

‘Cooking with Gordon’: Food, Health, and the Elasticity of Evangelical Gender Roles (and Belt Sizes) on *The 700 Club*

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Abstract

This article examines evangelical gender paradigms as expressed through a *700 Club* cooking segment facilitated by Gordon Robertson, the son of Pat Robertson – founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), *The 700 Club*, Christian Coalition, and one-time presidential candidate. Several themes converge within this cooking show, including health and nutrition, family ritual, and gender roles. Using the cooking segment as data, I draw on scholarship on body, gender, family and ritual to argue that evangelical discourses are labile in their responses to recent socio-cultural shifts and suggest that ‘Sunday Dinners: Cooking with Gordon’ defies caricatures of evangelical gender formation and signals a shift to soft-patriarchy and quasi-egalitarianism, at least within public, visual discourse. ‘Sunday Dinners’ underscores the centrality of the family in evangelical discourse – even as conceptions of gender are in flux – as it seeks to facilitate everyday rituals via cooking and eating together.

Keywords

evangelicalism; television, foodways; family and kinship, gendered practices; embodied ritual.

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The body plays a central role in our lives, acting as the canvas upon which we can display 'who we are,' and the means by which we interact with the world around us.

—Eve Shapiro, *Gender Circuits*¹

Indeed, the human body at any point in history is never a static, reified entity; it is always problematic, a shifting site of exchanges between self and world that is continuously shaping and being shaped by immediate natural and cultural forces.

—Martha Finch, *Dissenting Bodies*²

Humble Beginnings and 'Gourmet Televangelism'

Pat Robertson (1930–), formally Marion Gordon Robertson, founded the first Christian television station in the United States, on January 11, 1960. He called it the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and its flagship program, *The 700 Club*. Robertson received a jurist doctorate from Yale University in 1950 and a Master of Divinity from New York Theological Seminary in 1959. After a brief stint in the Marine Corps, he purchased an out-of-commission television station, UHF, in 1959.³ The inchoate station aired nearly two years later, on October 1, 1961,⁴ and by 1977, 'CBN started the nation's first basic TV cable network with satellite transmissions of religious and syndicated family TV shows.' Four years later, in 1981, the network reached just under ten million homes; in 1988 executives renamed the network *CBN Family Channel* and sold it to International Family Entertainment Inc. (IFE) in 1990. Fox Kids Worldwide, Inc. bought IFE in 1997 and Disney acquired the Fox Family Channel and renamed it *ABC Family* in 2001. CBN now airs in around 108 countries and in 218 languages. *The 700 Club*, CBN's most important program, features co-hosts Pat Robertson, (son) Gordon Robertson, Terry Meeuswen, Kristi Watts, and news anchor Lee Webb. *The 700 Club* prides itself as one of the longest-running programs in broadcast history and serves as a news source for one million people per day.⁵ Although the correlation between evangelicals and technology and media development has not always been a positive one, CBN attests to the evangelical conviction that media, when put to use for the purposes of God, positively affects society for good.⁶

¹ E. Shapiro, *Gender Circuits: Bodies and Identities in a Technological Age*, New York, NY: Routledge 2010, 188.

² M. Finch, *Dissenting Bodies: Corporealities in Early New England*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press 2010, 216.

³ J.R. Williams, 'Robertson, Marion Gordon ("Pat")' in S.M. Burgess and E.M. Van Der Maas (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2003, 1027–1028.

⁴ 'About CBN,' *Christian Broadcasting Network* (CBN), accessed 27 October 2011, <http://www.cbn.com/about/>.

⁵ 'About CBN.'

⁶ J.D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987, 129; C. Smith, *American Evangelicals: Embattled and Thriving*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998, 8, 137.

Family is a central discursive concern promulgated by CBN and *The 700 Club*. Evangelicals are associated with traditional family ideologies, but ironically, the visual face of these discourses is Gordon Robertson's (Pat's son and co-host) foodie-oriented television segment, 'Sunday Dinners: Cooking with Gordon.' Sociologist John Schmalzbauer first drew attention to this paradox with his (2009) post in Duke Divinity's *Call & Response* blog, "'Gourmet Televangelism" and the Practice of Christian Hospitality.' 'While Robert George, Albert Mohler, and Charles Colson were busy cooking up the Manhattan Declaration,' Schmalzbauer writes, "'700 Club" host Gordon Robertson was whipping up a Persian leg of lamb in a pomegranate marinade. Far from an aberration, Robertson's demonstration of culinary skill was part of a habitual lifestyle, otherwise known as "Sunday Dinners: Cooking with Gordon.'" He continues:

Hearing Robertson sing the praises of cardamom seeds and pomegranate juice is a revelation. Demonstrating a familiarity with ingredients rivalling the Food Network, he walks viewers through dishes like salmon in puff pastry and eye of round roast. In the midst of the lamb recipe, Robertson cannot contain himself, noting that 'roasted pears are just a beautiful thing' and that 'goat cheese and honey take it to a whole another level.'⁷

Schmalzbauer sees Gordon's 'foodie sensibility' as indicative of both Gordon's rise in economic status and willingness to share his 'cultural capital' with his viewers, as well as a sign of increased male involvement in domestic labour and an overall softening of conservative and essentialist gender role dichotomies.⁸ Gordon's cooking show is representative of a 'shift in gender roles,' a profound alteration of conservative Christian masculinity.⁹ In this essay, I examine Gordon's show in further detail, with careful attention devoted to evangelical construction of gender and family ideologies. I concede Schmalzbauer's assessment that 'Sunday Dinners' signals a significant shift in perceptions of gender; Gordon's show is a decisive blurring of traditional gender conceptualizations and practices. Subsequently, I argue that the cooking segment is an attempt to establish collective, family-oriented rituals centered on food preparation and consumption, in a society where the erosion of these sorts of ceremonies appears inevitable. In the following I focus primarily on two issues of sensate embodiment: gender and food. But before turning to these issues, however, one must locate both evangelicalism and 'Sunday Dinners' in their socio-historical milieus.

