the compost pile would expend their oxygen, slowing their combustion, and I would turn the pile with a pitchfork to give them air. All kinds of organic matter could go into a compost pile. Once I even composted a dead field rat; a few months later there was nothing but bones. I loved making compost. The bright green of freshly mown rye, vetch, and clover; steam arising from the pile on a cold morning; the smell of the forest floor in your hands. There is a secret joy, a kind of charity to be found in this act, transforming a pile of grass and dirt and old leaves into an offering of humic mystery. On those days I became a priest dispensing the elements to a microbial congregation. Lord, take these humble gifts: grass, leaves, soil. Make them be for us the body and blood of the world, holy vessels of self-emptying glory. All things come of thee, O Lord; and of thine own have we given thee. After several months of heating and cooling and turning, the pile of well-cooked humus would be ready to spread onto the soil. Into that I would plant Speckled Trout lettuce, Kuri squash, or Sugarsnap peas, which would feed the hungry people of Cedar Grove. The peoples hunger could be slackened, but it would never end, and all the while the secret life of soil would continue, the gift waiting to be found. Like a ceaseless hymn of praise, this cycle went on with or without you, winter and summer, rain and drought, seedtime and harvest, a process of creation beyond your control that had been in motion since the foundation of the world. It is a song of life that sings even when things around and within you no longer seem certain. I was beginning my fourth year as the director of Anathoth, and the experience had been deeply fulfilling and profoundly frustrating. The garden was a ministry of Cedar Grove UMC, but only a minority of the congregants worked there. Visitors came from around the country to learn how to build communities through working the land, but some church members stubbornly refused to have anything to do with the garden. Some were afraid of liability. Others feared the gardens racially inclusive vision for our town. I was weary of defending the project before our own church, but that wasnt the only thing. I was questioning what I had for years been certain was my lifes calling. After sowing the rye, vetch, and clover, I walked back again to the greenhouse and stood in the quiet air, letting the winter sun warm my bones. I would be a few minutes late for church, but I could still slip in. After all: when our Lord sought refuge, when his heart was troubled, it was not to the temple that he went to pray. It was to the garden. The nights frost evaporated from the broccoli heads like gauzy veils lifting from upturned faces. Dinosaur kale, Napoli carrots, Arcadia broccoli, Bronze Arrow lettucethese were our winter savings account, available to the garden members for free withdrawal. Carrots grew happily inter-planted with lettuce. Kale, broccoli, and cabbageall benevolent brassicasrubbed shoulders good-naturedly. Each crop cluster formed a dark green microclimate of contentment. The congregants of this tiny cathedral thrived in each others company. I could not always say the same for our little Methodist church down the road. The points of overlap between the church and garden were not always harmonious. Many did support the garden. Pastor Grace Hackney was one of Anathoths cofounders and often praised the garden in her sermons. The churchs accountant kept our books, others served on the advisory board, and some were regular volunteers on our Saturday workdays. As the gardens director, I was employed by the church as a minister of the land. But there was also a small group of naysayers on the churchs administrative council, those whose families had owned land here since the kings grants of the 1700s. They were threatened by new ideas like community gardens, and were adamant that the garden would receive none of the churchs money. I wrote grants and sought individual donations to fund Anathoths yearly budget, but when funds would arrive, inevitably someone would ask, with feigned piety, why didnt we just use that money to buy food and give it to the poor. But Anathoth was not just a hunger relief ministry. It was a whole new way to be a church. And therein lay the struggle. We took Anathoths mission from the book of Jeremiah: plant gardens and seek the peace of the city, and here at the beginning of my fourth year I think we had that mission half right. We had planted a lush and abundant acre of biointensive beds that provided our members with everything from arugula to Zapotec tomatoes; we had planted blueberry bushes, a native plants garden, and a greenhouseful of winter produce. We had planted the events calendar with biweekly potlucks and concerts, childrens programs and community service days for troubled teens. We planted so many things that churches from all over the South came to ask how they, too, could plant such gardens and seek the peace of their city. Anathoth had sprouted from an empty field, and on its best days it afforded a glimpse of the messianic feast, Jesuss abundant smorgasbord where all were fed. But Id begun to question if feeding people was truly my calling. I couldnt bear to see the crestfallen faces of Elizabeth and the boys when yet another Saturday afternoon would come and I would head off to hide exhausted in my hermitage. Inside the greenhouse I watered the spinach bed, then snapped off a piece and raised it to my mouth. Chewing slowly, I savored

