

Factors in Vegetarianism

ISAO HORINOCHI

62

The Seventh-day Adventist church has emphasized healthful living, including vegetarianism, as part of the gospel message. Because I was curious about the extent of vegetarianism practiced by members of the church, I surveyed Pacific Union College students in a school assembly in the spring of 1969. A total of 916 students, 70 percent of the student body, responded. The survey questions covered a broad spectrum of health-related topics, but this article will be limited to one aspect of the survey — vegetarianism and the use of “meatless meats” as a protein substitute.

Thirty-eight percent of the students claimed to be vegetarians in response to the question, “Do you eat meat products in any form when you are at home or outside the college setting?” Of these, about 1 percent were strict vegetarians who did not use eggs or dairy products, and the remainder were lacto-ovovegetarians. Twenty-six percent stated that they are occasional (once a month or less often) meat eaters, that they usually follow a lacto-ovovegetarian diet, and that only under some social and travel conditions do they eat meat. The final 37 percent responded that they eat meat frequently (every day, more than once a week, or once a week) outside the college setting.

SOCIAL PROFILES OF RESPONDENTS

The social backgrounds of respondents who eat meat and those who do not is significant, and further analysis would no doubt be useful. There is essentially no difference between the number of male and female vegetarians or meat eaters. However, classification by racial or ethnic background reveals that cultural patterns affect eating habits. The lowest rate (14 percent) of vegetarians and the most meat eaters (44 percent) are among Oriental students. I come from this background, and can perhaps at least partially explain the proportionately high incidence of meat eating among

the Oriental students. A high percentage (25 percent) of the Oriental students are new converts to the church who come from families who eat meat; only half come from homes in which both parents are members of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and even more significant, 29 percent of the Oriental students come from non-Seventh-day Adventist homes. Also, meat is used differently in Oriental cooking than it is in American cooking. Rather than centering the meal on a large cut of meat, such as the American steak and baked potato pattern, Oriental people use smaller amounts of meat as seasoning or a garnish with many vegetables. They also tend to eat less beef and more fish and chicken than Americans.

Black students and Spanish-speaking students do not include as high a proportion of meat eaters as the Oriental students. However, according to some of these respondents whom I have interviewed, the survey statistics do not reflect the pattern of the whole subculture. The respondents have unanimously indicated that the real rate of meat eating is higher among their groups than the survey suggested and that the rates represent a selective group of students.

There is a significant drop in the frequency of meat eating as the generation increases — that is, those who come from a long line of membership in the church tend to eat less meat and conform to a more completely vegetarian diet than recent converts. Among students whose parents are both members of the Seventh-day Adventist church, 40 percent are vegetarians and 32 percent eat meat frequently. In homes where only one parent is a Seventh-day Adventist there is much more significant conformity to church dietary habits when it is the father who is the member. The father's influence is also great when he is not a member, reflected in the fact that 51 percent of students from such families eat meat, as opposed to 31 percent of students from families in which the father is a church member.

The number of years in a Christian school also influences dietary habits. A student who has spent several years in Seventh-day Adventist schools is more likely to be a vegetarian (42 percent) and less likely to eat meat (31 percent).

Approximately 245 of the 347 students who claim to be vegetarians or lacto-ovo vegetarians said that they come from homes where no meat is served. Eighty percent of this subgroup had twelve years of precollege education in Seventh-day Adventist schools, and both parents of 92 percent are members of the church. Forty-seven percent are third-generation Adventists (both parents and grandparents are church members), and 27 percent have had great-grandparents who were members.

When the respondents are classified according to majors, as expected, theology or religion majors have a high incidence of vegetarianism (63 percent) and a low frequency of meateating (17 percent). This trend is followed by the majors in home economics. For unknown reasons, the business and secretarial science majors have the highest (50 percent) meateating percentage and also the lowest (22 percent) percentage of vegetarianism. The social science majors, who rank next to the business and secretarial science students, have the highest ranking (22 percent) in everyday use of meat.

Dietary norms are not usually established after students come to college, at least for the respondents of this survey. Most (71 percent) claim that their vegetarian eating habits were formed before they came to Pacific Union College. It seems that socialization in early childhood and youth is essential in the establishment of vegetarian dietary habits.

