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The Theology of Chocolate
Psalm 34: 8

It is the food of the gods. “It is to be eaten, as God’s *manna*... treasured, as God’s gift...; embraced, as God’s pledge of the eschatological banquet.” One would think that these words would refer to the most exquisite, glorious, magnificent, human experience. Actually, they refer to chocolate, and these are words from the Chicago Statement on Confectionary.

It is a well established fact that most people love chocolate. The average U.S. citizen eats over 12 pounds of chocolate annually, spending over \$10 billion, not including variation products. The British spend over \$8 billion. The Swiss top the league. They consume 22 pounds per person per year. And everyone who enjoys Swiss chocolate understands why. To enter a French or Swiss chocolatiere, to be wrapped in the sight, the aroma and the flavor can be no less inspiring than a magnificent piece of music. Who knows, writes Ben Myers *at faith-theology blogspot*: perhaps the development of existentialist philosophy in France and of neo-orthodox theology in Switzerland can be traced directly to the quality of the chocolates of those regions.

Even in the 18th century Marco Antonio Orellana stated: “Oh, divine chocolate! They grind thee kneeling. Beat thee with hands praying, and drink thee with eyes to heaven.”

We humans have an interesting relationship with chocolate. The first people known to have made chocolate were the Maya and Aztec of Central America who mixed ground cacao seeds with various seasonings to make a spicy, frothy drink. Then Spanish conquerors took the seeds to Spain where new recipes were created. Eventually the drink’s popularity spread throughout Europe. And ever-since, new technologies and innovations have changed the texture and taste of chocolate. Today chocolate is spread throughout the world in different flavors, spices, aromas, shapes, forms and colors. There is bitter and sweet, milk and dark, white and brown. Different percentages of coco and sugar, different drinks and concoctions, ice creams and truffles, with nuts or without, plain or complex... Chocolate is a whole world to itself, a universal phenomenon, social and economic and even political. Why can’t it be also theological?

Chocolate is a gift, a gift of God, a divine expression of love. In Genesis God created and said, “I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit, you shall have for food. And out of the ground God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.” Coco pods grow on trees. So why can’t they can be considered fruit? Besides, James writes in his letter, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from God.” James 1:17. Isn’t chocolate is a good and perfect gift?

Taste, one of our five senses, helps us enjoy food. Our senses, and thus our bodies, are the means by which we experience the world. And, even though food is a necessary element of life, it is also a source of joy, and pleasure, as well as friendship. We eat to survive, but we also eat to enjoy the taste, the flavor as well as the company. Most people in the world prefer not to eat alone but with another. So food sustains us but it also provides us with human connection and

sensual experiences of taste, flavor, spice, aroma, texture and feel. Sometimes our taste buds crave sweets, sometimes salty, crunchy or chewy, sometimes smooth, or cold or hot, sometimes spicy or bland and mild. The possibilities of flavors are endless. As such, chocolate can be a gift, a sweet and enriching gift for the body as well as the soul. It touches our palate with sweetness and bitterness, flavor and spice, texture and aroma, and it touches our soul as we connect to another in friendship through the sharing of it. So chocolate is a gift, God's gift to us.

Chocolate is a means, a catalyst for celebration and gratitude, both of which are often lacking in our lives. Our lives would be deeply lacking without celebrations, milestone recognitions, rituals and parties. Most of us generally are too busy, so we often forget to celebrate, to rejoice, to make merry. Too often we are burdened by life's demands, too overwhelmed by everyday issues that we forget to celebrate, to be grateful, to give thanks and enjoy the moment. Even in the church we do not remember that God is not always serious, that worship does not always have to be somber, that we need to be a people of celebrations, thanksgiving, joy and parties. Chocolate can help us be celebrative, grateful and joyful. Chocolate makers know this and that is why for every occasion from Valentine's Day to birthdays, Easter and Christmas, special chocolates are made. So chocolate can call forth gratitude and celebration which is good for one's spirit, lifting one up spiritually as thanksgiving fills the heart.

