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CONTENTS

Argument 4

ESSAYS

The Meal of God 6

— Bartholomew Calvano, O.P.

Food in the Rearview 17

— Paul Clarke, O.P.

Stewards, Not “Absolute Arbiters”: A Scientific and Catholic
Perspective on Genetically Modified Crops 29

— James Ritch, O.P.

The Bread that Perishes and the Bread that Endures 40

— Isidore Rice, O.P.

THE LOCUTORIUM

Among the Pots and Pans

An Interview with “The Cooking Priest,” Fr. Leo Patalinghug 50

— Jordan Zajac, O.P.

DISPUTED QUESTION

On a Faithful Approach to Food 62

— John Paul Kern, O.P., and

Josemaría Guzmán-Domínguez, O.P.

CONTEMPLATA	
The Holy Feasting: The Eucharist as a Sacred Banquet	77
— Ignatius Weiss, O.P.	

GESTA DOCTRINAMQUE	
The Apostolate of Jesus	
<i>By Pierre-Thomas Dehau, O.P.</i>	83
— Translated by Stephen Ruhl, O.P.	

LIVES OF THE BRETHREN	
The Diffusive Goodness of Becoming Who One Is	
<i>The Life of Fr. Kurt Pritzl, O.P.</i>	92
— Barnabas McHenry, O.P.	

ORIGINAL WRITINGS	
Little by Little	106
— Isaiah Beiter, O.P.	

FRIARS' BOOKSHELF	
Silence Will Save the World	111
— Irenaeus Dunlevy, O.P.	
<i>On The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise</i>	
<i>by Robert Cardinal Sarah with Nicholas Diat</i>	

The Sting of the WASP: The Necessity of a Christian Culture	
in Post-Protestant America	115
— Constantius Sanders, O.P.	
<i>On Resurrecting the Idea of the Christian Society</i>	
<i>by R. R. Reno</i>	

CLOISTER CHRONICLE	118
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ARGUMENT

The Son of Man came eating and drinking . . .

– Luke 7:34

Food is a fitting subject for Dominicans to consider. Accounts of the life of our founder St. Dominic are replete with foodstuffs, and God worked a number of alimentary miracles through him. The narratives are delightful and vivifying to consider. There is the story of the brethren sitting down at table in the convent of St. Sixtus, Rome, despite their having no food, and, thanks to St. Dominic's prayers, receiving miraculous supplies of white loaves and wine from the hands of angelic attendants (*Lives of the Brethren* [1955], 74–76).

Then there is the report of St. Dominic, having already offered an edifying spiritual conference to a convent of Dominican nuns, calling for a cup brimful with wine. Blessing it, he, the friars with him, and each of the nuns proceeded to drink deeply. The cup could neither be spilled nor drained, however; it remained full for all. "Drink up, my daughters!" St. Dominic exclaimed. No matter how much they consumed, they did not grow inebriated, but experienced spiritual delights only (Tugwell, *Early Dominicans*, 391–92). Such miracles signal the presence of God at work, by grace, in St. Dominic. They also suggest that food functions as a divine instrument, a point of contact between man and the Almighty. By charity, we can orient our love of created things toward God. It is possible to love food and drink for God's sake.

This issue of *Dominicana* takes as its theme the deep ties between food and the Catholic faith. Out of love for sinful humanity, the Son of Man came to drink the cup prepared for Him, the cup of salvation (Mt 20:22; Ps 116:13). He also came to feed, and to be fed upon. The Eucharist emerges as a point of particular emphasis in the pages of this issue. Br. Ignatius Weiss contemplates the *O Sacred Banquet*, Eucharistic verses composed

by St. Thomas Aquinas, while Br. Bartholomew Calvano explores a rich banqueting image found in the writings of St. Catherine of Siena. Br. Stephen Ruhl offers an original translation from a work by the French Dominican Fr. Pierre-Thomas Dehau, which concerns the Lord as both the Word and Bread of Life. Br. Isidore Rice contributes a personal reflection on the role of natural and supernatural bread in his life of faith.

Br. Paul Clarke places a pan-full of his food memories on the stovetop, reflecting on the deep meaning and identity we derive from our remembrances of particular meals. Meanwhile, Br. James Ritch uses Catholic social teaching to examine the matter of genetically modified crops. Br. John Paul Kern and Br. Josemaría Guzmán-Domínguez discuss a Catholic approach to food more generally, given the contours and challenges faced in our food-obsessed culture. The editors sit down for a dinner interview with the “Cooking Priest,” Fr. Leo Patalinghug, to discuss his unique ministry.

This issue also features an original short story by Br. Isaiah Beiter, a biography of our Dominican brother Fr. Kurt Pritzl by Br. Barnabas McHenry, and reviews of two recently published books, each of which examines tensions between the sacred and the secular in today’s world.

“Everything which we think of profoundly we cook, as it were, in our minds,” observes St. Gregory the Great (Homily 22, from *Forty Gospel Homilies*). Our hope is that the pieces contained in this issue function like ingredients, helping you prepare, and enjoy, a feast for the mind and the soul alike—a feast that creates a deeper hunger for the heavenly banquet.

Br. Jordan Zajac, O.P.
Editor

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Associate Editor

ESSAYS

THE MEAL OF GOD

Bartholomew Calvano, O.P.

St. Catherine of Siena was a mystic—the mystic of all mystics, perhaps. She had a profound relationship with the triune God and received many insights and graces from Him. She received the stigmata, although the wounds were kept hidden by God at her request. She was spiritually betrothed to Christ, accepting from Him a ring of espousal that was, again, most frequently invisible. She would fall into rapturous ecstasy, particularly after receiving the Eucharist.

Undergirding her mysticism is a robust theology. St. Catherine was a Dominican, and the character of the Order—prayer, study, and the sharing of that prayer and study with others—is abundantly clear in her writings. This connection is only fitting. St. Catherine was known to request that priests tell her about God when they would come to visit her, and her spiritual directors were always Dominicans. Her spiritual director for the longest length of time was Bl. Raymond of Capua, a Dominican friar who would frequently travel with her on her many journeys. Surely St. Catherine eagerly asked him to teach her about God during those times. The writings of St. Catherine are, therefore,

a beautiful blending of Dominican doctrinal preaching and the personal mystical experiences she received.

We can begin to appreciate this marvelous harmony by looking at an excerpt of just one of her prayers. Here, in the midst of her reflection on the supernatural love of God, a distinctly natural image emerges, that of a meal. The image speaks in a profound way to the intimacy and familiarity God desires with man:

Eternal Goodness,
you want me to gaze into you
and see that you love me,
to see that you love me gratuitously,
so that I may love everyone
with the very same love.
You want me, then,
to love and serve my neighbors gratuitously,
by helping them
spiritually and materially
as much as I can,
without any expectation of selfish profit or pleasure.
Nor do you want me to hold back
because of their ingratitude or persecution,
or for any abuse I may suffer from them.
What then shall I do
to come to such a vision?
I shall strip myself
of my stinking garment
and by the light of most holy faith
I shall contemplate myself in you.
And I shall clothe myself in your eternal will.
By this light I shall come to know
that you, eternal Trinity,
are table
and food
and waiter for us.

You, eternal Father,
are the table
that offers us as food
the Lamb, your only-begotten Son.
He is the most exquisite of foods for us,
both in his teaching,
which nourishes us in your will,
and in the sacrament
that we receive in holy communion,
which feeds and strengthens us
while we are pilgrim travelers in this life.
And the Holy Spirit
is indeed a waiter for us,
for he serves us this teaching
by enlightening our mind's eye with it
and inspiring us to follow it.
And he serves us charity for our neighbors
and hunger to have as our food
souls
and the salvation of the whole world
for the Father's honor.

So we see that souls enlightened in you,
true Light,
never let a moment pass
without eating this exquisite food
for your honor.¹

We find in this prayer a profound consideration of God. This essay offers a theological reflection on this rich Trinitarian prayer, exploring first the image of the Trinity as table, food, and waiter; second, the soul's capacity to taste God through sanctifying grace and the divine indwelling; and, finally, the hunger to feed on souls for the Father's glory. Drawing upon elements from St.

¹ Suzanne Noffke, *The Prayers of Catherine of Siena*, 2nd ed., 114–15.

Catherine's own life experience, her writings, and the Trinitarian theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, this reflection strives to help us appreciate how, by gazing toward the Lord with St. Catherine, we can come to know and love both the Creator and our fellow creatures better.

TABLE, FOOD, AND WAITER

At the heart of this prayer is the message that God loves us, and wants us to love and serve others. When St. Catherine peers humbly into the mystery of the eternal Godhead, she sees that God serves us most generously, in a way that we can easily appreciate:



Andrei Rublev — The Trinity

in the context of a meal. God is table, food, and waiter for us. This is quite the domestic image of the Holy Trinity, an image that is fitting when one remembers Jesus's promise at the Last Supper: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, *and we will come to him and make our home with him*" (Jn 14:23, emphasis added). Such an image would also be meaningful for St. Catherine, considering the many years she served her family at table. St. Catherine's parents had wished to arrange a marriage for their daughter, but she had taken a private vow of virginity, and, as a punishment, she lived as a servant in the home for some time—a duty she fulfilled happily.

This meal image conveys something of the unity of the Triune God. For St. Catherine, it is not only the food that makes the meal, but also the table, as well as the service of the waiter. This image is a beautiful example of the way in which the Trinity always acts as one. If we think about the crucifixion, we see how Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross, and how the cross was a kind of table prepared by the Father from all eternity for His Son. The bonds which, for our sake, held Christ fast to the cross were not mere nails, but were also the "bond of divine charity," who is the Holy Spirit (Letter T99, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, vol. I, 15). Furthermore, that same Holy Spirit brings to us all the graces which are poured out in the Blood of Jesus Christ.

The Father is the one who prepares the table of the cross, but also, as St. Catherine writes in a letter, the Father is "for us a table bearing everything there is" (Letter Gardener 1, vol. I, 189). This metaphor captures a profound metaphysical reality: the unbegotten Father is the principle and support of all that is. Just as a table supports everything that happens at the meal, providing the place for the food and those being fed, so too does God hold all things in existence.

The image of the Son as food should come as no surprise to any Christian. Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life and the Passover Lamb slain for our sins. We must eat of this Lamb roasted on the spit of the cross by the flames of charity, that is the Holy Spirit,

if we are to receive eternal life (Jn 6:54). St. Catherine herself was sustained in a miraculous way by the Eucharist. By the end of her life, she was unable to eat any food other than the Blessed Sacrament. This fast spanned the seven years prior to her death in 1380. Whenever she would try to eat, for instance when she was ordered to by her spiritual director, she would become terribly ill and suffer great pains. The Eucharist alone could she consume. Yet even with such harsh fasting, she still lived an incredibly active life, traveling, proclaiming the Gospel, and caring for the sick. It was the Eucharist that daily sustained and strengthened her. The Son was for her true sustenance.

The image of the Holy Spirit as waiter is very much in accord with His role as Advocate. He is our helper and brings to us the graces merited by Jesus Christ and poured out by the Father. Elsewhere St. Catherine supplies the image of Christ as a wine cask, and the Holy Spirit as a cellarer. She writes, "His humanity is the cask that encased the divine nature. The cellarer—the fire and the hands that are the Holy Spirit—tapped that cask on the wood of the most holy cross" (Letter T136, vol. I, 142). The Holy Spirit is the One who, so to speak, fills the precious chalice for those who feast on the Lamb. He gently guides and serves our hungry souls.

In St. Catherine's imagery, we therefore find vivid descriptions of the essential unity and personal distinctions found in God. In another passage she writes,

Next the bride is welcomed by her bridegroom and led into the room where table, food, and waiter are found. The room is the divine essence, where the real connoisseurs are fed. There we experience the eternal Father as table, the Son as food, and the Holy Spirit as the one who waits for us. And so the soul experiences and is in truth filled with the eternal vision of God. (Letter T112, vol. II, 337)

The vision of God, to see God and know Him, is the desire of our souls. We are led to this vision by Christ the bridegroom.

In this beatific vision we will see and know God both as one indivisibly united Essence and as three really distinct Persons. In this vision will we enjoy an eternal feast.

A SWEET KNOWLEDGE

In the prayer cited above, St. Catherine also reflects on Jesus as Nourishment. We are nourished not only with the Eucharist but also with divine wisdom. The only-begotten Son is “the most exquisite of foods for us,” she writes, and that food takes the form of “his teaching, / Which nourishes us in [the Father’s] will.” The Holy Spirit is the waiter who “serves us this teaching / By enlightening our mind’s eye with it,” and He also “serves us charity for our neighbors.” In these lines, St. Catherine is using very concrete images to describe some of the richest mysteries of Trinitarian theology: the divine indwelling and the invisible missions of the Son and Holy Spirit. She is describing how we can come to “taste” God, so to speak.