When we examine the relationship between meateating habits and the occupation of each student's father, we learn that students whose parents are employed by the Adventist church have the lowest ranking (12 percent) in meateating habits. The children of medical and dental practitioners tend to be in the middle (34 percent). Students from families in which the father is classed as a white-collar or blue-collar worker have the highest percentage (45 percent) of meateating.

Students from missionary families seem to eat meat the least frequently (16 percent) and conform most to a vegetarian diet (55 percent). Perhaps this reflects their position as "witnesses" for their religion in a foreign country. A high percentage (86 percent) of these families are vegetarians.

A significant finding that supports the concept of the influence of the home and parental example is the similarity of students' dietary habits to those of their families. When all the vegetarian students (347) were measured against their family dietary norms, it was found that 71 percent of the families were also vegetarians. The same pattern was also true of students who eat meat; 85 percent of their families also served meat frequently in their homes. These findings show that examples are more influential than preaching.

ETHICAL AND VALUE JUDGMENTS

The survey also included another question that is relevant to dietary norms: "Do you feel that the Spirit of prophecy counsel on diet is relevant to our times and applicable to our generation?" Sixty-nine percent of the respondents affirmed the relevancy of Ellen G. White's advice on diet to this generation. Another 21 percent accepted some of the counsels as applicable

today. Two percent completely rejected the value of Mrs. White's writing on diet, and 8 percent were undecided.

Perhaps the most significant findings on this matter are reflected in a separate category of frequency of meateating. Of those who eat meat often, only 45 percent accepted the relevance of Mrs. White's counsels on diet. The students who are vegetarians overwhelmingly (89 percent) accepted all the Ellen White writings as applicable to our time. These responses indicate that traditional acceptance of these writings is highly correlative to conforming behavior on dietary regulations.

Meateating is evidently measured by vegetarians as an important indication of religiosity in the Adventist subculture. A high proportion (59 percent) of this group expressed the opinion that people who eat meat are less consecrated; 23 percent of this group was not sure. But 311 frequent meat-eaters overwhelmingly (86 percent) said that meateating is not a measure of religiosity. This latter percentage is closer to the whole group's generally negative response (75 percent) to the suggestion that vegetarianism is a sign of "religiousness."

This strong standard expressed by the vegetarian group is reflected in their own value judgment of dietary deviancy. When they were asked if they feel guilty when they deviate from church dietary standards, 31 percent said "sometimes," and 25 percent said "all the time." Only 21 percent responded that they felt no guilt. Of those who eat meat frequently, the same percentage (30 percent) feel guilt "sometimes," but only 5 percent feel it "all the time."

When the respondents were asked if they feel that they have sinned when they deviate from church dietary rules, the same contrast exists between the vegetarians and the meateaters, although there is a noticeable drop in the percentages.

The frequent meateaters would fare better in a situation where eating "unclean" meat (pork, shellfish, and so on) is a test of survival. Fifty-nine percent of those who eat meat frequently said they would eat "unclean" meat under certain hardship conditions, but of the vegetarian group, only 29 percent were willing to eat it, and another 29 percent were not sure. This latter group represents ardent adherents of the church who are willing to stand for their convictions under extreme conditions, although their reasoning under the problematical situation is difficult to understand.

THE MEAT SUBSTITUTE PROBLEM

I believe that a contributor to deviancy from ideal health practices is the manufacture of so-called meat substitutes. My hypothesis is that meat substitutes, which are imitations of flesh foods, contribute to some degree to meateating because they admit the desirability of flesh foods. The meat substitutes may perpetuate a desire for meat.

I would like to suggest a coined phrase, "meatless meat," to describe all the various types of meat substitutes. On this basis, it may be that the church does not encourage a wholesome vegetarian diet but an imitative meatless meat diet. The dietary reform envisioned and counseled by Ellen White includes a "simple diet" and "plain food, prepared in the simplest manner." The many varieties of meatless meats are probably an antithesis to her concept of the ideal diet.

66

There is no doubt that these meatless meats help new converts transfer from meateating to vegetarianism, but a reversal of this transfer of diet is also possible, if the meatless meat strengthens a person's desire for meat. At the least, the imitation of meat may be a concession that in order to taste good, food must be in the form of flesh food.