Chocolate is a symbol of the gift of diversity as well as unity. In all its shapes and forms, colors and textures, aromas and fragrances, complexities and plainness, chocolate represents the world and its people, diversity of all kinds. It also represents unity and connectedness since no matter what form or color, texture of flavor, it is still chocolate. We are human, diverse and different yet of the same essence and the same, like chocolate.

With its capacity to satisfy, chocolate is a health food. Its smooth sweetness undoubtedly hits the spot as no other food can. As the book of Proverbs states, "a desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul. A desire fulfilled is a tree of life." Proverbs also states the following for honey, but I replace it with chocolate, for I am convinced that if there were chocolate when Proverbs was written, the author would have used chocolate instead of honey: "My child, eat chocolate, for it is good. And the drippings of chocolate are sweet to your taste." Chocolate satisfies hunger not only because of its exquisite taste but because when one eats what the body desires, then one is satisfied and does not overeat. This is my dieting technique. I believe we overeat because often our food lacks flavor, spice and aroma. We overeat because often what we eat is not what we're hungry for, and we eat only to eat. But if we eat what our bodies want, and if it is flavorful and savory, we will be satisfied with a reasonable amount. Eating food prepared with care and attention, with seasonings and flavor will fill us, satisfying our palate. It will hit the spot and we will want no more. Food needs to be enjoyed, not just eaten. And chocolate especially, should be so delectable that it is enjoyed one succulent bite at a time, one exquisite flavor at a time, one magnificent scent at a time. Thus chocolate can be part of a healthy diet, satisfying body and spirit.

Chocolate is a creative relational connecting force between God and humans. Coco beans are transformed to chocolate through a long process of pressing and conching. Conching is the final step in determining the ultimate flavor and texture of the chocolate. The conching machine

kneads the chocolate mixture for 24 to 60 hours at 110 degrees. So in making chocolate, God does part of the creating and we continue the other part. Chocolate binds God and humans as we co-create. If we and God can cooperate in making chocolate, imagine the possibilities of what else we can do together.

Chocolate can be a reconciling and healing force in the world, carrying its own “ministry of reconciliation.” In letters to the Corinthians and the Ephesians, Paul writes about “God in Christ reconciling the world and breaking down the dividing walls, making of us ambassadors of Christ” with a message of reconciliation, and making of us “the aroma, the fragrance of Christ, spreading Christ’s love and knowledge.” So chocolate can be a reconciling and healing factor in relationships, a bridge not only between God and humans, but also between humans and all life. To make chocolate, not only do we have to cooperate with God, we also have to work with one another around the world. Chocolate pods grow in tropical weather, mostly in Central and South America, and in Africa. Sugar, without which chocolate would be very bitter, originally came from the South Pacific and India; the conching machines come from the New World. Innovative recipes and creative interpretations... all give chocolate its unique flavor, texture and aroma. It takes a lot of cooperation even between continents to find the right ingredients to make the right chocolate. So if we in the world can cooperate in making chocolate, imagine the possibilities for reconciliation and peace. Imagine a world where countries would trade chocolate instead of arms, and where military airplanes would drop chocolate instead of bombs!

Chocolate is a promise of a better world, even eternal life! What would heaven be without chocolate? In the new heaven and the new earth, “death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. There will be no tears for God will wipe every tear from our eyes.” Chocolate can wipe tears away. Just share a piece with a crying child. Chocolate heals, and thus it can represent the gift, the grace and the abundance of the communion table, which stands as a symbol of healing, and of all good gifts to us--for sustenance of body and spirit, for nourishment of heart and mind. Who can say that if there had been chocolate when Jesus lived, Jesus would not have said, “I am the chocolate of the world. Take and Eat.” So we do. We come to eat and to taste that God is good!

Resources used:

David Congdon <http://fireandrose.blogspot.com/2007/07/theology-of-chocolate.html>

<http://faith-theology.blogspot.com/2007/07/theology-of-chocolate.html>