the wafer-thin leaf, remembering the summer Eucharist services we held in the garden. How beautiful it was to bring the gifts of the altar out into the fields. The cold truth that morning was inescapable: I had given myself so completely to this vocation that there was little left over for my family. Work was all I thought about: when Elizabeth tried to talk to me at dinner or one of my boys wanted me to wrestle, my thoughts went to the garden: the Brussels sprouts needed transplanting; I needed to order strawberry plants for the fall; and I couldnt forget that email to the garden members about our upcoming sweet potato harvest. Anathoth was all I thought about and yet, that work was also draining me of life and energy. That Sunday morning at the beginning of another Christian year, standing in the greenhouse, I realized I could not stay. The garden is our oldest metaphor. In Genesis God creates the first Adam from the adamah, and tells him to till and keep it, the fertile soil on which all life depends. Human from humus. Thats our first etymological clue as to the inextricable bond we share with the soil. Our ecological problems are a result of having forgotten who we aresoil people, inspired by the breath of God. Earths hallowed mould, as Milton referred to Adam in Paradise Lost. Or in Saint Augustines phrase, terra animataanimated earth. The command to care for soil is our first divinely appointed vocation, yet in our zeal to produce cheap, abundant food we have shunned it; we have tilled the adamah but we have not kept it. Tilling is, in fact, often harmful to soil structure and creates erosion. Since World War II, as a result of excessive tillage and use of petrochemicals, weve managed to squander a third of our countrys topsoil. With the combined challenges of climate change, peak oil, and the global food crisis, the balance of life on earth is rapidly approaching a tipping point. In the ways we grow our food and in the food we choose to eat, we have largely lost our connection with the adamah; we have failed to live in the garden. Anathoth taught me that to live and work in a garden is to relearn the most basic realities of life. Rather than an escape from the worlds problems, a gardenespecially a communal food gardenconfronts us with those very problems. Referring to Voltaires famous dictum We must cultivate our garden, cultural critic Robert Pogue Harrison says in Gardens: Notre jardin is never a garden of merely private concerns into which one escapes from the real; it is that plot of soil on the earth, within the self, or amid the social collective, where the cultural, ethical, and civic virtues that save reality from its own worst impulses are cultivated. Those virtues are always ours. We left the following August, four years to the day after Id become director of Anathoth, and our leaving happened, from my perspective at least, on good terms. Elizabeth and I had been talking about how we wanted to live closer to our extended families while our children were young. I had received a generous two-year writing grant, and this was our chance. We moved back to the mountains of western North Carolina, planted our own gardens and orchards, and I set about relearning how to be a husband to her and a father to our children. By 2011 nearly two years had passed, two lovely years of building a new life on the land with my family, yet since leaving Anathoth something within me remained unsettled. A decade ago in Chiapas, Mexico, I had discovered the connection between the cultivation of crops and the cultivation of the spirit. I had sensed a calling to feed people, and my subsequent years at Anathoth had been a crucible in which Id leaned into that calling. But now, despite a contented family life on our own piece of land, I felt an acute spiritual hunger that could not be filled. I would need to revisit those years from my past, only this time from a different vantage point. While I knew something about soilfeed the soil, the soil will feed the plants, and plants will feed the peopleI was only just beginning to embrace a sacramental life, a life of drawing nearer to God. I grew up in a Christian home, was a missionary kid in Nigeria for three years, attended divinity school, taught the New Testament to undergrads, and started a communal garden ministry for a Methodist church, which is to say that all my life Ive been immersed in various Christian subcultures. Yet I realized at age thirty-eight that I was only just beginning my spiritual journey. When I went to church I mostly felt bored. But I believed that the Living Christ was realI had met Him at Anathoth in the faces of strangers, even enemiesand I wanted to find Him again. I somehow needed to start from scratch, to approach the faith with the eyes of a new convert. I wanted answers to some fairly simple questions: What does it mean to follow God? How should I live my life? And what does all this have to do with the soil, the literal ground of my existence? These most basic questions had become incessant preoccupations. What I was really after, I realized, was that age-old quest for a life of holiness. A life of wholeness. In Lukes story of the disciples meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus, they knew him not. Only when they broke bread at the same table did they recognize him. For two thousand years, through the sacramental elements of the Eucharist and in table fellowship, people have sought Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Perhaps, I thought, one could also seek him in the growing of the wheat. During my Anathoth years I had experienced Gods presence in the act of growing food with others. In order to understand those experiences, I embarked on a new journey to seek out