These lines from St. Catherine can help us appreciate what it means to be in a state of sanctifying grace. It means that the Trinity can dwell in the human person in a special and personal way. In sanctifying grace, St. Thomas teaches, the Holy Trinity is personally present in the sanctified soul in a way that He is not present to the rest of the created universe. It brings the rational creature into union with the Creator. The Dominican theologian Fr. Gilles Emery explains that this is “a union in which the Triune God enters into intimacy with the human person, and the human being comes into the personal reality of God”—a union made possible by God’s gift of grace to the human person (*The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 360).

We are meant to enjoy this union, to savor and delight in it in mind and heart. We receive the divine gifts of wisdom and charity, which work to perfect our intellect and the will. These gifts of wisdom and charity refer us to the divine Persons in their distinctiveness. In other words, we experience a share in the way

that the divine Persons are related to each other. They give us a share in the relation of the Son (God's wisdom) to the Father, and of the Holy Spirit (God's love) to the Father and the Son.

When discussing how wisdom gives us a share in the way the Son is related to the Father, St. Thomas speaks of "intellectual illumination." St. Thomas quotes St. Augustine, who in his work *On the Trinity* writes, "The Son is being sent whenever someone has knowledge or perception of him." What might St. Augustine mean by perception? St. Thomas explains that "'perception' points to a kind of experiential awareness and this precisely is what wisdom is, a knowing that, as it were, is tasted" (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2). In the original Latin, we find that St. Thomas adds to the delight of this sacred truth by making a pun: wisdom (*sapientia*) is a sort of tasted knowledge (*sapida scientia*). Later in the *Summa*, St. Thomas again writes that by means of this kind of knowledge "a man experiences within himself the taste of God's sweetness" (*ST* II-II, q. 97, a. 2, ad 2). St. Thomas refers to this experience as a "taste" of God because, in this life on earth, it is a spiritual experience that goes beyond words, like a meal so perfect that words fail to do it justice. A person in a state of sanctifying grace does not always have this sensible experience—indeed, the saints show us that we are called to hold on to the "loving knowledge" of Jesus even when our sense appetites feel nothing—but the experience of God's sweet knowledge is possible.

EATING SOULS

In her prayer, St. Catherine refers to the Holy Spirit's mission of charity as something that stirs within the soul a hunger to feed on others' souls. As waiter, the Holy Spirit

serves us charity for our neighbors
and hunger to have as our food
souls
and the salvation of the whole world
for the Father's honor.

Paradoxically, the Holy Spirit serves up hunger as one of the courses. It does not sate the appetite, but rather stirs the appetite—inspiring a hunger to have souls as our food. We could say that this appetite is the heart of the theological virtue of charity, by which we love and desire what God loves and desires (that is, the good of our neighbors) precisely because God loves and desires this for them. This image of hungering for souls is a common one in St. Catherine’s writings. It is a particularly vivid image, one meant to convey a holy desire that draws us closer to Christ. Because of our union with Christ, we too must feed on souls at the table of the cross, filled with desire to help bring souls to that salvation won at Calvary. It is in accepting the crosses of our life that we participate in Christ’s saving mission, and so feed on souls.

The desire to feed on souls is a holy one for St. Catherine. It is meant to be positive. This stands in contrast to those who “devour” souls, which St. Catherine portrays as a negative activity. In one letter, for example, she writes against those pastors who “should be nourishing themselves on souls as their food . . . but instead . . . they are like wolves, not tending the little sheep, but devouring them” (Letter T327, vol. IV, 31–32). For St. Catherine, feeding on souls transforms souls in grace, whereas devouring souls leads to the demise of others’ souls, and one’s own. In this instance, what we eat becomes like us. But it should be noted that this process is inverted when we receive the Eucharist, as seen in St. Augustine:

I found myself to be far off from You, in the region of dissimilarity, as if I heard this voice of Yours from on high: “I am the food of strong men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you convert me, like the food of your flesh, into you, but you shall be converted into me.” (*Confessions*, 7.10.16)

Drawing on St. Augustine, Fr. Romanus Cessario, O.P. explains that “we do not consume this heavenly food, but rather

this food consumes us in the fire of charity and unites us in the bond of unity” (*Theology and Sanctity*, 51). Being consumed by Christ and the fire of charity in receiving the Eucharist, “we are then sharing in his warmth and in his power, in that we begin at once to feed on and savor souls. And we in turn change every other person into ourselves in love and desire, by giving them the color and taste for virtue that we have drawn from the wood of the most holy cross” (Letter T137, vol. I, 182). We must first be consumed by Christ in the Eucharist before we can ourselves feed on and transform souls. So, then, if Christ has first fed on us from the cross, and we have become like Christ through grace and the Eucharist, we can in turn feed on our neighbors so that they might become more like us, inasmuch as we are like Christ.

The purpose of this feeding on souls is not only for others’ salvation, but also for the Father’s honor. It is meant to give glory to God. Another repeated theme of St. Catherine’s is that we cannot love God as He deserves because we are creatures and He is the Creator. God has freely given us all we possess and we are eternally indebted to Him. Because of this debt, any love we show Him is owed to Him (and, indeed, even the love we do not show Him is owed to Him). We can only try to imitate God’s gratuitous love in and for our neighbors, to whom we owe no such debt. We do this by receiving from the Holy Spirit, as waiter, the food that is a hungering for souls.

EATING OFTEN

St. Catherine’s mystical experiences equip her with a profound set of images, making deep theological truths intelligible to those who read her prayers. The common experience of eating at table elucidates brilliant facets of the Trinity, and we are encouraged to seek the salvation of our neighbors by feeding on their souls. Just as we require daily sustenance, so we should be attentive daily to the feast prepared for us by God. We should be eating this food constantly, as St. Catherine suggests at the end of the prayer quoted

above. Souls enlightened by God, she writes, “never let a moment pass / without eating this exquisite food / for [God’s] honor.” Through this nourishment, we come to taste God.

Br. Bartholomew Calvano entered the Order of Preachers in 2015. Before entering he studied molecular biology, biochemistry, mathematics, and computer science at Rutgers University.

FOOD IN THE REARVIEW

Paul Clarke, O.P.

I've never claimed to have a perfect memory, but nothing signals early-onset senility more than my increasing inability to recall basic memories of my youth (the fact that I'm not yet thirty compounds the crushing sense of finitude). Now, I don't mean details like my childhood phone number or the name of my first pet (Bob, morbidly obese goldfish). Those I could conceivably do without. I mean the truly important memories, which for me and my family usually means food-laden memories.

If you were to ask me how I (mis-) spent my youth, I'd tell you about multi-week road trips crisscrossing the country, of moving seven times before even starting tenth grade, of telling concerned neighbors we weren't in the witness protection program, and of course, if you reminded me, I'd have a lot to say about food. At the last count, I've eaten in forty-three states. I don't mean mental states (though that'd be interesting to discuss); I'm talking about meals enjoyed (or not, depending) in dining establishments in the likes of Grand Junction, CO, Bettendorf, IA, Natchez, MS, and so on.

The issue, in a nutshell, is that the grandeur and misery of twenty-plus years of eating with my family around the continental U.S. seems to have overloaded the memory bank. For example, I have this emotionally charged memory of some Chinese takeout that I had for my birthday when I was seven or so. It was, in a word, the Greenwich Mean Time or Imperial Yard, the normative standard for all subsequent experiences of the great culinary traditions of the Far East. Yet when I try to recall simple details (*was it mushu pork? sesame chicken?*), I always come up with the same baffling mental picture of a dingy overpass in Seattle. Did we buy takeout from a man under the overpass? I couldn't tell you.

As may be clear already to the discerning reader, these ramblings will be no encomium to the joys of eating on the road,

though there were certainly many of those. This is a cautious look in a rearview mirror that's smudged from being adjusted while the driver was devouring a chili dog from Tommy's.

Some food memories are crystal clear in the center, but quickly get blurry toward the edges, as when I recall the first time I had honey mustard dressing. I think it was in California. I may have been five. I do know that it was a Coco's Restaurant with yellow booths, and it was a transcendent experience. As I sat there with my father, grandfather, and assorted other people who don't matter in this story, it seemed to me that this particular iceberg salad was possibly the most wonderful thing that would ever happen to me. I remember nothing else from that visit to California, or of much else before the age of reason (seventeen in my family), but it's clearly marked as the Year of Honey Mustard in my mental Rolodex.

On the other hand, there's a strange facility in recalling the worst or most bizarre eating episodes. For years, the Benders Gravy Incident in Cumberland, Maryland, has been my family's reference point for any conversation about the worst meal ever. My sister was about to begin college in our nation's capital, and in true Joad-family style, my parents decided we should all drive her down from the homestead in Ann Arbor, MI. So all eight kids piled in the van, along with my ninety-three-year-old grandfather and possibly a rabbit or two. Besides raucous, off-key singing and the usual violent games of ABC, things were going well until we stopped to grab a bite at a small restaurant built on the side of a mountain in Cumberland, which my father had looked up in advance and had been all sorts of impressed by. We should have known that we were actually in the Twilight Zone when my grandfather's request for tap water (no ice) posed insurmountable problems for the Benders staff. After delivering everyone's drinks but his, they returned with profuse apologies and—iced tea. On the third try, they managed to find some water, and came back light on the apologies but heavy on the crushed ice. My grandfather, raised in a mining town in Utah during the First World War, had not survived the Depression

for this sort of thing, and said as much. But the high point (or low point, I suppose) was the gravy that apparently accompanies every Benders dish. Heaped in all of its viscous glory and sliding dangerously off the edge of each plate was a mound of what at first glance looked uncannily like the Nickelodeon goo. The gravy's radioactive yellow-green color (n.b.: a vocal minority of Clarkes maintain that *puce* is the color in question here) was matched for raw nausea-inducing power only by its weirdly reflective surface, in which you could faintly see your own horrified face.

Our road trips—which could last from a day to a month—were often planned strategically around where and what we hoped to eat. The first day of an epic three-week, four-thousand-mile trip we took around the western half of the country in the summer of 2009 is a standout example. The target was Ross' 24



Heavy black clouds of dust rising over the Texas Panhandle, Texas
(Photo: Arthur Rothstein)

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USZ62-125986

Hour Diner (“Home of the Magic Mountain”), a Quad Cities icon, which holds the distinction of being visited by the likes of Chuck

Berry, Bill Murray, and Joe Biden. With the naive enthusiasm we always had on day one of these expeditions, we sat down and, with the exception of my ever-cautious mother, ordered the specialty of the house, the Magic Mountain, a simple matter involving a pile of fries covered in successive layers of nacho cheese and a hearty Midwestern chili that was defiantly liberal in terms of kidney beans. For the full experience (and a mere fifty cents extra), one could elect to cover their Mountain with “snow,” i.e., diced onions. The consensus after the first few bites was that the good people of the Quad Cities had either pranked us good, or they represented a new stage in evolutionary history, as they seemed to have developed cast-iron stomachs. It was inevitable that the next leg of the trip would be full of feelings of betrayal, regret, recrimination, and severe intestinal distress.

Fortunately, our campsite for the night was another seven hours away, and if we weren’t exactly hungry by our 8 p.m. arrival, we were at least ready to eat something that would put Ross’ firmly behind us. It was then, as the sun began to set, that we realized that the Burger King we’d passed about seventy miles back had been the closest restaurant to our campsite. As the younger kids put the tent up, the elders held a council, which ended with my father abruptly assuming the role of hunter-gatherer and driving off into the gathering darkness to “find something edible.” My mother began to heat water for pasta on what looked like a Fisher-Price camp stove, and it had almost reached a boil an hour later when my father returned with his findings: he had raided two gas stations and a local “General Store” for day-old donuts and some suspiciously dusty bags of trail mix, Bugles, and beef jerky. That night, as our camping neighbors called to each other across the way and made interminable and involved plans for breakfast, the Clarke clan ate penne and Oberto’s jerky by the shuddering light of our one camp lantern; some brave souls sampled the donuts. As we all drifted into our giant Coleman tent (“Sleeps twelve with comfort!”), we could hear our neighbors hitching their boats to their trailers with the sort of late-night bonhomie and efficiency

that involves a lot of shouting and mischievous honking and flashing lights, and transforms a rustic campsite into a nacho-cheese-and-kidney-bean-induced fever dream.

While we often made our entries in food history en route to a new house, family reunions, or visits to the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Acadia, and the like, we also weren't above making trips to food meccas such as Chicago or New Orleans just to eat. They were occasionally termed "cultural expeditions" when my father was feeling Orwellian, and sometimes included half-hearted visits to a local museum or aquarium, but the real point was Lao Sze Chuan on South Archer, or Frankie & Johnny's on Arabella Street. Quantity often had a quality of its own, one to which we were quite attached. The first time I tried *boudin* was during lunch (our third meal of the day), not long after a breakfast of beignets at Café du Monde and a brunch of gator pie and catfish at Middendorf's. I woke up several hours later on a bench in the New Orleans Aquarium, while hammerhead sharks floated close to the glass in front of me. That was par for the course. Normal as this came to seem, it's still hard to dodge, while compassed about by beignets, *boudin*, and hammerheads, the fact that there's something unique and irreducibly particular about the food you find—bad as well as good. Each has and leaves its own fingerprint, its own set of whorls and textures that are deeply and defiantly individual.