Family/Anomie

The *family* is an axiomatic form of human social organization that rises through kin or domestic grouping. In Max Weber's classic sociological works, this form of

⁷ J. Schmalzbauer, "'Gourmet Televangelism" and the Practice of Christian Hospitality,' *Duke Divinity Call & Response Blog*, accessed 29 August 2011, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/blog/12-14-2009/john-schmalzbauer-%E2%80%9Cgourmet-televangelism%E2%80%9D-and-the-practice-christian-hospitality>.

⁸ Here Schmalzbauer draws on two relatively recent works: Hunter, *Evangelicalism* and W.B. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2004.

⁹ Schmalzbauer, 'Gourmet Televangelism.'

kinship is both fundamental and universal to human experience.¹⁰ Many important social functions occur within the bounds of the family including procreation, child-rearing, socialization, protection, division of labour, and mediation of power and wealth. The family is also bound by invisible ties: emotions. Although conflict in social organization is universal, 'the focus of family life is in the social axis between the emotional attachments among its members and their personal respect and responsibility for each other.' In Weberian theory, the ultimate 'core of family life' is 'the combination of emotion and responsibility.' This relationship is 'the prime mover, the binding force, and the source of the communal conventions of the family.'¹¹

Even if some form of family or kinship is ubiquitous throughout global cultures, religious beliefs and practices further underscore the significance of the family. In fact, some researchers of North American evangelicalism argue that because the twenty- and twenty-first century family functions as 'the most rudimentary context' in which faith is expressed, it is at times difficult to tell where one social institution ends and the other begins. *Religion and family* 'are virtually inseparable.' Family passes on traditions; religion socializes children within particular moral orders, through networks of human relationships.¹² The family itself is therefore imbued with religious, theological, and divine significance: 'It occupies a central place in the Christian life and world view.'¹³ As recent (conservative) advocates of the family aver, 'The wife and husband also build their home as a spiritual place. They learn that family and faith are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. The vital home rests on reverence, worship, and prayer.'¹⁴

It is no surprise, then, that one important gauge of society's health is the perceived strength and vitality of the family unit. Evangelical communities view the family as a sacred, divinely-instated institution and themselves as 'embattled' by the ills of society; this is certainly the case concerning Protestant-evangelicalism in the U.S.¹⁵ The family is a battleground for these conflicts. When the stability and order of the nuclear family is threatened, evangelicals envision the result as both familial and religious deterioration. Allan C. Carlson and Paul T. Mero's *The Natural Family: A Manifesto* is a fitting example of familial conservatism. These writers, part of the 'Howard Centre for Family, Religion & Society,' bemoan the embattled nature of the family through discursive appeals to 'naturalness' or 'universality' of the nuclear family form; in this line of thinking, the 'natural family' is under attack by 'a terrible cloud of ideologies' including 'socialism, feminism, communism, sexual hedonism, racial nationalism, and secular liberalism.' In the 21st century, the family 'stands reviled and threatened.'¹⁶ Although

¹⁰ L.D. Blustone, *Max Weber's Theory of the Family*, Millwood, NY: Associated Faculty Press, Inc. 1987, 144.

¹¹ Blustone, *Max Weber's Theory of the Family*, 159.

¹² Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 76.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ A.C. Carlson and P.T. Mero, *The Natural Family: A Manifesto*, Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company 2007, 4.

¹⁵ See Smith, *American Evangelicalism*.

¹⁶ Carlson and Mero, *The Natural Family*, 6–8. Ironically, it is an accommodation and adaptation one of these 'terrible ideologies' – feminism (or *Biblical* feminism, rather) – that has helped shape contemporary evangelical gender discourse. J. Bartkowski, *Remaking the Godly Marriage: Gender Negotiation in Evangelical Families*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers

the Howard Centre is not a specifically an evangelical institution, Carlson and Mero's book is chock-full of appeals to the importance of religion and 'the Creator' in their arguments for the importance of the family. This particular work succinctly expresses traditionally Christian (and Protestant-evangelical) teachings on the family; it is a concise and exemplary representation of conservative Christian familial ideas. *Natural Families* is also endorsed by the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

According to sociologists of gender and family, voices like Carlson and Mero's fall under a descriptive technical term called the *family modernization perspective*. This ideological stance makes two primary claims: first, the family is less influenced by religious values than it should be, and second, macro-level economical and political changes, such as hyper-individualization and escalating post-industrialism, ultimately strip the family of its legitimacy and authority in broader society.¹⁷ Evangelicals have responded to these perceived problems in diverse ways. One of the most visible of these strategies is the development of specifically family-focused evangelical organizations, like Focus on the Family, that utilize myriad media forms in an effort to strengthen (what is believed to be) the deteriorating institution of the *American family*.¹⁸

The family is the first level of defence for those shielding society against *anomie*, or the erosion of social codes. But on a subsequent level pro-family voices concern themselves with the natural building blocks of the family: its members and their roles. At the core of stable nuclear families, the arguments go, are gender roles bound by stable complementarity.¹⁹ Essential to discourses on the breakdown of the family is the erosion of male-hood and fatherhood. Western forms of manhood or maleness, these voices suggest, are in a fragile, precarious state. Socio-cultural critics – both religious and secular – offer diagnoses and prescriptions. For conservative religious critics, including evangelicals, the rise of the androgynous male is not only unbiblical and contrary to nature; it is an 'aggressive state promotion' to undermine the natural foundations of marriage and family. These anti-sameness voices compare 'the effort to eliminate real differences between men and women' with 'the old efforts by the communists to create "Soviet Man" and by the Nazis to create "Aryan Man"'.²⁰

University Press 2001, 32–34; S. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2003, 13–14. As J. Stacey (*Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America*, New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1990, 139–145, esp. 139) details, "postfeminism," in my view, better characterizes the dominant gender ideology of contemporary evangelicals. Generated partly in reaction to feminism, it also selectively incorporates and adapts many feminist family reforms.'

¹⁷ Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1; Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, 3.