others, both living and dead, whose calling was similar to my own. I plumbed the riches of living Christian and Jewish tradition. I decided to dig deep into the soil of the burgeoning twenty-first-century food and faith movement about which Id been hearing many good things, to learn about the cultivation of soul and soil from the examples of those I encountered. The search for an authentic life is an old one. When the early Christians went to the desert, this is what they prayed: We beg you, God, make us truly alive. That fourth-century prayer was not the prayer of people patiently awaiting their ticket to heaven, just biding their time on earth; it was the urgent and anguished and utterly rooted prayer of people who wanted God to make them more fully here now. Those fourth-century monastics fled to the desert because they were being drawn toward life. They knew that their society, a bloated culture of excess and spiritual emptiness, prevented them from becoming the humans God wanted them to be. Like these early monastics, I

had a desire to live a life of integrity and wholeness, to become more fully alive. And I decided to look for the fulfillment of those desires not in the desert, but in the garden. Over the course of a year I would visit a different garden for each of the four seasons, each visit coinciding with a liturgical holiday. I traveled as an immersion journalist, but also as a pilgrim. This journey was a quest to find those modern prophets who might teach all of us better ways to be at home in the world. I visited a Trappist monastery in the South Carolina low country where I prayed the Divine Office with the monks and learned to grow mushrooms. At a model community garden started by several Protestant churches in the mountains of North Carolina I asked a blessing over a potluck meal and renewed my faith in community. I ran a prayer gauntlet with Pentecostal organic farmers and meth-cooks-turned-coffee-roasters in Washingtons Skagit Valley. And finally, in what struck me as the completion of a sacred circle, I traveled to a Jewish organic farm in the Berkshires where I davened in a red yurt in the predawn hours, celebrating the bounty of the fall harvest according to ancient tradition. Each of these garden communities arose out of their particular place and context. They were small, even obscure, which meant they were in little danger of being commodified or otherwise co-opted. Over the course of that year I would discover many things: That times of intentional solitude deepened, rather than distanced, my relationship with others. That manual labor disciplined not only the body but also the spirit. That trying to save an imperiled world is for naught unless that work is undergirded by a rigorous prayer life. And everywhere I went, I witnessed how our yearning for real food is inextricably bound up in our spiritual desire to be fed. During my four years at Anathoth there were times when I caught a glimpse of what the biblical writers called shalom, a right relation not only with God and people but with the adamah; I had experienced profound moments when people and the land coexisted in blessd armistice, times free of struggle, and in those moments it seemed as if Gods glory had come to dwell in the land, as the Psalmist promised, a time when justice and peace would kiss. And so I went looking for these glimpses of shalom among others who were trying to live again in the garden, in the most expansive sense of the word. I began my journey in Advent, the beginning of the Christian year, and as the time drew near to embark, I began to think of my quest as really a journey to four spiritual strongholds, fortresses of power both sacred and profane. It was this balance of the holy and the mundane that attracted me. In each place I felt a palpable and immediate sense of the Divine Presence, yet that mystery arose from the daily tasks of growing mushrooms, milking goats, planting carrots. Each of these communities produced some of their own food, making them less dependent than most of us on a centralized, oil-addicted food system that is already showing signs of collapse. That simple act of growing food gave them something most of us dont possess: agency. As such, they had regained a measure of freedom from anxiety. But there was also something more mysterious at work in these places. A merciful Presence brooding over the bent world. The answer to our hunger for more than just bread. To grow and share food with others in a garden is to enter a holy country. American spirituality is discovering itself anew as people of faith reconnect with the land. But while the buy local, eat organic movement is increasingly in the public eye, the faith-based food movement remains virtually unknown by the wider public. At times it intersects with its larger cousin, but mostly it charts a parallel course, comprised of many people whove neither heard of Michael Pollan nor set foot in a Whole Foods. Many of those Ive come to meet in this loosely woven movement view soil as a sacrament: a physical manifestation of Gods presence, a channel of Divine grace. They know soil is a portal that joins us to the world to come even while rooting us more deeply in this one. Through the practices of caring for the soil, those I encountered had discovered a way to become more fully alive. What follows are the stories of people who have aligned their lives with the real. They have sought from God, and been given to find, the patterns of life that made them more holy. More whole. More human. This was the way I was seeking, and this was the way I was given to find. We beg you, make us truly alive.