To be clear, my appreciation for the toothsome particular was not somehow found on the road, but began at home. It was in the various traditions of birthday desserts, the annual summer "taco bonanza," the smoked salmon every Christmas Eve and *bûche de Noël* every Christmas Day. The heart of it all was my mother's superb culinary chops, her loving attention to detail, and the obvious delight she took in preparing not merely the food but also its recipients. At family dinners, we—myself and the seven alien children my parents claimed were my siblings—received the traditions and were taught the virtues of eating like human beings. There were standards and expectations that were far from trivial and didn't admit of relativizing interpretations. Since there's a

baseball analogy for everything: the homestand prepared us for the road trip. How (and what) we ordered when we were on the road grew directly out of eating at home and learning what is good and holy, such as the sour cherry bread at Pavé bakery in Everett, WA (now closed, so don't get your hopes up).



Norman Rockwell — *Freedom From Want*

As is likely clear by now, I don't have much to say about *haute cuisine*. There's nothing elegant about piling slabs of brisket onto pieces of Wonderbread. These experiences of roadfood were in places that seem to grow kudzu-like right out of the soil, natural extensions of a certain place's timeworn habits of eating. I think this is true even of bizarre (but blessed) hybrids, like the donut and tamale shop we discovered in Natchez, MS. What first appears to

be totally out of place may reveal a side of the region you missed the first time around. In this case, the region or city opens up worlds of gastronomic adventure, as had been proven to me a thousand times during my family's second sojourn in Mississippi. The Mayflower in downtown Jackson has what I still think is the greatest salad dressing the New World will ever produce (I hear France lays claim to honey mustard), and the smell of their liver 'n onions special was my first sense of the level of depravity that man can sink to. At a Little League game about twenty miles outside the city, I once saw a man in cut-off sleeves sitting alone on the bleachers behind home plate, holding a football-sized pickle in a brown paper bag. From the infield, through the clouds of zeppelin-sized mosquitos, I could see him take the occasional meditative mouthful. In that moment, I knew what it meant that man is by nature *capax omnium*, capable of all things.

The universe still has unexplored nooks and crannies, even in an age where the internet seems to illuminate everything, making everything at once equally visible and equally dull. Some great places have dingy signs and duct-taped booths, some don't have a restroom. Some places, the waiter doesn't even introduce himself, or promise to take care of you. In many of the places where we stopped and in almost all of the ones we loved, there's none of the overproduced abstractions, the cultivated image, the tell-tale signs that appearance means more than substance for this particular establishment. There's instead an imperfection that itself is perfective: it heightens your taste, sharpens your vision so that you can focus on the one thing necessary: how's the food?

I have nothing against health-standards, but I've had delicious meals while drenched in sweat and swatting away flies, and eaten expensive Play-Doh made no better by the climate-control and unstained tablecloth. There's something, of course, to do with a "sense of place," but it's very different from what often masquerades under this name: the slaving appetite for what is unique *because* it is unique, for what is "only found here" *because* it's only found here. Sadly, while food tourism is widely and rightly

disliked, we don't tend to notice the family resemblance it bears to the absurd, vague comfort we derive from seeing "locally sourced" printed on our menu. To confound goodness with uniqueness (or its appearance) is a capital vice of our age. But the fact of the matter is: I don't love Arthur Bryant's barbecue because I can only find it in Kansas City. That would be high-grade silliness. I love it because it's *metaphysically perfect barbecue*, because it's good—not because it's "unique." It turns out that its *way* of being good has to do with a lot of singular, contingent, inimitable features of Arthur Bryant's location, history, hickory wood, and direct providential guidance—and this does make it unique. Because it's good, it's necessarily unique, a singular and blessed refraction of goodness. So let's not put the cart before the horse, or the sauce before the rub, shall we?

And yet alongside this particularity, there's also the generous commonality of *good* food; they're cousins—the fried okra, the "Juicy Lucy" burger at St. Paul's Blue Door, Arthur Bryant's burnt ends in Kansas City, pastrami and cheesecake at the Stage Deli in New York, boiled peanuts, gulf shrimp and grits in Oxford, Mississippi. Despite the strong differences of culture and taste, there's a still stronger similarity between muffaletta and alligator pie in New Orleans and Ukrainian brunch at Kramarczuk's on Hennepin in Minneapolis, between a slice of pecan pie in Louisville and platters of some terrific Lebanese food in Dearborn, Michigan. Their lip-smacking goodness binds them close so that they stand together, defiant exceptions to the faceless tyranny of the glossy and generic. They belong to the rich, mottled community of good things, united despite or maybe through their idiosyncrasies.

Our eating expeditions were often seasoned by the memories my parents would share of when, for instance, Lusco's in Greenwood, Mississippi used to serve only pompano and steak, and you could bring coolers of beer in with you. Many times we were returning to a place that my parents had eaten at early in their

marriage (my mother has a story of my father driving with his knees while eating a chili dog from Tommy's and somehow emerging from the car unscathed), or that my father had discovered while working in Boston, New York, or L.A.

New York pizza, pastrami sandwiches, and cheesecake, fresh seafood on Boston's Fish Pier, or burgers and dogs from good old Tommy's in L.A.—it was like clockwork: each time I was suddenly drawn into my parents' past and saw the plates of scallops and bowls of chowder and my parents themselves as they were decades ago. For a moment, I saw the restaurant as they saw it, shared their delight in discovery; I understood more of who they were then. The distance of years was suddenly and silently abridged. Simultaneously, though, I was seeing my parents and the scallops and my mother's lobster bisque in the present, with my own eyes and emotions and memories and so on. In those moments, history didn't feel so much linear as layered. Eating together does this. In meals, lives and experiences are fused, memories entwined and extended from parents to children.

The online food reviews that have spotlighted these restaurants came well after, which means that the whole ethos of finding good food while on the road was a vastly different enterprise. Experimentation, recommendation, risk, success and failure, were not just different; they were—I speculate—more personal, a kind of close-quarters contact with the uneven surfaces of U.S. culture from which we're now insulated. In fact, I suppose all this has something to do with my parents' experience of America, tasted and felt at a time when the country's restaurants were still caught in the shifts from local and provincial to national (and even global) consciousness, from mom & pop diners and greasy-spoons to chains. Those years saw a vast sea-change that led to the generic swamping the specific and smoothing over the fine-grained differences that single *this* out as magnificent and *that* as merely decent. As my family hurtled across the country's interstates and crawled past empty storefronts in small old towns, we got a vision of the shifting sands, the winners and losers, of

American life in the twentieth century. Maybe certain chapters of history are learned only by combinations of sight and taste. These sorts of physical impressions are fertile, and the memories that grow from experience develop quickly from the particular *this-here-right-now* until they shape our understanding of man and his place in the cosmos. It's because man is the strange animal who not only eats, but thinks and loves, that eating is something more than refueling the body: what we eat and how we eat it end up shaping our affections and ideas about who we are, where we're going, and what matters in the end.

Our sense of taste has the peculiar power to complement our sight and occasionally correct its prejudices. Sight can be seduced by beauty—or what passes for it—but taste can help distinguish, for instance, the apple which is cosmetically perfect but mealy and tasteless from one that's misshapen and spotted but has the crisp bite and sweet taste of the real deal. As American culture falls deeper under the sway of cultivated image and manipulated appearance, it's worth asking whether our habits of eating are held captive by convenience and surface-level attraction, fascinated more by the glitter than the gold. In fact, if the knowledge of human beings begins in the senses—in what we see, feel, smell, taste—then one cultural lament to add to our country's growing list is the way these senses suffer from the slick barbarism of overstimulation by low-grade luxuries. The net result is boredom, the spiritual heartburn from consuming too much of what means so little.

I don't want to give the impression that all eating has at its base some weird educational motives. While my father would often joke about "broadening our horizons," he often just meant expanding the waistline. The moralizing was eminently practical, as when my saintly mother would turn to my father—as he pulled the car out from a Nashville barbecue joint and the kids in the back began to fall prey to food poisoning on the spot—and say, "Well, dear, what did we learn this time?" To which my father would

reply, without fail, “What, you didn’t like it?” The lessons learned had to do with the fine art of distinguishing between various side dishes of an identical shade of fried brown at a meat ‘n three place in the Deep South, and having the canniness to pick out fried okra. Or the foundational axiom of roadfood, that appearances can be deceptive. A dingy, nondescript storefront could hide some superb Indian food (I owe my love for lamb saag, chicken vindaloo and the mango lassi to Amar India in a strip mall in Dayton, Ohio, of all places). A hard-earned bit of wisdom: put no trust in princes, even when they write reputable food reviews. There’s no substitute for walking in and sitting down—even if you only walk out with food poisoning. For all the dining disasters and panicked, late-night searches for the Tums, the rewards are worth it. It’s a long season of eating, and a losing streak or a big loss doesn’t spell total defeat. Need proof? The Seattle Mariners can blow a twelve run lead in the seventh to Cleveland on August 5, 2001, and still tie the MLB record for wins in a season. You could look it up.

That’s not to downplay the darker side of things, the old “nothing gold can stay” sense of melancholy and loss when you discover that even the greatest eats can go bad, or just disappear. Sometimes these places change ownership, or their menu, or just go out of business. The great places are singular and wonderful—and also fragile as crystals. It’s heart-wrenching to come back to a sacred eating site and find that it’s still there but, well, something’s changed.

Some of that can, of course, be our own fault. We can gild certain memories, turning that gumbo or brisket sandwich into something it maybe never was. The privileged place it holds in our memory was given it by—us. And yet the memory’s unreliability may not mean that much, in the end. We always strike some bargain with our food (at least when we take it seriously and don’t confuse it with what we order at Famous Dave’s). We cooperate with our food when we commit to a meal as something more than refilling the body’s fuel supply. We let it form us, influence us, shape our future and determine our past—for better or for worse. And

part of that means leaving the window open for disappointment. My family had a whole arsenal of phrases that you'd hear as we approached a new place with anxious anticipation: "Well, it can't be that bad, can it?" "Look, can't beat Benders, right?" "At least there's people in there," and so forth. It's a courtship, with all the nerves and excitement of a first date.

There are delicate networks of anticipation and memory that frame and enliven every meal we eat. Meals are always somehow an excuse, an occasion for something that runs far beyond mere nutrition, often on account of the way they provide a setting for conversation. At the same time, though, meals are also the *stuff* of conversation. We live on the food we eat and the talk that arises out of and about our eating. It's for this reason that conversations about food are deeply important for us creatures of sense and spirit, of memory and metabolism. Eating creates memories, the sort that lie at the intersection of body and soul. That's what makes meals so remarkably potent—provided you can recall them.

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STEWARDS, NOT “ABSOLUTE ARBITERS”

A SCIENTIFIC AND CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS

James Ritch, O.P.

“**T**heir eyes tell their sad stories,” remarked a rice farmer in Tamil Nadu, India, speaking in an interview with *Global Farmer Network* about the children he encounters. “[G]hostly white irises give way to vacant stares. We can look at them but they can’t look back at us. They’ve gone blind because of malnutrition.”

What he is describing is Vitamin A deficiency, a disorder which wreaks havoc on the physical development of children. “Upwards of half a million Indian children go blind each year,” he explained, “and many of them die within months of losing their eyesight.”

The statistics on malnutrition in children around the world are simply staggering. According to the World Health Organization, fifty-two million children under the age of five are wasted, meaning they experience a low weight-to-height ratio, and seventeen million of those young children are severely wasted. One hundred fifty-five million children—the equivalent of half the population of the United States—suffer from stunted growth as a result of malnutrition or undernutrition. What is more, nearly half of all deaths among children under five years of age are linked to undernutrition, a condition which makes children more vulnerable to various diseases.

A number of genetic discoveries over the past hundred years have inspired remarkable technological advances in agricultural biology—advances that can help to alleviate the suffering of our brothers and sisters in dire need. But various challenges need to be properly understood and overcome in order to do so. This essay

considers the subject of genetically modified (GM) crops from a scientific and Catholic perspective. It asks what gene editing is, where the technology comes from, and what it is capable of doing to aid mankind today. It also provides an overview of the Church's approach to this issue. It is becoming a pressing issue even for the Church in her sacramental life, as the final section makes clear. An informed and responsible approach to GM crops can help people of good will to promote solidarity and practice responsible stewardship of the earth.

GENETIC MODIFICATION THEN AND NOW

We have come along way from Fr. Gregor Mendel's experiments on pea plants in the vast gardens of his nineteenth-century monastery. Yet those experiments, in which Mendel artificially bred crops to pass on desirable traits to future generations, laid the groundwork for modern genetic studies. By the 1960s, the West was experiencing its most fruitful period of agricultural innovation, thanks to the introduction of "dwarfing genes" into cereal crops. These genes increased the production of seeds in the plants while minimizing the amount of inedible parts of the plant. A decade later, a group of scientists showed that bacterial DNA could be introduced into the DNA of plant cells during infection by a bacterium. This was a significant discovery because it meant scientists were then able to insert any type of DNA molecule into a plant cell in order to change its genetic makeup.