¹⁹ 'Even if sometimes thwarted by events beyond the individual's control (or sometimes given up for a religious vocation), the calling of each boy is to become husband and father; the calling of each girl is to become wife and mother. Everything that a man does is mediated by his aptness for fatherhood. Everything that a woman does is mediated by her aptness for motherhood. . . . We affirm that the complementarity of the sexes is a source of strength. Men and women exhibit profound biological and psychological differences. When united in marriage, though, the whole becomes greater than the parts.' Carlson and Mero, *The Natural Family*, 14–15.

²⁰ Carlson and Mero, *The Natural Family*, 18, 20; Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 91, 93, 111. For a more religiously-nuanced prescription of *divinely-instated* gender separateness and

In sum, to mute the differences between men and women – both physiological and psychological – is to ignore God’s natural design.

The breakdown of manhood is also a broader societal concern. A number of journalists and commentators also call attention to the predicament of American masculinity and offer their own prescriptive accusations. A concise review of article and book titles is telling: ‘The Day of the Lout’ (*LA Times*); ‘Dead Suit Walking: If it isn’t the Great Depression, it is the Great Humbling. Can Manhood Survive the Lost Decade?’ (*Newsweek*); ‘The End of Men’ (*Atlantic Magazine*); ‘Men, Who Needs Them?’ (*NY Times*); ‘Our Male Identity Crisis: What Will Happen to Men?’ (*Psychology Today*); and *Manthropology: The Science of Why the Modern Male Is Not the Man He Used To Be*. These writers bemoan what they see as the downward spiral of the American male towards irrelevancy, apathy, or ineptitude.²¹ One wonders if this widespread cultural anxiety is rooted in traditional conceptions of gender roles that are, in effect, fundamentally anchored in religious practice. Social theorists have compellingly argued that powerful socio-religious forces give way, through processes of secularization and/or development, shedding their religious formulations but retaining a secularized form of societal meaning and relevance.²² It remains to be seen, however, where Gordon Robertson and *The 700 Club* fit amongst these tensions. In this anxious permutation of discourse(s) on manhood, where does Gordon situate himself? How does Gordon perceive maleness? Next, I briefly trace the history of evangelical family and gender ideologies before situating CBN itself within the fray.

Familism and Soft-patriarchy

Based on 19th- and early-20th-century conservative Protestant roots – which melded biblical conservatism with Victorian familial ideals – evangelicals are, by historical lineage, *familists*, meaning that they invest the institution of the family with sacredness and view the functions of the family (marriage, child-

distinctiveness, see J. Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers 2001.

²¹ N. Gabler, ‘The Day of the Lout,’ *Los Angeles Times* (February 13, 2011), accessed 7 November 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/13/entertainment/la-ca-louts-20110213>; R. Marin and T. Dokoupil, ‘Dead Suit Walking: If it isn’t the Great Depression, it is the Great Humbling. Can Manhood Survive the Lost Decade?’, *Newsweek Magazine* (April 17, 2011), accessed 7 November 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/04/17/dead-suit-walking.html>; H. Rosin, ‘The End of Men,’ *Atlantic Magazine* (July/August 2011), accessed 7 November 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/the-end-of-men/308135/>; G. Hampikian (op-ed contributor), ‘Men, Who Needs Them?’, *New York Times* 25 August 2012, accessed 28 August 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/25/opinion/men-who-needs-them.html?_r=0; R.B. Williams, ‘Our Male Identity Crisis: What Will Happen to Men?’ in *Psychology Today* 19 July 2010, accessed 4 September 2012, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wired-success/201007/our-male-identity-crisis-what-will-happen-men>; P. McAllister, *Manthropology: The Science of Why the Modern Male Is Not the Man He Used To Be*, New York: St. Martin’s Press 2009.

²² M. Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Routledge 2006 (1930), 123–125; E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, New York: Oxford University Press 2001 (1912).

bearing, and especially motherhood) through lenses of *sentimental domesticity*.²³ Familism tends to translate into gender-role traditionalism, or separate-sphere ideology, in which men and women fill specific, divinely-instated roles. A series of corresponding dichotomies best represents this separatism: husband/wife; work-place/home; breadwinning/childrearing; paid employment/unemployed domestic labour. Familists support their claim to divine ordination by appealing first to a number of specific biblical texts and second, to natural order. In other words, traditionalists argue that physiological and psychological differences between the sexes reinforce essentialist, separate sphere ideals. Men are masculine, muscular, and thus designed to be active in the external world; women are feminine and weaker and thus more attuned to sheltered, interior, domestic responsibilities. So the argument goes. In terms of cognition or personality, men excel at conquest and work while women are unsurpassed in relational strength.²⁴

These essentialist discourses sometimes take a sexualized turn. One recent conservative commentator argues that 'however we try, the sexual act cannot be made into an egalitarian pleasuring party. *A man penetrates, conquers, colonizes, plants. A woman receives, surrenders, accepts.* This is of course offensive to all egalitarians, and so our culture has rebelled against the concept of authority and submission in marriage.'²⁵ For this writer, the issues are clear; God created men and women very differently, and for progressive culture to try to blur these differences is to disregard God's intention for the respective genders. It is important to note, though, that Wilson's quotation has been met with considerable outrage from other Christian writers. Although the quotation was published in 1999, it recently generated a tidal wave of critical response in the Christian blogosphere. One *Gospel Coalition* contributor, Jared Wilson, stirred up the controversy by affirming Douglas Wilson's statement in a blog post titled, 'The Polluted Waters of 50 Shades of Grey' (this article has since been removed from the *Gospel Coalition's* webpage). Popular and progressive-leaning blogger, Rachel Held Evans, critiqued both Wilsons' essentialist languages in a blog post titled, 'The Gospel Coalition, Sex, and Subordination.'²⁶ At last check (early September, 2012), this post had received over 640 reader comments, a startling figure considering that this is a personal blog site. A basic online search of related terms ('Gospel Coalition' + 'sex' + 'Wilson' + 'gender') reveals a plethora of other blogs that mentioned the debate. All in all, I see this wide range of response to these controversial statements as reinforcement of the thesis that evangelical gender roles are in flux and that gender dichotomizations are a past relic in many evangelical circles. These bloggers also reinforce the argument that gender role negotiations on the ground tend to be more egalitarian than public or official discourse suggests.²⁷

²³ Bartkowski, *Remaking the Godly Marriage*, 24–30; Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 8–9, 36.