The food manufacturers have been successful in producing these meatless meats. Many of the products have texture, color, appearance, and flavoring similar to meat, and even their names indicate meat products. These manufacturers have even gone beyond the imitation of "clean" meat and have also produced imitations of "unclean" meat. Perhaps the producers of these meatless meats, motivated by a desire for profit, have outstepped reasonable boundaries in the manufacture of these substitutes.

An examination of the sixty-eight different forms of meat substitute products produced by church institutions and independent companies operated by Seventh-day Adventists reveals that twenty-seven, of the meatless meat products have meat-type labels; the balance have nonmeat labels. The following are some examples of both types:

MEAT-TYPE LABELS

Wham (ham-style loaf, ham-style slices)
Stripples (hickory-smoked flavor imitation bacon)
Prosage (use like sausage)
Vegetarian Luncheon Slices (corned-beef-like)
Holiday Roast (turkey-style dinners)
Vegetable Skallops (imitation shellfish)
Terkettes (mock turkey)
Little Links

NONMEAT LABELS

Dinner Rounds
Nuteena
Proteena
Protose
Fry Sticks
Big Pat
Dinner Morsels
Cheze-O-Soy
Cho-Pats

There is ambivalence about some of the recent meatless meat products highly imitative of flesh foods. Many people have expressed delight because the new products have a better texture and flavor than the older, somewhat spongy, gluten meat substitutes. The "fibroprotein" product, manufactured from specially processed soybeans, has a texture similar to many meat products, such as the white meat of chicken and roast beef slices. Other persons have had reservations about the new products, expressed in such remarks by shoppers in the college market as: "Yes, I like it very much, but I don't think they should make it taste and look so much like meat." "What bothers me is the name 'Wham,' when we don't even eat ham." "I feel guilty about eating substitute ham and bacon."

Sixty-six percent of the respondents were in favor of a meat substitute as part of a vegetarian diet, but 7 percent said that meat substitutes reminded them of eating real meat, and another 11 percent felt that the "meatless meat" was a poor substitute for meat protein. A much higher percentage (19 percent) believed that another approach to providing protein in diet should be developed.

I feel that further research should be done on whether meat substitutes are a detriment or a support when used to supplement a vegetarian diet. The recent trend toward meat-type labeling and vegetable protein products that imitate meat, especially those that copy "unclean" meat, may not contribute to the ideal dietary norm. Perhaps we should seek to develop more nutritious and less costly meat substitutes in place of the expensive meatless meats.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

If we were to generalize about the dietary habits of Seventh-day Adventist students at Pacific Union College, slightly over a third of the students are vegetarians, another slightly over a third eat meat frequently, and just over a fourth are occasional meateaters. Perhaps the correlation of home eating habits to the student dietary norm is the most significant finding of this research. Those who are frequent meateaters come from families that eat much meat, and the vegetarians come largely from vegetarian families. Most students thus strongly reflect their parents' values on diet. Further research, especially a comparison with the parents' responses to a similar questionnaire, would be an invaluable study.

The dietary habits of Seventh-day Adventist church members may reflect another aspect of a changing, contemporary church-growth. As the children of the church adherents are socialized to practice the same faith, and as others are "evangelized" into the church, the consequence is more members,

all of whom have different personal preferences and habits of all types. Accommodation to these preferences and habits and the compromise of traditional teachings thus occasionally result. The controversy over dietary regulations within the church is thus a natural consequence of a changing church.

Dietary preferences might also be related to social class; upward social mobility might involve greater association with secular society, involving possibly a compromise of dietary habits. Affluence might also influence the style of life, changing eating practices from simple, healthful food to rich or expensive delicacies such as steak. The promotion of greater educational achievement among the members might ultimately develop church leaders who dictate a religious mood that is not in harmony with traditional Seventh-day Adventist customs.

I conclude with the following recommendations to the Seventh-day Adventist church:

1. If vegetarianism is to be encouraged in the church, early socialization of the children by parents is essential; the example of parents has special importance.
2. Healthful and economical protein products that are within the reach of the average member should be developed; vegetarian products should not imitate meat; meat-type labeling should be replaced with labels that do not suggest meat.
3. Vegetarianism should not be considered a measure of consecration of members, but it should be encouraged as a contributor to good health, which affects spiritual development. It is only one of many variables that reflect one's alternatives in religious norms.
4. The polarization of members into factions over dietary preferences may lead to a divided fellowship. We should not seek to judge others but instead should express our opinions in a spirit of loving, accepting Christianity.