Today, the term "genetically modified" is used to describe plants produced by the man-made manipulation of the plant's genes. Scientists have developed multiple technologies to edit the genes of organisms over recent decades. The gene-editing tool that might possess the greatest potential to promote scientific discovery and advancement, especially in plant biology, is what is known as the CRISPR system. The Clustered Regular Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeat (CRISPR)-Cas 9 system is a gene-editing technique that was borrowed from bacteria that naturally



Vincent van Gogh — The Sower

use it as a defense mechanism against viruses. The bacteria stores memories of viral DNA and draws from this memory to identify invading viruses. This leads to the destruction of the virus by the DNA-cutting enzyme called Cas9.

So what's the big deal? This system is significant because it is cheap and accurate, and can edit the genetic material of any organism. Imagine taking a pencil and using it to change a single letter in a multi-volume encyclopedia, say from an “a” into a “g.” This is what CRISPR allows scientists to do. They can now change a single chemical letter in the human genome, which is three billion letters long. And that one change can make a world of difference. Some claim that the development of the CRISPR system is more significant than the discovery of antibiotics. Such is its rich potential.

Since it was first described five years ago, the CRISPR technique has changed science and medicine. It is currently being

implemented for the eradication of mosquito populations, for example, in order to thwart the spread of the Zika virus here in the United States and malaria in other countries. It is also being used to handle complex gene-editing in plants. Providing resistance and tolerance for a crop often requires that multiple genes be mutated, and the CRISPR can do so in a single cell in the same experiment (Aimee Malzahn et al., “Plant Genome Editing with TALEN and CRISPR,” *Cell Biosci* [2017] 7:21). The CRISPR system has also proven helpful in combating rice blast, a fungal infection that is one of the most destructive diseases in rice-growing countries and a blight on global rice production. The CRISPR system was used to offer enhanced resistance to rice blast fungal infections. Unlike other gene-modifying systems, with the CRISPR system multiple genes were able to be targeted simultaneously (Fujun Wang et al., “Enhanced Rice Blast Resistance by CRISPR,” *PLOS ONE* [April 26, 2016]). In addition to rice, the CRISPR system has been utilized to make both low-gluten bread wheat and durum wheat, which is a hard wheat used to make pasta. Since there is a market for low-gluten bread products, scientists mutated the disease-causing α -gliadin genes to modify the gluten protein composition of wheat (Susana Sánchez-León et al., “Low-Gluten, Non-Transgenic Wheat Engineered with CRISPR/Cas 9,” *Plant Biotechnology Journal* [2017]). Such are some of the benefits that the CRISPR system offers for global health and food production.

THE CASE FOR (AND AGAINST) GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS

There are a number of compelling reasons to use this technology in order to create GM crops. First, according to a recent estimate by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the world population will increase from 7.6 to 9.8 billion people by 2050, which would increase the demand for food and require an even greater food supply. At the same time, each year we are losing about ten million hectares of cropland because of soil erosion (a space totaling the approximate size of the state of Kentucky).

These factors create the potential for a dire predicament. In the future, there will be many more mouths to feed with less cropland to produce food. With GM crops, however, food spoilage can be delayed and environmental stresses can be better resisted. Ripening can be delayed in order to improve post-harvest shelf life, and herbicide tolerance, insect resistance, drought tolerance, and bacterial/viral resistance can all be improved. One recent advancement in this field of biology is golden rice. Since there is a shortage of dietary Vitamin A in low-income countries leading to malnourishment, scientists inserted two genes into the rice plant to program it to produce beta-carotene, a precursor to Vitamin A (X. Ye et al., “Engineering the Provitamin A [beta-carotene] Biosynthetic Pathway into [Carotenoid-Free] Rice Endosperm,” *Science* 287 (2000), 303–05). This modification, which gives the rice a golden color, represents a major step to prevent malnourishment in countries where rice is the staple crop.

GM crops have also contributed to food security, sustainability, and the protection of the environment. From 1996 to 2015, these crops increased food productivity by 574 million tons, an amount valued at \$168 billion. Sixty hundred twenty million kilograms of pesticides did not need to be used. It was projected that carbon dioxide emissions were reduced in 2015 by 26.7 billion kilogram, equivalent to taking 11.9 million cars off the road for one year. In addition, eighteen million small farmers and their families were aided, possibly preventing them from becoming impoverished (*International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Bioethics Applications*, 2016 Executive Summary).

Despite the promise that GM crops hold, they have received mixed reviews since their introduction into commercial markets approximately three decades ago. A meaningful portion of the current U.S. population thinks that GM crops are unsafe for consumption. Over half the individuals surveyed in a recent ABC News poll expressed precisely this opinion. In another poll taken by the Pew Research Center, 39 percent of people said that GM foods are worse for one’s health than non-GM foods. And there

is more than just a fear of bodily harm from consumption of GM foods. The Pew Research Center poll also suggested that there is a public distrust of the scientists who conduct research on GM foods. A third of the people polled said that a desire to help their industries is what influences scientists' research findings.

In response to such public concerns over the safety of GM crops, a study committee of the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine stated that it found "no substantiated evidence of a difference in risks to human health between currently commercialized genetically engineered crops and conventionally bred crops." Additionally, the World Health Organization has stated that "GM foods currently available on the international market have passed safety assessments and are not likely to present risks for human health," and that "no effects on human health have been shown as a result of the consumption of such foods by the general population in the countries where they have been approved."

In addition to the opinion that GM crops may harm one's health, there are various concerns about the effect of genetic modification on the environment. Some critics have voiced concerns about transferring genes from GM crops, such as antibiotic resistance genes or other genes that might offer an advantage to microbes or wild plants. But there are currently procedures in place to remove antibiotic resistance genes before commercial introduction (Smita Rastogi Verma, "Genetically Modified Plants: Public and Scientific Perceptions," *ISRN Biotechnology*, vol. 2013 [2013]). Decades ago we would actually find commercial crops that were mutagenized in a less controlled way than new gene-editing technologies, leading to widespread and relatively indiscriminate mutations that were not necessarily desirable or even known to exist in the plants. These "conventional crops," as they were called, lacked a requirement for assessment before entering the food-chain (Halford et al., "Genetically Modified Crops: Methodology, Benefits, Regulation and Public Concerns," *British Medical Bulletin* [2000] 56.1: 62–67). Even though there is some breeding

between GM crops and wild plants, this has always been the case between conventional crops and wild plants. With GM crops, it is apparently difficult for breeding to occur, despite observation of it in the field.

In another criticism of GM crops, it is argued that these crops will only increase food supply at a very slow rate. One scientific reviewer concluded that the public’s lack of a basic knowledge of GM crops is actually the prime factor for its slow progress rate (Verma, “Genetically Modified Plants”). Also, limited research funding is another significant factor, including staunch opposition from advocacy groups. Greenpeace, in particular, has a “robust global presence” that spearheaded opposition to golden rice, which could have its “greatest impact on the poorest people in Africa and Southeast Asia.” In response, more than one hundred Nobel laureates signed a letter urging Greenpeace to “end its opposition to genetically modified organisms in general and Golden Rice in particular” for the sake of the malnourished. They also pressed Greenpeace to “recognize the findings of authoritative scientific bodies and regulatory agencies” (Joel Achenbach, “107 Nobel Laureates Sign Letter Blasting Greenpeace over GMOs,” *Washington Post*, June 30, 2016). The public debate continues, however.

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS

How is a Catholic to evaluate the morality of GM crops? Overall, the Catholic Church views GM crops in a positive light, but she recommends prudence and caution concerning the proper implementation of this technology. The USCCB stresses this idea in Part 4 of the document, “For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food: A Catholic Agenda for Action—Pursuing a More Just Agricultural System” (2003). The Church, however, has not made definitive judgments on moral issues pertaining to the use of biotechnology in agriculture.

If we look to the Scriptures for guidance, we ought to recognize that God, in all His benevolence, entrusted the earth to man:

God blessed them, saying to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth.” God said, “See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are upon the whole earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this shall be your food.” (Gen 1:28–29)

Thus God calls us to be stewards of the earth. As Pope St. John Paul II stressed, these words from Genesis “entrust the earth to man’s *use*, not *abuse*. They do not make man the absolute arbiter of the earth’s governance, but the Creator’s ‘co-worker’” (“Jubilee of the Agricultural World” Address, 11 November 2000).

This stewardship begins with scientists. When proceeding with experimentation and gene-editing on plants, scientists must have a noble goal in mind: to help humanity, whether it be to reduce poverty and hunger or to aid farmers in their livelihood (USCCB, “For I Was Hungry,” Part 4). The *Catechism* states that man may perform biomedical research on animals “if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives” (CCC 2417). This teaching would include experimentation on plants, since they are simpler organisms than animals. Similarly, the Pontifical Academy of Life states that

there is a place for research, including cloning, in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, wherever it answers a need or provides a significant benefit for man or for other living beings, provided that the rules for protecting the animal itself and the obligation to respect the biodiversity of species are observed. (“Reflections on Cloning,” Ch. 4)

The use of the word “cloning” here refers to gene manipulation. When writing on this subject, Pope Francis has affirmed that there are benefits from scientific and technological progress, but that parties should not perform “indiscriminate genetic manipulation” (*Laudato Si’* §131). To prevent such a misuse of technology—which could lead to serious consequences, especially upon the environment—both the USCCB document “For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food” and *Laudato Si’* stress that there needs to be an open scientific discussion and participation in the decision-making process. This allows all those affected to offer their concerns regarding the usage and introduction of GM crops. Pope Francis states that “a technology severed from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power,” which involves considerable risks (*Laudato Si’* §§136, 131). Pope Francis also pointed out that the “risks involved are not always due to the techniques used, but rather to their improper or excessive application” (§133). Socioeconomic problems arise when lands are exploited, leading to the destruction of complex ecosystems, and when productive land is held by a few farmers to the detriment of many small farmers. GM crops therefore represent but one element in a much broader effort to cultivate the earth responsibly and for the benefit of all mankind.

GENETIC MODIFICATION: A EUCHARISTIC MATTER

With an increase in the usage of GM crops, including wheat, there is concern that the removal of gluten from crops may become more common. There ought to be increased concern and awareness, therefore, about the importance and sacramental significance of gluten in the hosts used for Communion at Mass.

Earlier this year, Pope Francis requested that Robert Cardinal Sarah, the prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, remind local ordinaries that they need to “provide for all that is required for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper” (“Circular letter to Bishops on the bread and

wine for the Eucharist,” 15 June 2017). This includes providing guidance and “guaranteeing the Eucharistic matter through special certification.” Ordinaries are required to remind priests “to verify those who provide the bread and wine for the celebration and the worthiness of the material.”

In reference to gluten-free altar bread, the letter by Cardinal Sarah also reiterates a previous clarification by then-Cardinal Ratzinger that, “[h]osts that are completely gluten-free are invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist. Low-gluten hosts (partially gluten-free) are valid matter, provided they contain a sufficient amount of gluten to obtain the confection of bread without the addition of foreign materials and without the use of procedures that would alter the nature of bread” (“Circular Letter to All Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences Concerning the Use of Low-Gluten Altar Breads and Mustum as Matter for the Celebration of the Eucharist,” section A, 1–2, 24 July 2003).

Cardinal Sarah’s letter also addressed the fact that scientists are able to modify wheat to lower the gluten content. He reiterates a statement about GM organisms from a previous letter of the Congregation: “Eucharistic matter made with genetically modified organisms can be considered valid matter” (see “Letter to the prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments,” 9 December 2013). But of course, altar bread made from GM organisms must contain gluten, since it is the specific difference that gives wheat its essence. Catholics with celiac disease and other gluten-related allergies should be treated with pastoral sensitivity, and at the same time all Catholics, both pastors and the faithful, must remain cognizant of the Church’s sacramental teaching on the Eucharist. This is an issue that promises to come up more and more frequently.

ETHICAL MODIFICATION

In sum, in a world whose population is growing and is experiencing a number of environmental and societal concerns, recent advances in agricultural biotechnology offer the global community significant benefits in the fight against malnourishment, hunger, and poverty. Ethical principles grounded in the common good, as well as responsible stewardship, should guide decision-making and the implementation of agricultural advances for the protection and assistance of humanity and the environment. We are called to be stewards of the earth, not “absolute arbiters.” We should not change or tamper with the very nature of organisms, but we are permitted to modify the genetic code of organisms in order to aid our neighbor and, in a spirit of charity and solidarity, feed the hungry. As the number of advances increases exponentially in this exciting technological age, it appears that very few aspects of life will be untouched. But may we never lose sight of God’s benevolence and omnipotence in creation. May cooperation with the Creator be our guide.