²⁴ Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 169.

²⁵ D. Wilson, *Fidelity: What It Means to be a One-Woman Man*, Moscow, ID: Cannon Press 1999, 86.

²⁶ Accessed 20 July 2012, <http://rachelheldevans.com/gospel-coalition-douglas-wilson-sex>.

²⁷ On the nuanced ways families negotiate of gender and household roles outside of official discourse, see Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*; Bartkowski, *Remaking the Godly Marriage*. For a study of the changing ways 'local'

In the wake of late 20th-century socio-cultural upheavals – not the least of which are several waves of feminist mobilization – evangelical ideological discourse on gender roles fragmented. To put it bluntly, as some scholars rightly conclude, Protestantism plays an important role in domesticating men.²⁸ Although it is easy to demonstrate the state of evangelical gender ideology in terms of binaries – conservatives (patriarchal leadership, separate spheres and roles) versus liberals (egalitarian leadership, quasi-androgynous roles) – recent research suggests the rise of a complex ideological moderation. This more nuanced form of evangelical family structure is *soft-patriarchy*. As a moderate expression of familism it ‘offers men a “patriarchal bargain” that accords them with symbolic authority in the home in return for their exercise of greater responsibility for the well-being of their families,’ a responsibility that entails increased relational involvement and more consistent emotional work in the lives of wives and children.²⁹ This ‘New Man’ is sensitive, less egocentric, and is ‘governed by the sensibilities of egalitarianism and partnership rather than domineering.’ He is more emotionally expressive and communicative and rejects negative traces of rigid patriarchy such as stoicism and insensitivity. Key descriptive words in soft-patriarchal discourse include *self-sacrifice*, *mutual submission*, and *servant leadership*.³⁰ These developments are also *postfeminist* in that they incorporate and adapt feminist family reforms to some degree, but not in an explicit or official sense.³¹ It is at this juncture in the development of gender ideology that Gordon’s cooking show resides.

‘Sunday Dinners: Cooking with Gordon’

On *cbn.com* the subtitle of the ‘Sunday Dinners’ webpage, ‘Sharing Good Times with Family and Friends,’ is telling. Family is the overarching theme and nostalgia plays a crucial role. ‘Gordon Robertson has fond memories of Sunday dinners from his youth. Here, he shares some of his favourite recipes from the past and present,’ the website describes. The page showcases four main segments (or respective ‘recipes’) include ‘Salmon in Puff Pastry,’ ‘Eye of Round Roast,’ ‘Roasted Chicken with Lemon Zest,’ and ‘Persian Leg of Lamb and Rice Pilaf.’³²

evangelical families conceptualize gender and labor, see P. Edgell, *Religion and Family in a Changing Society*, Princeton University Press 2006.

²⁸ See Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 14; K. Aune, ‘Fatherhood in British Evangelicalism: Negotiating with Mainstream Culture’ in *Men and Masculinities* 13:2 (2010), 170.

²⁹ Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 9.

³⁰ J. Bartkowski, ‘Connections and Contradictions: Exploring the Complex Linkages between Faith and Family’ in N.T. Ammerman (ed.), *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, New York: Oxford University Press 2007, 156–158; Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*, 13–14. For a study on increased male emotional work at home in the British context, see Aune, ‘Fatherhood in British Evangelicalism.’

³¹ Stacey, *Brave New Families*, 139. See note 22 above.

³² See ‘Sunday Dinners: Cooking With Gordon,’ accessed 28 August 2011, <http://www.cbn.com/special/sundaydinner/>. One can access a number of other shows archived on *cbn.com* and posted to YouTube.

Reversal of Roles

In the cooking show, Gordon is the master of the kitchen. He is not simply a husband concerned with assisting his wife in *her* household labours, although alleviating his wife's domestic pressures certainly plays a role; he is chief chef, professional cook, and skilled initiate in the fine culinary arts. To be sure, Gordon acknowledges that one of the reasons he cooks is to lessen domestic stresses for his wife, that is, to give her a rest from kitchen work at least one day per week: 'When I cook, I cook on the weekends. I take that load off Kathryn, and, I like it.'³³ His claim also bolsters recent statistical evidence that men pull more weight now than ever when it comes to the division of household labours (including cleaning, child care, and cooking).³⁴ Although the segment is primarily about cooking and preparation of food – to which I will turn shortly – a researcher might easily excavate the show for short discourses that say much about evangelical conceptions of gender, gender roles, and the family. Or to put it in socio-anthropological language: the show is ripe with symbolic language and action.

The atmosphere of the kitchen studio is relaxed and casual, mirroring other popular television cooking shows. Gordon commonly wears slacks and a solid or striped oxford or button-down, over which he ties an apron. Should one take Gordon's comfortability in donning an apron – a historical cultural icon commonly associated with motherhood, women's duties, and feminine domesticity – as a confirmation of a blurring of male–female domestic roles?³⁵ I contend that the ways Gordon moves through the studio space and interacts with his (mostly female) co-hosts affirm this question, if only partially. In some scenes, Chef Gordon plays the role of culinary expert, patiently guiding his co-hosts through curious and often tedious steps of fine food preparation. The irony, however, is evident in the behaviour of the co-hosts; here we see wives and mothers taking domestic advice from a man. For instance, in one segment, co-host Kristi Watts assists Gordon in preparing puff pastry-wrapped salmon. Kristi works full-time

³³ 'Cooking with Gordon: Salmon in Puff Pastry,' *Youtube*, accessed 28 August 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnht05VCd14>.

³⁴ For a good overview of this argument, see journalist R.D. Konigsburg's report, 'Chore Wars,' *Time Magazine* 8 August 2011, accessed 13 October 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2084582,00.html>. Some researchers describe the rise of a burgeoning 'New Male Mystique,' in which men 'now experience more work-family conflict than women' in that they feel conflicted due to work obligations and simultaneous pressures to be emotionally invested as a partner and father in the home sphere. K. Aumann, et. al., 'The New Male Mystique,' *National Study of the Changing Workforce and Families and Work Institute* 2011, 1. See also B. Harrington, et. al., 'The New Dad: Caring, Committed and Conflicted,' Boston College Center for Work & Family 2011.

