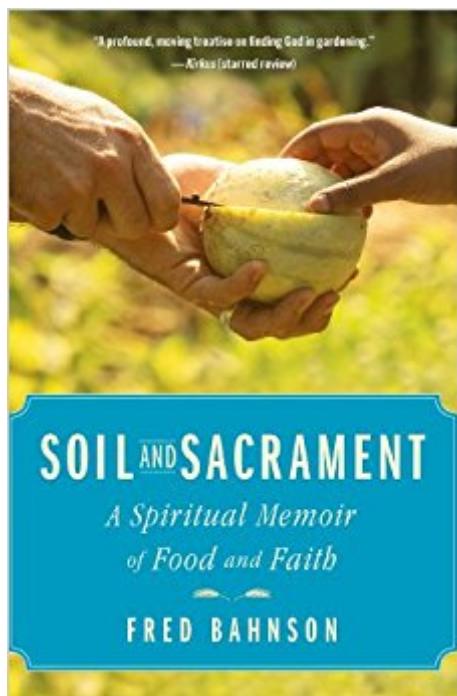


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# Soil And Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir Of Food And Faith



## Synopsis

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. Like many seekers of the authentic life, Fred Bahnson sought answers to big questions like >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. > 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 communities—Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, and Jewish—Bahnson 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. > is a book about communion in its deepest sense—an inspiring and joyful meditation on what grows above the earth, beneath it, and inside each one of us.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A profound, moving treatise on finding God in gardening." (Kirkus Reviews (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. I'm all for seekers who

sit around asking, “What does it mean to be fully alive?” But it’s 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 life—for 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 soil—or 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 Lamott’s spiritual writing, Bahnson’s 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)

Fred 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.

A 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.

I 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 Bahnsen 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 Bahnsen to direct their new Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative. Hopefully, we'll be hearing more from Bahnsen: both the lyrical and the practical. I'll definitely be paying attention.

As 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.

Interesting book and an important and useful addition to any library on the subjects of faith/religion and environment/food.

Love this book and would recommend it.

You can actually feel the sacredness of the soil in your whole body as you enter into each story. The hard work of being being intentional in building a relationship with the holiness of the earth that sustains us comes through clearly. This Little books recognizes the power of the land to heal itself and all those who work the sacred soil.

Good writer. Good heart. Wonderful book.

I loved this book

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