Br. James Ritch entered the Order of Preachers in 2015. Before entering he studied biology at Providence College and earned a masters degree in neuroscience at the University of Massachusetts Worcester.

THE BREAD THAT PERISHES AND THE BREAD THAT ENDURES

Isidore Rice, O.P.

*I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of
the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.*

– St. Ignatius of Antioch

ASSEMBLE THE INGREDIENTS

A few times in my childhood, Grandma's potato bread recipe emerged. It was a lovely thing when it did. After hours of watching Mom peeling potatoes, mashing, mixing, kneading, and waiting, our home was filled with the sweet fragrance that was a mere herald of things to come. Alas that I smelled the scent so seldomly, since baking seemed to demand too much to be a regular affair. Yet on the occasions when I ate of those rolls, they cemented one certainty in my mind and my palate: this is true bread. The bagged stuff from the store does not deserve the name.

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It was September, 16th, 2001. Aunt Jean and Aunt Catherine would not be able to come any more. All the flights were canceled. Dad had asked me if I wanted to reschedule. But, for some reason, I decided to go ahead anyway.

The Church was full. I was in the front row in my little suit and tie. I was not used to being in the front row nor in a suit and tie. I had to be good. I needed a Kleenex. I couldn't wipe my nose on the nice clothes in the front row where everyone could see. The priest got up to give his homily. There was silence. Even amidst this tragedy, he said, God has given us a sign of hope. And, he continued, that sign of hope is sitting in the front row.

I did not really understand, but I made sure to sit still and not to wipe my nose on the nice clothes. I did not even ask Mom how much time was left. This time I was not bored. This time I had the hopeful anticipation of what was to come. This is what I chose not to delay. This is what I understood. That on this day, I was going to receive Jesus.

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My mom often lamented how bored the people in the catechesis book looked. “Couldn’t they have found pictures of people who were happy to be at Mass!” Mom would say with her usual gusto as we read through the chapter together, sitting on the living-room couch.

Overall, my middle-school self found those books, like the people pictured in them, quite boring. I wonder what I would think if I looked at them again now. We went through the seven sacraments and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, read the long quotes at the end of each chapter, and answered the discussion questions. We looked at large pictures on every page, some of which were clearly stock photos, and some of which spurred my mother’s righteous indignation.

I am sure that the books were trying to do catechesis right, presenting the Church’s teachings and her traditions in an attractive, relatable way. Yet, for middle-school me, despite all its color photos, it failed.

Or did it? Judging by its fruits there must have been something right about my catechesis. After all, I remained Catholic, and even solidly so. There may have been gaps in my catechesis, but through those lessons, my mom instilled in me one rock-solid certainty: the Eucharist is Jesus.

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How do we hand down the faith? The Scriptures are full of commands to do so. There is the Shema that many Jews recite two or three times daily and the Church's liturgy proclaims as each week begins: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest" (Dt 6:4–7). Then there is the great missionary mandate that Christ gave the Church, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19–20).

Accepting this challenge to evangelize can be a daunting hurdle today. The command to "drill them into your children" can seem like some form of indoctrination. Might we instead let them make their own judgments and decisions about faith? The mandate to "make disciples of all nations" can make us queasy. Perhaps we could just look at all the good things in diverse cultures instead.

"The Church draws her life from the Eucharist." The first line of Pope St. John Paul II's final encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, cuts through all these worries. Perhaps it was no accident that the one truth about which I had confidence, from which my faith grew, was the Eucharist. Perhaps my mother could be compared with the woman in Our Lord's parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of wheat meal, till it was all leavened" (Mt 13:33).

#### MIX AND THOROUGHLY KNEAD

I was a grumbling middle schooler and I did not want to go to the Amish lady's house to have her cook for us. This seemed to be the epitome of weird. But my great aunt had her heart set on it so I begrudgingly went along.

Everything changed when I ate of those rolls. The faded memory of grandma's potato bread was suddenly before me. We raved about them, and how much work it must have taken her. Yet the Amish lady simply told us that it wasn't hard at all, and that she sold recipe books.

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I could see the round moon rising outside, but my attention was not there. My eyes were fixed on a smaller circle, not visibly radiant, but piercing me with His gaze. I had not planned to sign up for the retreat: it included Confession and I could not face that. But as I waffled a new friend had pulled out her laptop and made me register. I had not planned to go to Confession—one day of course, probably, hopefully, just not yet—but the first talk on the first night of the retreat convicted me that the time had come.



Adoration at the Dominican House of Studies (Photo: Lawrence Lew, O.P.)

I had not felt so free in years, and I do not remember a step of my walk along the moonlit lake, but somehow I found myself back in the chapel. I had never seen this before, the Eucharist put into that beautiful gold thing, incense, and Latin and all—“*Praestet fides supplementum, sensuum defectui*”—but as the fresh sanctifying grace surged through my mind and heart, the Liberator reclaiming His own land, it seemed all so right. To my syllogistic mind, newly graced, it was so logical: it is good to be with Jesus; that Host is Jesus; “It is good, Lord, that we are here.”

And to think that tomorrow morning, though more aware of my unworthiness now than ever, I would have a clean conscience when He deigned to come under my roof. What amazing love that He would sacrifice Himself to save me, to give Himself to me. Perhaps I should become a sacrifice for Him.

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So many of the fears and fretting we have about sharing the faith fade away when we find the love of the Lord. Or rather, when He finds us. For our faith is not about a bunch of difficult, unpleasant things we must do, the most socially awkward being that pesky imperative to spread it. No, it is about Our Lord and His love for us: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:9–10). When we receive the Lord’s love, when we receive Him, when “God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (1 Jn 4:12), we find the powerful love that leads and enables us to fulfill His great commission.

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For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Cor 5:14–15)

LET THE DOUGH RISE

I loved baking those Amish-lady rolls. It was a simple and straightforward recipe; between a sentence of encouragement, an ingredients list, and a short paragraph of instructions, it filled only a third of a page in the spiral-bound recipe book. For a little recipe, it made a lot of rolls. Even when I made half of the dough into a loaf, there was an abundance of rolls to give to friends. Of course, I could have reduced the recipe, but what would be the advantage of that? The work and time would be the same, but with fewer good things to share.

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It was a bit of a hike over to the University of Maryland Catholic Student Center—all the way across campus. Better to make the hike together. Better to knock on some doors of Catholics in the dorm, especially the ones who seemed as lukewarm as I had been. Freshmen like free food. Maybe they would find what I had found. Or rather, be found.

There was Mass, then dinner. Mass was the key. I would receive Jesus, then go to dinner. I would find the new people, then bring Him to them. He was still inside me after all. The conversation was awkward. Usually it never got beyond name, major, and year. But sometimes it did.

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Once we decide that the Lord is worth sharing, we face the next hurdle: how? We fret about method. Should we “preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary, use words,” or should we go on a crusade against the Atheists of the YouTube comment section? Should we focus on being relevant and relatable or on being cuttngly counter-cultural? Is there a recipe for how to share and pass on the faith? Is there an ingredient list of books to use

and directions for steps to follow that will produce good Catholic children and converted friends every time?

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*From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both the source and the summit of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit. (Pope St. John Paul II, Ecclesia de Eucharistia, §22)*

#### SHAPE THE LOAF

**B**aking is not like cooking. The most important steps, the ones which take up the most time and in which the flavor builds, consist in letting the dough sit. You do not have to be burdened, anxious, and worried about many things. You mix the ingredients with the yeast, and let it do its work.

People notice the shape first. That is where a baker's efforts produce visible results, but it is not really so important. Some people do not make baguettes since they do not have a fancy French knife to make the slashes. That is dumb. When good dough falls into the right shape, wonderful things happen. But even if you ruin the shape you should not despair. It can still be salvaged, it should still be baked, the bread can still be good. It is the dough that really matters. And the yeast. The Baker knows the dough when He sees the loaf. It shines through in its countenance.

Baguettes are my favorite now. They are simple. You need only four ingredients: water, flour, salt, yeast. The bakers of the best boulangeries of Paris would consider it an abomination to use anything more.

But you need time. You let the leaven go for fourteen hours. When you find it in the morning, it is hardly recognizable. It has quadrupled in size. Bubbles pop every second. It emits a fragrance full of promise.

You hide it in some flour, water, and salt. The flour is good, but you would never want to eat it plain; the individual grains would taste as good as sawdust. Yet the water unites the many bits of flour into one lump of dough. Then the bubbling leaven gets to work, making this dough like itself.

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“How was Mass?” Dad would ask when I returned.

“Pretty good; Jesus was there,” I would respond.

That, of course, was the reason for going. During the semesters there were other reasons—our chaplain’s homilies, friends, the lunch group afterwards—but on break it boiled down to the main one. Sometimes things become simple.

The friends were the reason I started going, or at least were the catalyst. I had vague memories of daily Mass with Mom. When I heard the bells, I would poke her, and ask if this was the important part. She would give a solemn nod. But those memories had faded and I did not think of daily Mass as something people did, not people like me at least. But after the retreat I realized that these new friends went to daily Mass. They were happy to be there. They went as much as their schedules allowed, and their schedules were designed to allow it. Soon mine would be too.

There was a unity there that I had not seen. These friends went with me to the hospital when I slipped on ice and split my chin, and they stayed until I was stitched. Charity. And together they received Him every day. Perhaps you are what you eat.

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We can get caught up with all of the things people see, active things. But “one thing is needful” (Lk 10:42). If we seek the One thing, if we follow Him, if the dough has the True Yeast—not the leaven of the Pharisees—the external things fall into place. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt 6:33). The grains of flour find their place when they are washed with water and when the Leaven is hidden in the lump.

As we are joined into one in Him, we find ourselves joined to each other as well: “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor 10:17). “If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us” (1 Jn 4:12). It is not visible, but people see it: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). They see it, they note its source, and like yeast, it spreads.

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For what is the bread? It is the Body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ—not many bodies but one body. For as bread is completely one, though made up of many grains of wheat, and these, albeit unseen, remain nonetheless present, in such a way that their difference is not apparent since they have been made a perfect whole, so too are we mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ. (St. John Chrysostom)

BAKE

A friend and I were both entering religious life soon; our lives were taking shape and our places in the loaf were becoming clear.

“My aunt thinks it is because I want to teach,” she said, “but that’s not it at all.” She paused, “Teaching is great, but . . . I just want to be with Jesus.”

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As a religious, you go to more funerals: Br. Peter, Uncle Jim, Fr. Haddad, Fr. Regis, Fr. Muller. I had not considered that before, but it is not sad. It is after death that we reach the goal. “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil 1:23).

Here we have the pledge. Even as the loaf endures the fire, it spreads its sweet scent throughout the house. But these whiffs are only a foretaste of the great banquet to begin once it is baked, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Ps 116:15).

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When he had pronounced this amen, and so finished his prayer, those who were appointed for the purpose kindled the fire. And as the flame blazed forth in great fury . . . he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odor, as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking there. (The Martyrdom of Polycarp)

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THE LOCUTORIUM

AMONG THE POTS AND PANS

AN INTERVIEW WITH “THE COOKING PRIEST,”
FR. LEO PATALINGHUG

Jordan Zajac, O.P.

Fr. Leo Patalinghug minces vegetables, not words. Not long after he welcomed the editors of *Dominicana* into the kitchen of his Baltimore townhouse for an interview about his ministry as the “Cooking Priest,” as he has come to be known, he smiled and said, “Make sure you tell your readers this is going to be the weirdest article they’ve ever read.”

Weird may not be the right word exactly, but it will certainly be unique. You see, Fr. Leo Patalinghug is not your typical priest. Your typical priest has not defeated world-famous Iron Chef Bobby Flay in a cooking competition broadcast on the Food Network. Nor has your typical priest earned a third-degree black belt in taekwondo. Nor was he an award-winning choreographer for a break-dancing group before he entered the seminary.

Fr. Leo did not set out to be unique, but it just so happens that his priestly calling has led him down some unique ministerial paths. It has brought him not only to the Food Network, but also to appearances on ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS. It has led him to

host the EWTN program “Savoring Our Faith” and to co-host the Sirius XM Radio show “Entertaining Truth.” It has led him to found and direct an international apostolate called Grace Before Meals, as well as a non-profit organization, The Table Foundation. It has also led him to move into a rundown neighborhood in Baltimore, where he currently resides in a one-bedroom townhouse. It has led him to alter the floorplan of that townhouse, in order to bring the Lord into its midst.

“You’re actually standing in the tub,” he told us as we toured the residence. Except we were not standing in the tub. We were in a chapel. We were standing in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, reposed in a simple tabernacle hanging on the wall. On the altar underneath the tabernacle stood a magnificent golden chalice, which had been used by Pope St. John Paul II. “This room is the center of my life,” Fr. Leo said happily. This chapel is the Cooking Priest’s first home, the kitchen his second. And the story of how he got here is an unusual one indeed. When we were scheduling the interview he wrote in an email, “I’d even prepare for you a meal—so you can get a fuller experience of what I do.” Over the course of the next several hours, Fr. Leo opened up about his life and his ministry—all while cooking a multi-course meal for us.