³⁵ The 1960s-era manual, *Fascinating Womanhood*, for instance, mentors women on how to be more feminine and appealing to their husbands. The manual delineates for the reader specific gender roles and sees the apron as not only an article of clothing but a symbol of feminine identity. A 'housedress' overlaid with an 'apron,' the manual argues, 'is more or less your uniform or identification mark. When you wear a feminine, domestic-looking housedress and apron, there will be no doubt in the minds of your family about who you are – the queen of the household.' H. Andelin, *Fascinating Womanhood*, New York: Random House, Inc. 2007 (1965), 297–298.

as a television personality; she simply does not have time to cook elaborate meals for her family. She asks Gordon the obvious questions as he cooks. In another segment, also co-hosted by Kristi, Gordon makes fun of her (lack of) skill in the kitchen: 'Well, the joke around here is that you make – when you come to cooking – you're making cereal.' 'Cereal!' Kristi confirms, laughing, and then defends herself: 'I can cook!' 'You pour it out from the box,' Gordon goes on, and 'you pour milk on top of it.' 'It's a form of cooking!' Kristi defends. Gordon is patient in his instructions. He moves slowly through the process, offering helpful tidbits of culinary information on everything from the importance of grinding whole spices to cooking at very low temperatures to preserve meat quality. Later in the segment, Kristi says that she wants to prove that she can cook 'more than cereal.' Gordon concedes and then tests her: 'Okay, can you sweat the mushrooms?' There's an awkward silence, and both parties smile. 'I don't know what *sweating* means,' Kristi reluctantly admits. Gordon shows her how. 'What are leeks?' Kristi inquires at a different point. 'As God is my witness, I don't even know what they are.' Gordon obligingly enlightens her.³⁶

Facilitating Family Rituals

Even if Gordon's show challenges rigidly-defined gender assignments, in terms of labour and duties, however, this does not mean that evangelicals are changing their views on the sacral institution of the family. In fact, 'Cooking with Gordon: Sunday Dinners' can be viewed as an attempt to reinforce the centrality of the family in a world where the erosion of family values is considered imminent. This reinforcement comes through intentional gathering, cooking, conversing, and *eating together*. At certain times during the cooking segment, while Gordon chops vegetables or manually grinds spices, the camera zooms in on his hands. His large, gold wedding band figures prominently in the scene, a symbol of his covenant to wife and family. Gordon's introductory statements for one of his sessions are worth quoting at length:

We want to show you Sunday Suppers; we want to encourage you to have family meals together. You know, the Sunday Supper was such a great tradition. Growing up in my family, we always expected: Supper. Sunday. Mom's gonna' cook. It's going to be awesome. It's gonna' be a great meal. It was something we always looked forward to.³⁷

The meal as a source of familial reinforcement and relationship-building is a consistent theme throughout the cooking segments. Occasionally Gordon's wife, Kathryn, joins him on the studio set for special occasions, such as the preparation of a holiday meal.³⁸ Before whipping up 'Chicken with Lemon Zest,' assisted by long-time co-host Terry Meeuwssen, Gordon reiterates: 'I really want

³⁶ See 'Cooking with Gordon: Salmon in Puff Pastry – CBN.com, December 27, 2010,' *Youtube*, accessed 28 August 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnht05VCd14> and 'The 700 Club – August 11, 2011 – CBN.com,' *Youtube*, accessed 28 August 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEx1e3JlIouk>.

³⁷ 'Cooking with Gordon: Salmon in Puff Pastry.'

³⁸ 'Gordon's Holiday Favorites – CBN.com,' *Youtube*, accessed 29 August 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8auRH6QMv4>.

to encourage families to start eating more together. . . . You can gather your family [and] friends around to have a time of fellowship together and really enjoy one another. And what better way to do that than over food?'³⁹

The themes of family-gathering, conversation, and friendship occur repeatedly, demonstrating that gathering together around the table is a form of ceremony or quasi-ritual. Although 'Sunday Dinners' focuses mostly on the *preparation* of food in order to facilitate these family rituals, one can envision the symbolic role of proper group behaviours in such activities as praying over (or 'blessing') the meal, carving the roast, or setting and clearing the table.⁴⁰ Although dining practices differ from family to family and culture to culture, Gordon's admonitions on gathering for meals are clear attempts to form meaningful family experiences or rituals. In an effort to locate the cooking show within its broader context it is helpful to note the ways one article contributor to *cbn.com* finds issue with the un-meaningful (i.e., non-symbolic) processes of food consumption in contemporary society's fast-paced environment:

Opening yourself up to that kind of perspective could transform meal times into rituals that you savor. If that sounds far fetched, then examine your eating traditions. Do you shove food down your throat all week without really thinking about it much? Is your only view of food, in a spiritual context, some brief and occasional religious sacrament – perhaps a quick communion? Hey, when we scarf our way through life, it is easy to be flippant with faith.⁴¹

There is no question that 'Sunday Dinners' is a concerted effort to stabilize the family in a time where its erosion appears imminent. In fact, as the above writer attests, if one disregards the sacredness of meals, one's faith might also be lived out capriciously. In this way, corporate gathering, eating together, and faith are inextricably allied.⁴²

French Cuisine: Technique and Meaning

The content of 'Sunday Dinners' – what meals Gordon prepares and the procedures by which he does so – underscores the centrality of food, eating, diet, and the family in evangelicalism. Although an explicit and unilateral belief system about consumption and diet is clearly lacking from such a program, important values are implied. On the subject of utopian food practices in North America, historians Etta M. Madden and Martha L. Finch draw on semiotician Roland

³⁹ 'Sunday Dinners: Chicken with Lemon Zest – CBN.com,' *Youtube*, accessed 13 October 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjPzLIZzov4>.

⁴⁰ R. Collins, 'Women and the Production of Status Cultures' in M. Lamont and M. Fournier (eds.), *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, Chicago University Press 1992, 219.

