

Health-conscious Christians ask, 'What would Jesus eat?'_22304

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Health-conscious Christians ask, 'What would Jesus eat?'

By Alexandra Alter

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WASHINGTON (RNS)-If doctors had to identify the deadliest sin affecting Americans today, they probably would name gluttony as the No. 1 killer.

As obesity in the United States reaches epidemic proportions, with more than 60 percent of adults overweight or obese, public-policy makers and health officials are scrambling over ways to improve the American diet.

But Don Colbert, physician and nutritionist, thinks the obesity crisis could be solved if Americans would pause before inhaling a super-sized fast food meal and ask themselves a simple question: "Would Jesus eat this?"

If it's loaded with saturated fats, sugar or artificial ingredients, the answer is no, said Colbert. Her book "What Would Jesus Eat?" combines biblical scholarship with conventional dietary wisdom.

"The gluttonous spirit is deadly," he said. "I've seen so many diseases related to dietary excess, so why not go back to the owner's manual, the

Bible, to see what Jesus ate?”

Jesus essentially ate a Mediterranean diet rich in whole grains, fish, fruit and vegetables and modest amounts of olive oil, meat and wine, Colbert said. Anything the Old Testament blacklists in its dietary prescriptions is out, including shellfish, pork products, horses, camels, birds of prey and other carnivores.

Colbert, a Mississippi native who studied for a year at a Bible college as well as training at medical school, said he wrote the book and its companion, “The What Would Jesus Eat Cook Book,” both published by Thomas Nelson, after realizing many of the fattest Americans are dedicated fundamentalist Christians.

“Most people say, 'Hey, it's important that I live a Christian life, but my body's not that important,'" he said. “They'll go to heaven. The only problem is, if they neglect their bodies, they'll go to heaven a lot faster.”

With six new books in his Bible Cure series, including books on combatting cholesterol, diabetes and thyroid problems through diet and prayer, Colbert's Bible-based diet empire has expanded far beyond his private practice at the Divine Wellness Center in Longwood, Fla.

And Colbert's not the only Christian diet guru urging people to ask what Jesus would eat. Christian advocates of vegetarianism say if Jesus were alive today, he would maintain a plant-based diet out of compassion for animals.

Others say Jesus would approve of genetically modified food, given his propensity for transforming and multiplying food.

Although there may be disagreement over what Jesus would choose given the option of a veggie burger, broiled lamb with garbanzo beans, or genetically modified corn on the cob, growing numbers of Christians are

looking to the Bible for dietary guidance, hoping Scripture might succeed where science has failed in inspiring healthy eating habits.

Stephen Kaufman, co-chair of the Christian Vegetarian Association, hopes more Christians will start making faith-based choices about what they eat.

“There are a lot of people out there for whom diet is a reflection of their faith,” he said. “We're taught to take care of our bodies, the temple of God's spirit, as Paul said.”

Kaufman disagrees with Colbert's claim that Jesus would eat meat, arguing that although lamb and red meat may have been acceptable fare in Jesus' time, modern agricultural practices make meat an unhealthy dietary choice, as well as an immoral one.

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