FOR STARTERS: THE CALLING OF A COOKING PRIEST

Wearing his black chef’s coat and tossing a bowl of steaming pasta, Fr. Leo spoke of his early life. He was born in the Philippines, the youngest of five children (four living), and grew up in the Baltimore area. “As for my family,” Fr. Leo noted with a wry smile, “my dad says we put the ‘fun’ in dysfunction.” Despite differences of opinion and lifestyle, the members of his immediate family have always had the capacity to come together around the family table. For every family, Fr. Leo explained, that table represents “the sacramental altar of the domestic church.” The table is where the individual members of the family—and the family as a whole—grow, develop, and are strengthened.

Most mornings growing up, Fr. Leo was the one bringing his siblings to the table, albeit against his will. His brothers and sisters were the first ones to take advantage of what must have been some innate talent he had in the kitchen. They recognized that one of Fr. Leo's pet peeves is running late. "I just *have* to be on time for things," he said to us, his eyes growing wide. Using this character trait to their advantage, his siblings would make him cook breakfast for them, or else, they threatened, they would make him late for school. So cook he did. He learned to serve, never expecting where his burgeoning cooking skills would lead him some day.

Fr. Leo's love for cooking deepened at the same time he was preparing for the priesthood. While attending the North American College in Rome, he also took cooking classes, as a way to balance out his life in the classroom. He became friendly with



The Cooking Priest, Fr. Leo Patalinghug

several Italian restaurant owners, too. Thanks to his gregarious personality, Fr. Leo found his way back into their kitchens, where they would trade tips and secrets. He would learn about rigatoni and lasagna, and instruct them in the ways of hamburgers and ribs.

Fr. Leo would go on to serve as a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. He had not been ordained for long when the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 occurred. After doing what he could to care for his people in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, he and some priest friends went on a short retreat, recognizing their own need to recover and renew themselves spiritually. He did all the cooking. For recreation they would watch a little bit of the Food Network, which was the only station not devoting coverage to the attacks. One evening, as his fellow priests watched Fr. Leo cook dinner and carry on, one of them suggested he start his own cooking show. He could talk about food and the faith, his friend thought. Fr. Leo scoffed at the idea. His friends persisted, however, and eventually they put Fr. Leo in touch with a production company and a producer who loved the concept.

With time the idea developed into a ministry all its own, called Grace Before Meals (www.gracebeforemeals.com). Fr. Leo started recording and posting episodes of a cooking show for the website, and traveling to give talks and food demonstrations, all of which emphasized the connections among faith, food, and family. Fr. Leo remarked, “Grace Before Meals was a movement that grew to the point where it became about me basically traveling [and] speaking on what I call a ‘theology of food,’ but doing so in the context of a family ministry—where the entire family can do something together and be together. In the Church today we’re breaking the family apart. There’s youth ministry and young adult ministry and women’s ministry and men’s ministry. What can we do for the *family*? We can [have them] eat together.”

During these years, Fr. Leo was also helping form men for the priesthood. He taught homiletics and served as director of pastoral field education at the seminary located at Mount St. Mary’s

University in Emmitsburg, Maryland. “My students absolutely hated my guts” he said with a laugh. The Dominican friar who taught Fr. Leo’s preaching class in Rome would yell “You’re boring me!” at the seminarians when their preaching proved unengaging. Fr. Leo would employ similar tactics. Reflecting on the experience of the people in the pews, Fr. Leo told us, “they’re starving for signs of God. They really are starving for it. We have to learn how to feed them, not by overfeeding them but by meeting them where they’re at.” As Fr. Leo served us our first course (a delectable rigatoni della casa), he continued, “it’s about portion control.” With practice, he said, “I [learned] when to turn up the spice. I know if I’ve overcooked my homily. I know if I’ve not given [too much], but made them hungry for more. I know if it’s too salty, too sour, too bitter. I know that a good homily hits all the flavor profiles, like a good sip of wine.” He wanted his students to preach with the same versatility and dynamism.

Soon Fr. Leo would be given an opportunity to take his preaching to a global audience.

THE MAIN COURSE: THE THEOLOGY OF FOOD GOES GLOBAL

Steak fajitas. This is the instrument through which the Lord chose to work. “Fusion steak fajitas” are what Fr. Leo served up to defeat celebrity chef Bobby Flay on the Food Network program “Throw Down! with Bobby Flay.” The premise of this popular food competition show involved Flay traveling the country challenging chefs to a surprise cook-off, to see whether they could withstand the heat of world-class competition and the scrutiny of a panel of judges. I asked Fr. Leo which was more nerve wracking: celebrating his first Mass after being ordained or appearing on the program. “Neither of them!” he replied, without hesitation. “When I decided to become a priest, I felt God was calling me, and I had confidence in Him.” With the television appearance, Fr. Leo actually had to pretend he was scared, for added dramatic effect. “Being in front of people doesn’t bother me so much. . . . I was shocked but I wasn’t

nervous.” With the cameras rolling, Flay challenged Fr. Leo to the showdown, and Fr. Leo looked the Iron Chef in the eye and replied, “Bobby, with God as my witness, I am not afraid of you. Bring it!”

The night that the episode of “Throw Down!” premiered, Fr. Leo’s website received two million unique visitors. Fr. Leo’s witness inspired many. One woman from New York City wrote to him afterwards describing how she had been away from the Church for thirty years. Something about seeing him on the show that night had moved her deeply, however. She went to Confession at St. Patrick’s Cathedral the next day and received the Eucharist for the first time in three decades.

Reflecting on the impact that this television appearance had on people, Fr. Leo is struck by something that may seem paradoxical: “In media, you learn that less is more. In your approach to everything [related to media work], less is more . . . I mean, when you watch it, Bobby Flay mentioned God more than I did.” The simple appearance of a Roman Catholic priest on a secular cooking show brought people back to the Lord’s table. The experience, and the fruit it bore, deepened Fr. Leo’s desire to, as he put it, “allow myself to be a man who allows the Holy Spirit to do in me what the Holy Spirit does in others.” It infused him with new zeal, and more of a fearless trust in God. It also provided many new opportunities.

Following his victory on “Throw Down!”, Fr. Leo’s food-related ministry expanded significantly. The more he gave talks, led retreats, and offered food demonstrations, the more he developed what he calls “the theology of food”: an exploration of the theological aspects and dimensions of food and eating. In 2014, he published a book on the subject, entitled *Epic Food Fight: A Bite-Sized History of Salvation*. The connections between food and faith are rich in our Catholic tradition, he noted. The Scriptures, for example, begin and end with food: the forbidden fruit (Gen 2:16–17) and the banquet of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). Even Fr. Leo’s affection for theologians is food-oriented. In speaking about the conciseness and direct presentation contained in the *Summa*

Theologiae, he remarked, “I love the organization of St. Thomas Aquinas. It’s a recipe! *This, this, this*, and *this*.” In the structure of the *Summa*, then, Fr. Leo sees a kind of recipe book for the Catholic faith: how to understand and live it more fully.

The faithful are sometimes surprised by Fr. Leo’s theological approach. He remarked that

Some people . . . poke fun at me, saying things like, “the theology of food, what’s that? I’ve heard of Theology of the Body; are you just taking that idea?” I tell them that my idea came first: before God made the body, God made food. And in the body God created hunger, and a freedom to choose what to eat. And if *we* [priests] don’t do a good job of presenting the beauty of the faith as truly digestible, then the devil—who is a really good cook, too—will make bad things look good. The whole salvation history started with one stupid bite of the forbidden fruit. And the only thing that will correct it is one bite of the Blessed food [the Eucharist].

God wants to fulfill His children. He tells them He wants to give them a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3:8). But one of the big problems is that we just don’t hunger for God. We don’t crave Him. We’re not like the deer that yearns for running streams (Ps 42:1). That’s because we’re in a land of plenty; we think none of this ultimately matters.

We’re addicted to those “cheap carbs” of the spiritual life. That’s why we need the seasons of fasting. I tell people that if you don’t get fed at Church it’s because we’re not doing a good job, or because you don’t come hungry, because you come already fed. You come full, I tell them—of yourselves! So get penitential. Get rid of that which fills you up, so you can make room for God in your life.

I worked in the prison system for a time, and one time I had a prisoner draw me a picture of the crucifixion. And he had Mary there at the foot of the cross with tears coming down from her eyes, and Jesus was bleeding, and she was cupping her tears and His blood, forming what looked like little pieces of hosts. Isn't that beautiful? Now *he* was hungry!

There is such passion and joy in Fr. Leo that, when he offers reflections like this one, you cannot help but put down your fork and listen attentively. This is precisely what I had done. He looked down at my plate and noticed the small pile of chicken skin I had amassed (the main course he served was Asian-inspired grilled chicken tenderloin, finished with a rub featuring Sriracha and Old Bay). Fr. Leo leaned in and said, "By the way, I'm not going to be insulted if you don't eat the skin, but that's like chicken potato chips right there! C'mon!"

While Fr. Leo expressed appreciation for Aquinas's *Summa*, he sees himself as more of an Augustinian in his theological approach. In Fr. Leo's reflections about our need to hunger for God—who wishes to nourish us with His tenderness and goodness—the influence of St. Augustine becomes clear. It was St. Augustine who once wrote, "Suppose that God wishes to fill you with honey; but if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?" Pope Benedict XVI cites this quotation from St. Augustine in his encyclical letter *Spe Salvi* (2007). The Holy Father goes on to reflect, "The vessel, that is your heart, must first be enlarged and then cleansed, freed from the vinegar and its taste. This requires hard work and is painful, but in this way alone do we become suited to that for which we are destined" (§33). It is possible to recognize Fr. Leo as a kind of missionary, working strenuously to call people to do precisely this kind of spiritual work. He labors tirelessly to prepare souls to receive the Lord's sweetness.

A PALATE CLEANSER:
NEW FORMS OF SERVICE AND STEWARDSHIP

It is also possible to see Fr. Leo's work as the Cooking Priest as a "call within a call," so to speak. That is, it gave his priestly life a distinctive ministerial shape and structure. With time, Fr. Leo experienced another call. Fr. Leo left the Archdiocese of Baltimore after ten years of service in order to join *Voluntas Dei*, one of the Church's secular institutes of Pontifical Rite. Much like religious communities (such as the Dominicans and Franciscans), secular institutes consist of individuals who consecrate themselves to God by making vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Secular institutes also have distinct charisms and missions. Unlike religious communities, however, the members of secular institutes do not typically live together in community, but continue to lead lives "in the world." *Voluntas Dei*, which was founded by Fr. Louis-Marie Parent, OMI, enjoys a kind of twofold charism, or calling. First, members are called to imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, saying yes to God's will in their lives (*Voluntas Dei* is a Latin phrase meaning "the will of God"). Second, the institute draws inspiration from St. Paul, as its members are called to be evangelists and missionaries in the secular world.

Fr. Leo says he joined *Voluntas Dei* because he felt called to reclaim the charism of what it meant to be a *secular* priest (as opposed to a "religious priest," meaning a priest belonging to a religious order or community). Fr. Leo had first sensed a call to do something for the secular world, so he had become a secular priest. Yet something was still missing. He was moved with compassion for those who no longer came to Mass, and for those who did not know Christ at all. "The idea of going where God is not is all of our call. You might be afraid of the term 'secular,' but really 'secularism' is what we should fear. Secularity, and being consecrated in it, is exactly what Jesus was. He was a secular man, but a consecrated man." For Fr. Leo, *Voluntas Dei* was a further way to say yes to God's call in his life. Giving your life to God is about "doing the

weird things that God may be asking you to do,” he reflected (and he pointed to the lives of many of the saints to illustrate the point). When people do not come to Church, Fr. Leo thought, we should go to them. So he is trying to do precisely that.

As a member of *Voluntas Dei*, Fr. Leo had to move into a secular environment. First he lived in his father’s old medical office, which, by his own admission, looked “totally ghetto.” “Then I moved into the actual ghetto,” he said, looking out the kitchen window onto the parking lot of the apartment complex below. He lives in a mixed residential area consisting of young professionals, individuals and families transitioning out of low-income housing, and those in low-income housing. The neighborhood is gritty. He says the experience of living in the world, and realizing what it takes to make ends meet, has changed both his perspective and his preaching. It has also given him new avenues for preaching and witnessing to Christ. “All my neighbors know who I am. They not only know it, they love it! They come over here and eat all the time. And in that, you know what? I’m eating with sinners,” just as our Lord did, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees (Mt 9:11). “And they’ll ask questions: *why can’t you do that? . . . what do you all believe? . . .* It’s always about their desire to know what we teach.”

Fr. Leo responds by teaching and ministering as a priestly servant and steward. “In our ‘clericalizing’ mentality sometimes, we love to be served,” he noted. But Fr. Leo tries to resist that temptation. “I’m a servant. That’s number one.” Fr. Leo is also a steward, seeking to utilize the various gifts and opportunities the Lord has given him. His ministry, Grace Before Meals, has grown into an international apostolate. In addition to his work in television and media, as well as his writing, it involves Fr. Leo traveling the world giving food demonstrations, talks, and missions, and leading retreats.