⁴¹ B. Cantwell, 'The Passover Meal and Your Health,' accessed 15 October 2011, https://www.cbn.com/health/fitness/FF_passovermeal08.aspx.

⁴² For another clear example of this blending, consider the recent initiative, 'Table Talk for Families': 'It can be a struggle for parents and children to read the Bible regularly together – but help is at hand. *Table Talk* is designed to form the basis for a short family Bible time – maybe just five minutes at mealtime.' 'Table Talk for Families,' accessed 5 April 2013, <http://www.thegoodbook.com/bible/daily-devotional-reading/table-talk>.

Barthes to argue that food practices constitute 'a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour.' In other words, 'a culture's food system constitutes a symbolic language that transmits information about the underlying values, the ethos, of a society.'⁴³ What types of foods does Gordon cook and do his preferences tell us anything about this form of evangelical cultural life?

Gordon has, in short, an affinity for French cuisine. In one holiday segment that walks through the recipe for 'pear tart,' Gordon adds his own special twists but acknowledges that the original tart recipe is a century-old French one.⁴⁴ In 'Gordon Robertson's Turkey Leftovers,' Gordon sautés onion, celery, and carrots together in butter. 'This is what the French call a *mirepoix*,' he tells co-host, Kristi.⁴⁵ In another segment, Gordon grills steaks outdoors with cook and restaurateur Rick Tramonto. The two men jest about the American tradition of grilling steak and, Gordon adds, chuckling, 'we like our burnt sacrifices.' Later in the show, after Rick shares his secrets of steak grilling, Gordon tells Rick about his personal cooking preferences:

For me, the [cooking] technique is everything. And every step has meaning. And the more you understand the steps, and what it's trying to do – the marinade is trying to break down the tough fibers to make an inexpensive cut tender – and how important those steps are. It wasn't really until I got into *French cooking* that I understood it. And I understood the meaning of technique and how important are the simple things, like making sure your eggs are at room temperature – how that influences the final dish. And it's just understanding the process. For every one of these steps, there's meaning.⁴⁶

For Gordon, the cooking process itself is significant in that it is imbued with meaning. From knowing one's local butcher on a personal basis and intentionally selecting one's fruits and vegetables at local farmers' markets, to the careful preparation of the food itself, the process is described by Gordon in near-ritualistic terms. Gordon's preference for French culinary methods demonstrates that food (both preparation and consumption of) are imbued with unique significance or specialness.⁴⁷

The types of foods Gordon prepares are also telling. Lamb, roast, salmon, steak, turkey, chicken: *meats* of various types are showcased on 'Sunday Dinners.' One might interpret this emphasis on meat in a number of ways. If food is a symbolic system, then particular food types take on particular meanings. Barthes, for instance, sees steak as symbolic of masculinity while sugar might

⁴³ E.M. Madden and M.L. Finch, *Eating in Eden: Food and American Utopias*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2006, 14.

⁴⁴ '700 Club Interactive – December 20, 2010 – CBN.com,' Youtube, accessed 28 August 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cZUd-oKdcw>.

⁴⁵ 'Gordon Robertson's Turkey Leftovers,' CBN, accessed 8 December 2011, http://www.cbn.com/media/player/index.aspx?s=/mp4/AR91v1_WS.

⁴⁶ 'The 700 Club – May 30, 2011 – CBN.com,' Youtube, accessed 29 August 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-UBq-RJX4U> (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ This is not to say, however, that Gordon only cooks French-styled food. His cooking, as is obvious, is *Americanized*. He also draws on other traditions, such as Persian cuisine (i.e. 'Persian Leg of Lamb').

take on 'feminine' aspects as it is correlated to a 'sweet time.'⁴⁸ More closely related, historian Daniel Sacks argues that Protestants in the early 20th century often had a 'gendered understanding of food.' In fact, Sacks writes, 'a meal for men must be substantial – and include meat.'⁴⁹ Although Gordon's cooking falls into the category of 'bourgeois cuisine' in that it is middle-class gastronomy, situated somewhere between local or regional cooking practices and that of the professionals (in Gordon's case, the French), it also suggests that a gendered understanding of food practices is not too far off base.⁵⁰

Making Sense of 'Sunday Dinners': Gender Construction and Ideological Contrast

There are other interpretations of 'Sunday Dinners' to be considered. For instance, is the show simply another attempt of North American Evangelicals to 'Christianize' a popular secular genre? Male top-chefs are also the stars of a number of popular cooking shows on secular cable networks. 'Sunday Dinners' certainly provides a profanity-free alternative to other cooking programs, such as Chef Gordon Ramses's 'Hell's Kitchen.' Gordon's presence as a male cook might be considered in this regard, but his status as conservative evangelical problematizes such a unilateral interpretation. To return to gender issues, one might wonder if Gordon is actually *affirming* or *reinforcing* his patriarchal role as the leader of the household as he instructs these women how to do 'their' job more appropriately. Is he patronizing women's roles in his cooking segment? This is one plausible rendering, I admit. But such an interpretation, I'd argue, does not fully grasp the structure and content of the show. One overarching observation of 'Sunday Dinners' is the way that male/female differentiations are largely absent; traditional dichotomies appear somewhat irrelevant. For Gordon, his being male *and* a talented cook is a non-issue. If cooking and kitchen duties were once assigned explicitly to the women's sphere, they are no longer. On the one hand, then, Gordon embodies a typical model: *male as skilled professional*. But where this model is particularly striking is in its application to traditionally Protestant, familist contexts. Historically – ideally – Protestant fathers do not stay home and cook. Thus, Gordon's model in 'Sunday Dinners' is an unexpected visual example of the blurring of evangelical gender roles.

There are a number of compelling contrasts between 'Sunday Dinners' and other discourses promulgated through the CBN website. These differences have to do with gender construal as well as food practices. First, other contributors offer models of fatherhood that compete with Gordon's own. Popular Christian writer John Eldredge embodies a gender essentialism that seems to contradict

⁴⁸ Gusfield, 'Nature's Body and the Metaphors of Food,' 80–81; R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, St. Albans: Paladin 1973; 'Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption,' in R. Forster and O. Ranum (eds.), *Food and Drink in History*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1979.

