
The influence of food symbolism on food insecurity in South Africa: how relevant is the Eucharistic celebration?

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Abstract

Various research results point out poverty, inadequate food production and inadequate distribution as the main culprits for food insecurity in many African countries. This article wishes to contribute to the existing knowledge on food insecurity and concentrate on South Africa and investigate whether food symbolism can also lead to systematic food insecurity and discrimination of some people. Since the official end of political apartheid in 1994, there have been great improvements in terms of grants, aid, increase in food production and change of structures. Nevertheless, food insecurity still persists. This research seeks to uncover new facts concerning the cause for food insecurity in South Africa. It brings to the fore that instead of focusing on structural changes only, researchers need to re-evaluate some of the cultural and religious beliefs attached to food production, distribution and consumption. The article also hopes to highlight that the Eucharist which is a centre of Christian life ought to unite the faith-based communities and confront the vice of injustice in all its forms which exacerbates the problem of food insecurity. Christian encounter with Christ through the Eucharist forms the believers into a community of brothers and sisters and empowers people to participate in the liberating mission of the Lord. This solution would go to the roots of the moral problem of food insecurity and put institutions and structures on a new, more humane and beneficial foundation.

Introduction

Since the inception of a democratically elected government in 1994, South Africa has registered many successes in terms of governance, the rule of law, and social service provision among others. Nevertheless, food insecurity remains one of the greatest challenges. According to the study carried out by the National Food Consumption Survey in children aged 1-9 year, in South Africa 10.3% of the children is underweight and 21.6% of the children are stunted (Vermeer & Tempelman, 2006:91). This implies that despite the fact that the international community¹ has frequently reaffirmed the right to adequate food

¹ The principal instruments establishing human rights in international law are: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 par. 25; the Declaration of the Rights of the Child 1959 principles 4 and 8; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1996 art. 11.1, 2; the Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition 1974; the Rome Declaration on World Food Security 1996 art. 1; and the Plan of Action of the World Food Summit 1996 objective 7.4.

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