Fr. Leo is also working on a non-profit organization called The Table Foundation, which involves various kinds of outreach to and through the food and hospitality industry. “The non-profit exists to harvest the power of food to do good,” Fr. Leo explained.

Upon saying this, the Cooking Priest grew slightly sheepish. “I know, it sounds hipster-y,” he confessed with a grin. Yet the purpose, he explained, is to help feed bodies, minds, and souls and to build a sense of community.

One plan involves the Foundation opening a space not far from Fr. Leo’s current residence. It will feature a cafe on one floor, which will serve breakfast and lunch. The cafe will be staffed by individuals who have been released from the prison system. The Foundation intends to offer these men and women training and mentorship, as well as transitional housing, that they might be able to start careers in the foodservice industry, while giving back to the local community at the same time. A second floor will feature “main event dining,” with celebrated chefs visiting in order to host meals and bring people around the table for a unique dining experience.

Another outreach project that falls under the auspices of The Table Foundation is the Olive Mass. Fr. Leo pointed out that while the Church celebrates the White Mass for healthcare workers, and the Red Mass for judges and lawyers, there is nothing offered to those who work in the hospitality industry. So two years ago he held the first annual Olive Mass, offered for those who make and serve food. The second annual Olive Mass took place in September, 2017, at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. Archbishop Gregory Aymond was the principal celebrant, and hundreds of chefs and food industry workers were in attendance. In explaining the concept to us, Fr. Leo stressed that “if we don’t feed chefs spiritually and intellectually, they’ll be their own pastors and they won’t have room for God.” Fr. Leo reminded us that it was St. Teresa of Avila who remarked, “if you want to find God, find him among the pots and the pans.” Fr. Leo wants to help those in the foodservice industry do just that.

THE FINAL COURSE: MEALS AS MISSION

In spending an evening with the Cooking Priest, it becomes clear that he loves to serve. (Fr. Leo spent several minutes hand-whipping some whipped cream to top off our dessert, a crushed berry and mint parfait—truly a labor of love.) To see the Cooking Priest in action calls to mind the parable about the man who gave a great banquet. There Jesus says that “when the time for the dinner came, he dispatched his servant to say to those invited, ‘Come everything is now ready’” (Lk 14:17). The servant performs a crucial function in announcing that the meal is prepared and in beseeching others to come participate. He proclaims and implores. He acts as the sacred banquet’s missionary, we might say. Fr. Leo is passionate about this kind of evangelism, and he works to inspire other Catholics to do the same work—to invite people to the Lord’s table.

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DISPUTED QUESTION

In the Middle Ages, the disputed question was one of the major forms of academic investigation. A master of theology would pose a question on which great authorities seemed to disagree, and then entertain objections from fellow masters and students. After others attempted to reconcile the various authorities, the master would give a determination that resolved the question.

In our form of the disputed question, two student brothers approach a difficult issue from different angles in order to reveal its complexity. While traditionally the dispute was settled by a master, here we will allow readers to form their own decision.

ON A FAITHFUL APPROACH TO FOOD

John Paul Kern, O.P. & Josemaría Guzmán-Domínguez, O.P.

THE QUESTION

In his description of the early Church community in Jerusalem St. Luke writes, “Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46). To be Catholic is to approach food with a glad and generous heart. In the following conversation, Br. John Paul Kern and

Br. Josemaría Guzmán-Domínguez provide a culinary tour of Catholicism, discussing what a Catholic approach to food might look like for the faithful in today's world.

Br. John Paul Kern (JPK): Food is a wonderful part of Catholic life!

As a convert to the Catholic faith, back in 2006, I remember that as I was going through RCIA I was struck by how food was involved in so many aspects of the life of the Church. Food plays a role in our celebration of feast days throughout the year, and Catholicism gave birth to many different types of food as it came into contact with and baptized diverse cultures throughout the world. For example, King Cake helps celebrate the Epiphany, Hot Cross Buns celebrate the Triumph of the Cross, and croissants the Feast of Our Lady of Victory (or Our Lady of the Rosary as it's now called). A little closer to home we have various Irish-American and Italian-American foods associated with different feast days, such as the Feast of the Seven Fishes on Christmas Eve.

I also came to realize that the Catholic faith uses food as an opportunity to build up and foster community, not only on feast days, but as a regular part of life. Many traditionally Catholic countries seem to understand dinner as an opportunity to enjoy time with friends or family, something to be savored and cherished and not to be rushed. Here in the U.S., we also see the omnipresent coffee and donuts after Mass as an opportunity for the parish community to spend time together, and it seems that campus ministry dinners serve a similar purpose in Catholic communities at universities.

Br. Josemaría Guzmán-Domínguez (JGD): And if you grow up as a cradle Catholic, like I did, you also know about food's centrality in Catholic culture and Catholic life. I remember growing up having

a special place for weekend dinners with all the family, especially Sunday meals after Mass. For many years growing up in my family we always ate fish on Fridays—which wasn't much of a penance for me since I love fish! This was a way to parallel the liturgical celebrations of the Church and to remember ancient Christian practices. Of course in the old countries, in Italy and Spain, that approach to food is somewhat kept even by those who maybe have distanced themselves from the Church. Their heritage is so deeply rooted that it's just a part of life—and a very Catholic part of life.

However, in the modern world—and at all times, with fallen human nature—we have to be concerned about a disproportionate love for food. This is something that here in the U.S. perhaps we are prone to because most of us have so much food at our disposal. It's really a temptation, then, to take food for granted—treating food as a transient good that comes and goes without remembering its broader communal and liturgical implications. This forgetfulness leaves us vulnerable to a misappreciation and an abuse of food.

Gluttony is the capital sin that relates to a disordinate love for or desire for food. It comes in different flavors. Most people just think about it as having absurd quantities of food and eating it too greedily or quickly or without sharing—distorting its proper place in human life. But also there is a kind of gluttony that is being very picky about foods. We can see this in someone who desires to eat only delicate, exquisite foods, and looks down on simpler fare. Or in the case of one who doesn't know how to eat what's given to him—say, by his mother when he's seven years old and she serves him soup, or when one is a guest in a house—there's something to gratefully receiving food that is given as a gift. On the contrary, pickiness can make us too attached to what we want and closed us off to the gifts, even the simple ones, that others offer.

The tradition of the Church has always recognized the dangerous temptations surrounding food. Gluttony is one of those capital

vices, along with pride, the queen of the vices, that seeks to distract us from God, to pull us away from Him. The saints have always attacked the sin of gluttony and warned us to be careful about food. It's a good that's necessary for human life, but that can easily become a distraction.

On the other hand, the saints and the Church have always put forth models of temperance—the virtue of desiring and enjoying foods and other bodily goods with moderation and in the appropriate context. That's something we need to recover in our Catholic thinking, especially today. What are some ways that you think we could do that?

JPK: As you pointed out, it's important that we don't allow our culture to train us in an unhealthy attitude toward food. If you look around, you see an industry that seems to be catering to gluttony in many ways. On one hand you have the fast-food movement, which offers you super-sized quantities of questionable nutritional quality at an extremely fast pace. This caters to several aspects of gluttony. On the other hand, you have Whole Foods (or "Whole Paycheck"), which offers you food for a discerning palate at a high cost. You don't seem to see as many food options that hit the "golden mean," such as nice little family restaurants—places which promote spending time with family and friends and enjoying some good food at a reasonable price.

Within this cultural context, the Church offers us some help. In addition to all her feast days, which train us to use food to serve the higher ends of promoting community and the worship of God, she also gives us an approach to temperance by having days of the week and entire seasons dedicated to fasting. In this way she promotes a wonderfully balanced approach to food. We have Fridays for abstinence; Sundays for family time—and maybe some extra dessert to celebrate the Resurrection. Lent is an entire season teaching us to abstain and be able to have a healthy detachment

from food, lest, like the Philippians to whom St. Paul writes, “our stomachs become our God” (Phil 3:19). This intense penitential season prepares us to more intensely celebrate the Easter season, which immediately follows Lent. So even in the realm of food, the Church teaches us that we must embrace the Cross—we must pass by the way of the Cross—in order to arrive at glory!

JGD: I think we can be helpfully challenged by the example of the saints. In particular I’m thinking of the early monks who fled into the desert, leaving behind all earthly goods to follow Christ more closely. The way they talk about food involves eating the bare minimum to keep living. That’s a striking example—maybe not one we’re all meant to imitate exactly, but one which prompts us to reflect. Think also of St. John the Baptist. People thought he was bizarre for what and how he ate, and accused him of being possessed by a demon for denying the good things people normally enjoy. But he teaches us by word and deed, especially in Advent and Lent when the Church goes into her penitential mode. In those times, we focus on him as a particular example of the Christian life. He summons us to prepare the way of the Lord in our own hearts by distancing ourselves from the food that is good and wholesome in itself. His example shows us that renouncing food for a time can help us to grow closer to God.

JPK: Even in the relatively extreme and austere examples you mentioned of the early desert fathers and early monastics who really embraced some hardcore fasting in order to be more detached from the world and to grow closer to God, I’ve still come across examples of sober common sense about food. Some of them cite Christ’s instruction to the apostles to “eat what is set before you” (Lk 10:8), even in the midst of their extreme fasting. I also remember one story of a woman who was a renowned baker and who, in thanksgiving to a monk to whom she had entrusted a prayer request that subsequently had been answered, wanted to thank him and so baked him the most extravagant, luxurious,

delicious pastry she could make. Upon giving it to him, she realized *this man's whole life is devoted to penance and abstinence* (the “negative” detachment aspects). *Did I just put a big temptation before this man?* However, she was amazed at his response. As she put it before him, he received it gratefully, smiled, ate it, and seemed to enjoy it more than anyone she had ever seen. In having a proper relationship to food and detachment from it, he was able to enjoy it more—not less.

JGD: That lady sounds like an Italian grandmother . . . “*You look too thin!*”

JPK: Yeah, I can imagine something like this happening to St. Francis of Assisi. Or, as one of my monk friends tells me—he’s a good faster, he’s pretty thin—he’ll often recount tales of the Italian grandmothers who see him and say, “Hey Father, no one likes a skinny priest!” They’re always trying to fill him up. But even when he’s fasting or trying to abstain from meat, if they’re trying to share something like their family’s special meatball dish with him, he’ll enjoy it with gratitude—and he’s *really* enjoying it. It’s beautiful.

JGD: These stories show how for some people, and especially people of certain cultures, the making and the giving of food is a love language. For their sake—and ours too, you don’t want a *nonna* on your case for not eating her food—we have to learn also to appreciate the goodness of food. It’s part of God’s good creation. Let’s remember Psalm 104, and how it recounts the goodness of God and His creation. The Psalmist says “Lord, thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart” (Ps 104:14–15).

The Scriptures throughout tell us that creation is good. One aspect of Christian living is to appreciate that goodness—and always to



Peder Severin Krøyer — Hipp, Hipp, Hurrah!

remember that God is the ultimate Good, toward whom all these created things direct us. We are meant to *use* the good things of the earth to point us to God and to bring us closer to Him. And food can serve in this way.

JPK: Yes, just as you said, St. Augustine famously drew this distinction between enjoyment and the use of things. God himself is the only thing that we properly enjoy in Himself. However, we can use all things, including food, in order to build up community, as you said, and to enjoy God. And actually, in enjoying God, we're able to enjoy other things *all the more*—as we enjoy them fittingly in relation to God.

JGD: Well, Br. John Paul, you're definitely right there. When we enjoy God we can enjoy the good things of God as well—in fact, better than if we don't know and love and enjoy God. For example, with the use of food, our contemporary culture tells us just to buy it

and consume as much as we can, as cheaply as we can. It's a culture of consumerism and waste that sets food in its improper context. The fast-food culture struggles to teach us how to properly use and enjoy the goodness of food. And so, as a response, starting in France and spreading throughout Europe, a "slow food" movement has developed. It's a clever idea. This involves restaurants that make a point to make the food only when you order it, not ahead of time. They encourage you to sit down, eat slowly, enjoy the food and enjoy the company that gathers around the table. This is a small wake-up call for us to really appreciate the goodness of food and especially of the human company that develops around food.

JPK: Yes, absolutely. My patron St. John Paul II often used the language of gift to explain how we can properly understand, receive, and enjoy our relationship to things and people. When I look at a thing itself, whether it be food or another person, I may be able to appreciate some of that thing's goodness. But when I recognize that it's a gift from God I can enjoy it all the more. For example, even supposing I could actually reproduce my mother's recipes faithfully, if I made the food for myself, it just doesn't taste as good as if my mother made it. It's like I can taste the love that's there. So similarly, if we recognize that food is a gift from God, we can, in a sense, taste the love in this food—God's love. The same principle applies in enjoying God's many gifts, including other people.