⁴⁹ D. Sacks, 'On Deciphering a Potluck: The Social Meaning of Church Socials,' *Material History of American Religion Project* (1997), accessed 8 December 2011, <http://www.materialreligion.org/journal/potluck.html>.

⁵⁰ J.S. Thursby, *Foodways and Folklore: A Handbook*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Folklore Handbooks 2008, 30.

the character of soft-patriarchy: 'Men want a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.' A woman, on the other hand, 'wants to be romanced, she wants to be an essential part of a great adventure, she wants a beauty to unveil.'⁵¹ While Eldredge's description of gender remains vague in this interview, he is more forthcoming in his book *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*, also publicized by CBN. Men are aggressive by nature, he asserts (implying, therefore, that women are not). Men enjoy aggressive sports and competition; hockey and boxing are not female sports. 'My boys,' Eldredge continues in a personal vein, 'do not sit down to tea parties. They do not call their friends on the phone to talk about relationships.' Men want to be heroes and rescuers; women want to be rescued (although, he concedes, a woman wants to be part of the adventure). Ultimately, Eldredge sees the blurring of God-given distinctions as a negative development: 'The world kills a woman's heart when it tells her to be tough, efficient, and independent.' Toughness, efficiency, and independence, by implication, are therefore construed as male traits.⁵² In a statement ringing with separate-sphere, essentialist language, Eldredge claims that 'boys have never been at home indoors, and men have had an insatiable longing to explore.' He bemoans the fact that men have been alienated from their aggressive, adventurous selves and homogenized into 'Really Nice Guys.'⁵³ I am under the opinion that the terms 'Really Nice Guys' and the sensitive, emotionally-invested 'New Man' are synonymous; at the very least, the terms are closely analogous. And Eldredge is not alone in his convictions.⁵⁴ His statements are also reminiscent of Douglas Wilson's sexually-toned essentialist arguments, cited above.

Second, Gordon's meals seem to contradict broader CBN discourses having to do with health, nutrition, diet, and exercise. Put simply, Gordon's gourmet meals are in no way catered to those who are concerned with counting calories. Especially interesting is the fact that Gordon's father, Pat Robertson – known throughout the evangelical world for his emphasis on health and nutrition on CBN programs, including *The 700 Club* daily television programming – dissuades those wishing to lose weight from using high fat-content food substances like butter. In one weight-loss text, Pat writes that 'the object of this [nutritional advice] program is to force your body to mobilize your stored fat for energy. For this reason, you should not add any supplemental fat – no butter, no cheese, no fat meat, no sausage, etc.'⁵⁵ Butter, to the contrary, plays an important role in Gordon's foodie segment, the visual face of CBN and *The 700 Club's* discourses on food. 'I like butter,' Gordon states in one segment.⁵⁶ (Margarine, he insists in

⁵¹ L.J. Bagby, 'John Eldredge Speaks on Ransoming Hearts,' *CBN*, accessed 17 October 2011, http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/biblestudyandtheology/perspectives/bagby-john_eldredge_0804.aspx.

⁵² Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 10–11, 15–17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4, 9.

⁵⁴ See also D. Eckman, 'God Formed the Man and Fashioned the Woman,' *CBN*, accessed 17 October 2011, http://www.cbn.com/family/marriage/adamneve_2.aspx.

⁵⁵ P. Robertson, 'Weight-Loss Challenge.'

⁵⁶ 'The 700 Club – May 30, 2011 – CBN.com,' *Youtube*, accessed 29 October 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-UBq-RJX4U>.

another show, is unacceptable for fine cooking.⁵⁷) With his affinity for French cuisine, Gordon does not modify his meals for those concerned with watching their weight. He does not intend his 'Sunday Dinners' as a weight-loss program, nor does he base his selections on health benefits. But it is fascinating to observe that the nutritional habits promoted by the show perpetuates issues of ill-health so stringently resisted by other CBN health and nutrition contributors, including *The 700 Club* founder, Gordon's own father.

Boundary Construal

Although 'Sunday Dinners' does not make it explicitly clear, one might point out the ways evangelicals construct, manage, and reinforce boundaries. The family meal itself – the facilitation of which is, in fact, the primary goal of the show – has a role in the delineation of social boundaries. Meals eaten collectively embody particular rituals as well as mark ceremonially the divisions between members and non-members.⁵⁸ A collective sense of 'we' or 'us' is established, one might point out, by the simultaneous exclusion of those who are not included in these categories. As anthropologist Mary Douglas writes, central to ideas of food and social food practices are messages 'about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries.'⁵⁹ Food symbols help to order experience but also do so in distinction from *other* experiences (or from those *others* who experience them).⁶⁰ Although analysing Gordon's cooking show does not give the researcher access into the millions of homes that watch *The 700 Club* across the country, there is no question that preparing food and consuming it as a group are profoundly *social* activities. And while all of the rituals involved in social food practices are not explicitly 'religious' as, say, the spoken prayers or verbal blessings that precede consumption, these ceremonies are special to evangelical cultural life, in general. 'Sunday Dinners,' in fact, is devoted to the very construction of these everyday rituals. 'Sunday Dinners' seeks to make everyday life more meaningful and does so through the construction and reinforcement of familial boundaries.

Additionally, eating is closely tied to sex and gender roles. In some traditional societies, males are served before females and certain foods are imbued with masculine or feminine traits.⁶¹ What is important to note in the case of *The 700 Club*, however, is that dichotomized gender boundaries, especially in essentialist, separatist terms, are relaxed. Strict bifurcations are muted. These boundaries are not rigid and unchanging. Although Gordon prefers 'meaty' recipes that might be described as 'masculine' foods, this remains a loose correspondence.

⁵⁷ 'Watch Gordon Cook Christmas Breakfast – CBN.com, December 10, 2009,' *Youtube*, accessed 28 August 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkO4f1P9A9I>.

⁵⁸ Collins, 'Woman and the Production of Status Cultures,' 219.

⁵⁹ M. Douglas, 'Deciphering a Meal,' in M. Douglas (ed.), *Implicit Meanings*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1975, 231.

⁶⁰ Gusfield, 'Nature's Body and the Metaphors of Food,' 77.

⁶¹ P. Farb and G. Armelagos, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1980, 5.

In 'Sunday Dinners,' Gordon reassigns meaning to iconic symbols such as the apron, or, more broadly, the kitchen itself.

A Brief Note on Influence and Reception

It is difficult to determine just how influential *The 700 Club* is in terms of representation of broader U.S. evangelicalism, as religion journalists have astutely noted.⁶² There is no question that Pat Robertson is a polarizing and controversial figure. A 1996 article in the mainstream *Christianity Today* captured this paradox well, arguing that one does not 'have to be popular to be important.' Through *The 700 Club*, Robertson has been a key figure in the charismatic renewal, the growth of Christian television programming, and conservative evangelical political mobilization. Regardless of his controversial nature, Robertson 'helped transform evangelicalism from a small, defended backwater to the leading force in American Christianity.'⁶³ *Christianity Today* duly notes that while he 'is one of the most influential leaders in 20th-century evangelicalism,' Robertson's 'pontificating on everything from marijuana to Israel to September 11 to the end of the world' make him unpopular among 'culturally savvy evangelicals.'⁶⁴ Robertson is an ambivalent figure, certainly, but his influence on American Christianity should not be understated. CBN's budget, in comparison to Focus on the Family's, for instance, bypasses it by \$165 million per annum.⁶⁵ Although statistics on religious television reception are notoriously difficult to gage and interpret, that *The 700 Club* can be seen in 97% of U.S. television markets and over one million American viewers per day tune in to the program, demonstrates its relevance to at least some segments of American evangelicalism.⁶⁶ One might question the extent *The 700 Club* is representative of broader trajectories in evangelicalism: As a form of public, official, or broadcasted discourse, do its views represent those of most everyday evangelicals? What I find important about *The 700 Club*, however, has less to do with its *representation* of a the larger evangelical public than that it does with the fact that it poses itself strategically as a visual model for exemplification and emulation. The show intends that families watching it will follow suit; the overarching goal of 'Sunday Dinners: Cooking with Gordon' is that families will re-establish meaningful rituals.

⁶² See Sarah Posner, 'Judging Pat Robertson's Influence' in *Religion Dispatches Magazine* (January 14, 2010), accessed 27 March 2013, http://www.religiondispatches.org/blog/2191/judging_pat_robertson%E2%80%99s_influence/.

⁶³ T. Stafford, 'Robertson R Us,' in *Christianity Today* (August 12 1996), 28.

⁶⁴ See the topical description 'Pat Robertson,' *Christianity Today*, accessed 27 March 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/r/pat-robertson/>.

⁶⁵ R. Boston, 'Facts and Figures about the Religious Right in America,' *Church & State* (May 2011), 11, 13.

⁶⁶ 'About CBN.' Nielsen ratings, for instance, are misleading in that they tally only viewers who watch one episode, but not the number of times per week that viewers tune in to that specific program. For programs like *The 700 Club*, then, viewer totals might be grossly underestimated. On these and other difficulties, see William J. Brown, 'Assessing the Value of Devotional Television,' in Robert H. Woods, (ed.), *Evangelical Christians and Popular Culture: Pop Goes the Gospel*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO 2013, 114 and 156n6.

Conclusion

At the centre of these discourses lies a peculiar entity: the American evangelical body. The family, by anthropological definition, is a secure network of embodied kinship relationships; at a most basic level, it is two or more bodies brought together under some sort of committed kinship structure. These bodies, in addition, are gendered bodies. Evangelical gender ideologies, in turn, are attempts to make sense of one's psycho-physiological characteristics according to a divinely-ordered schema. What people *do* with these bodies, in effect, is determined by the specific ways God is believed to shape and purpose those bodies. That this show is representative of shifting perceptions of how these bodies are imagined echoes historian Martha Finch's claim that bodies are never static or reified entities. Bodies are perpetually shifting sites of exchange between self and the world.⁶⁷

In summary, then, the discursive ideologies promulgated via *The 700 Club's* 'Sunday Dinners' segment demonstrate several notable points. First, the family is an axiomatic feature of evangelical worldview and the future of the faith is believed to depend on the vitality of the family. Second, and in no small way, 'Sunday Dinners' is an attempt to facilitate meaningful family rituals in an environment where the demise of those traditions seems to be an imminent threat. What exactly these rituals are – beyond the call to 'gather together' – must be investigated by future researchers of everyday evangelical cultural life. Third, on specific practical and theological junctures, the term *evangelical* implies a strikingly diverse mass of opinions and arguments. Not all evangelicals agree on issues of family, gender roles, and nutrition; this point cannot be stressed enough. Some of these discourses, in fact, are blatantly contradictory.⁶⁸ Fourth, and subsequently, Gordon Robertson suggests an internalization of a complex form of *soft-patriarchy*, even while other CBN contributors offer models of fatherhood that compete with his own.⁶⁹ On the one hand, his show embodies an anti-essentialist approach to household duties that has more to do with culinary skill than with one's gendered status; on the other, it suggests a return to a meaningful, ritualized past. The show looks nostalgically to tradition while it inadvertently adopts feminist reforms. 'Sunday Dinners' suggests that for those who regularly view *The 700 Club*, separate-spheres ideology is a thing of the past. *Real* fathers spend time with their families. Real fathers are physically- and emotionally-invested in the lives of both their spouse and their children. Real fathers take the initiative to help around the house (without having to be asked, of course). And, most importantly, *real fathers cook*, even if only on occasion.

⁶⁷ See the quote opening this essay.

⁶⁸ Bartkowski, *Remaking the Godly Marriage*, 161.

⁶⁹ For instance, Gordon's depiction of a man who is comfortable donning an apron and working in the kitchen may be at odds with Eldredge's vision of the fierce, wild-hearted man. Or to put it differently, Chef Gordon himself may fall far too closely to Eldredge's dreaded 'Really Nice Guy.' See Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 7.