As you mentioned, the consumer attitude is prolific in our culture. This can affect our view not only of things but also other people. It certainly hurts the family. And the parish community, too. If we fall into the fast food mentality with parish life, we might think "this parish conveniently provides me with a Mass or a sacrament I need," and then we drive right back out again. Or we may be so trained by a fast food culture that even when we are home we rush to eat food or to grab food on the go. Learning to stop and appreciate food as a gift can also help us to appreciate the family as

a gift, the parish community as a gift. In practical ways, food helps us appreciate other gifts, like the gift of the Catholic community, or keeping “sacred” that one family meal every Sunday, as you had mentioned.

JGD: So it sounds like you’re saying there’s an attitude we could name spiritual gluttony. That when we’re trained by physical gluttony to indulge in a disordered way, we could then relate to other people and spiritual goods in the same way: we seek them out for their sweetness, quantity, or other pleasing qualities, and then we discard them, as Pope Francis has pointed out in his comments concerning the “throwaway culture.” We then move on to the next thing we want to consume for our own selfish benefit. Discard and move on, discard and move on. And we run the risk of living our whole life with this same attitude. Perhaps thinking about food in a healthy Catholic way, as we’ve talked about, can help us recover some spiritual temperance and develop a healthier, less consumerist attitude toward other things.

JPK: Certainly. I recall a few ingenious friends in college using food to rescue me during a time period in which I was hyperproductive but lacking in community. I was accomplishing a lot but looking back I was consuming both food and experiences in a somewhat utilitarian fashion, trying to find some minimum of balance between work and play, yet not truly enjoying things and people in my life. Fortunately, some friends would still call me to see if I was coming to hang out, and when I complained that I was way too busy, they would point out that I had to eat anyway, and they would offer to make food for me. Of course, once we were eating together, the conversation usually continued for a while. and sometimes I would end up realizing that it was more important to stay and spend some time enjoying our friendship. In a very beautiful way, receiving the gift of food opened me up to receiving the greater gift of our community. I hope that the “slow food” movement you mentioned earlier has a similar effect in the lives of many people!

It makes sense that as social creatures our approach toward food will also have a social impact. The Catholic Church in her social teaching has often articulated the principle of having a preferential option for the poor. So, Br. Josemaría, do you think as Catholics we should have a preferential option for the poor in our approach to food?

JGD: Of course!

JPK: It's easy to say "yes" right away, and I'm certainly not going to disagree with you. Many of us, when we were children, were told by our parents that we had to finish all the food we had on our plate and not to throw *any* of it away. Why? Because there was a starving child in Africa who would *love* to have this food. And yet, even as children, many of us realized that whether or not we ate that food or threw it away, a child on the other side of the world was *not* going to be any less hungry. So, practically, how does our awareness of the poor and our preferential option for the poor work in our approach to food? How does it actually help the poor?

JGD: Well, those children certainly have a point there—that plate of food is never going to get to Africa in time for a starving child to have it. In fact, that insight into reality is often used as a tool by the child to avoid eating something he or she doesn't want to eat!

I might suggest a few approaches that would actually help the poor. First of all, you can offer up eating some food you don't like for the people who are starving. Be conscious that you have something they don't, and be thankful for it. Giving God thanks for the food, for the people who produced and delivered it, and begging Him to feed those who are hungry—these would be good spiritual practices occasioned by the food we're blessed to have.

Another practical point is to make good use of leftovers. Making sure we don't waste what we've been given—thinking in terms of

stewardship, what we have is a gift we need to be responsible for as well.

Finally, if we have a more conscientious approach toward food, we might be able to set aside some of our food budget for almsgiving to the poor. Or we could have food ready in our car—non-perishable foodstuffs, or bottles of water, or chewy protein bars, for example—to hand out to the poor we may encounter on the streets. We should remember that feeding the hungry is the first corporal work of mercy.

JPK: Speaking of the works of mercy, and of the three aspects you have laid out here—spiritual offerings, practicing good stewardship, and practicing generous almsgiving—I’m struck by their similarity to the traditional combination of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in Lent, and how these elements relate to each other. These Lenten practices may provide for us an approach to food more generally. First, with regard to prayer, during Lent we focus on loving God. He in turn teaches us to love other people. Just as you said, we give thanks to God for the food we have and pray for those who do not have it. In turning to God as our highest good and asking him for grace—this is what allows us to keep ourselves from being indulgent with food, to practice fasting, and to consume less.

Fasting and consuming less teaches us a spirit of detachment which, in turn, enables us to give more to the poor both in almsgiving and through prayer. One frequent example I’ve heard and have recommended to others is: think of your weekly five dollar Starbucks. No, that one exact coffee is not going to travel halfway around the world for someone else to have. But these five dollar spent on coffee could support multiple meals for the hungry in the United States, or even more in other parts of the world. If, with the help of God’s grace, we are able to become more detached through temperance and fasting, we will be better prepared to share with the poor.

JGD: There's another dimension to thinking about food and poverty, too: the consumerist nature of our production and distribution of food. We're generally thoughtless about the reality of human labor and its dignity. We tend to under-appreciate the labor that goes into food production. There may be a sort of excessive mechanization going on. We make technology a master in this realm, whereas it should only be a service to those who produce our food.

How is a Catholic to approach this problem? On the one hand, it's great to have technology which makes more food available to more people. It aids in the feeding of many who may not otherwise have been fed. On the other hand, there is something lost in human life when we turn over food production to totally mechanized ways and when the whole process from production to consumption becomes very impersonal. We lose an element of the humanity that should go into food. What do you think about that?

JPK: Yes, there is a certain danger in being separated from the planting, raising, and harvesting of food, especially here in the First World. I remember when I visited Haiti, I was very struck in praying with them the Lord's Prayer, this prayer we pray at Mass every Sunday. For the people there, the petition "Give us this day our daily bread" was, in addition to referring to the supersubstantial bread of the Eucharist, also a very literal prayer for their daily food for survival. In Haiti, if weather or insects destroy the plants in the neighborhood garden, the impact on the people is magnified. Because of this they more readily recognize how much they depend on God's goodness and God's providence for their daily needs. Whereas for us, I'm not even sure where the food I'm eating comes from. I don't know where it's produced, who picks it, or how it was transported. The role that God plays in this process on a daily basis is not readily apparent. We're usually pretty confident the food is just going to show up. Yet, in a real way, it is still God who is involved in the supply of this food as well. It's been a while since this country went through the Great Depression in

which regions of this country turned into a dustbowl, and many people were facing real starvation. That was a big wakeup call in the 1930s after the Roaring 20s. With increasingly industrialized processes, people were sure they could enjoy their daily bread without having to rely on God. We can certainly share the same sort of illusion today—that we are not dependent on God, which is reinforced because we don't clearly see our dependence on him for the production of our daily bread.

JGD: And with respect to food in particular, our dependence on God is manifested in our dependence on one another: those who grow the food, those who pick it, those who make it available for our buying and our consuming, those who prepare it and cook it. But the ways we now produce and consume food often hide the human reality behind it. As Catholics we need to be more aware. We should ask ourselves, where did this food come from? From whom did it come? How are they being treated? Are they being paid enough so that they can eat their daily bread, as I'm eating mine from the fruit of their labors. Are they working and living in situations that respect their dignity? These are all realities that are bound up with the very food that we eat every day.

The Church is tasked also with being aware of today's cultural poverty and of providing the food of truth about the human person and human community. Here members of society can learn from the Church how to treat one another, how to direct all things—food, and all other social realities—to the dignity of the human person, the common good of society, and the worship of God.

JPK: I remember St. John Paul II applying Christ's teaching, that "[t]he Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" to the realm of work. Work is a gift of God for man; man doesn't exist simply for the sake of work. We could extend this logic to food as well. Food exists for man, man does not exist for food. So for those who are involved in the work of food production, this production

of food should also be of benefit to them, such that food is for the sake of man—both for those who are producing it and those who are consuming it. Food should not in some way enslave those who are working in its production, just to serve the desires of those eating that food. Certainly for those who are involved in the business of producing food, especially those in positions of ownership and roles of leadership, this is an area where they can really practice their faith—to make sure that in their production of food there are good working conditions, just wages, and that their dignity is maintained.

At the same time, while it can be challenging to try to see what's happening at the back end of the ever more complex processes involved in food production, and to be able to evaluate these processes, there are ways we can all be attentive. Many of us have ample means at our disposal, which allow us to make choices in what we eat and where we shop. There are certainly some brands of certain foods that guarantee that the producers are paid a fair price. There are also conscientious choices we can make on the local level. I remember when I was in graduate school there was a popular local restaurant with very good food, but we learned from students who worked there that the owners mistreated their workers. So several of us decided to eat meals elsewhere. We wanted to support a restaurant that promoted better working conditions. There was a desire for unity, for solidarity.

We may also find a helpful lens through which to approach food by considering the most exalted use of food made by God himself. Jesus Christ refers to himself as food, as being the Bread of Life. He uses bread and wine to give us himself in the Eucharist. Simple food—something as common as bread and wine—is elevated for an extremely noble purpose: the most perfect worship of God. The Eucharist also builds up the community. God spiritually nourishes his people through the Eucharist and gives us grace to unite us in love, in communion with God and with one another in his body

the Church. The Eucharist is the supreme example of the properly ordered use of common things (bread and wine) for the love of God and neighbor, in worship of God and in building communion.

JGD: Yes. And recall that he gives us the gift of the Eucharist as the bread for wayfarers. It's not the final meal just yet. That awaits us in our heavenly home. But here during the journey he sustains us with the daily bread which is the Eucharist, so that we can travel through this life, fasting and feasting, toward that eternal heavenly banquet where we shall taste and see the goodness of the Lord (Ps 34:8).

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CONTEMPLATA

THE HOLY FEASTING

THE EUCHARIST AS A SACRED BANQUET

Ignatius Weiss, O.P.

St. Thomas Aquinas loved a good feast. Born to a noble family in medieval Italy, the young Tommaso d'Aquino would have been well acquainted with magnificent banquets. His favorite feasts, however, were not the suppers of the secular world but the Supper of the Lamb. In the Eucharist St. Thomas recognized certain qualities similar to the feasts and banquets he would have attended in the secular world. Drawing on the image of a great banquet, an image also employed by Jesus in his parables, St. Thomas was moved to compose some of the Church's most eloquent writings in honor of the Blessed Sacrament. His writings were in turn adopted by the Church to be used for the Feast of Corpus Christi, now known as the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Among these compositions are the *Adoro Te, Devote* ("Godhead here in hiding") and the *Tantum Ergo* (the last verses of the *Pange Lingua*). The antiphon *O Sacrum Convivium* or "O Sacred Banquet," while it is the shortest of these Eucharistic poems, is far from lacking in theological profundity. The full text reads:

O Sacred Banquet, in which Christ becomes our food,
The memory of his Passion is celebrated,
The soul is filled with grace,
And a pledge of future glory is given to us.

By considering briefly the characteristic elements of a banquet, we can better appreciate why St. Thomas chose to develop his devotional poem around this metaphor. Developing our own sense for the image can in turn help us better to understand the Eucharist and stir up love for our Eucharistic Lord.

WHAT MAKES A BANQUET?

There are three important elements of a true banquet. First, a banquet is a commemoration: it is intended to honor someone or something. Second, banquets are marked by an abundance of food. Third, a banquet is structured as a series of courses, reaching its sweet conclusion with the dessert course. Taken together, these three characteristics distinguish a banquet from other kinds of meals and celebrations.

Banquets are distinct in that they are held to honor some memorable person or event. When a wise and munificent medieval king would host a feast for his royal court, the array of roasted meats and overflowing cornucopia of harvest vegetables pointed to the various fruits brought in from the kingdom. A feast can be held to celebrate any variety of occasions; what is represented at a banquet, however, is always something that is being memorialized—whether it should be some historic victory, a birthday or an anniversary, or even the memory of a person.

In every age, it is the nature of a banquet to leave the guests satisfied, full of the rich and hearty fare offered in the banquet's many dishes. The smorgasbord of food arrayed along the table is an essential part of a feast. A banquet is far more than a mere abundance of food, however; that would only be a buffet. The vast

array of food laid out before the guests is the basic “stuff” that gives occasion for the meaning and interior structure of the feast. The food communicates something of the meaningfulness of the person or event being honored.

No banquet is complete without the dessert course. Today, the presence of the dessert fork (or spoon) sitting on the table throughout the meal serves as a reminder of what is yet to come. When the entrees have been removed and one’s place has been reduced to a water glass, a cup and saucer, and this shiny, silver utensil, there is only one conclusion to be drawn: the best is yet to come. Soup and salad whet the appetite, and the entree nourishes. But it is the dessert course which concludes and consummates the whole feast with its delicacies.

Taken as a whole, the banquet supplies a feast for all the senses. While the courses are being served, and then for a while afterwards, it is inevitable that the guests should comment about the sights, scents, and flavors of the meal experienced; they sing its praises. Such lavish and grandiose memorial feasts furnished St. Thomas with a useful image for praising the Sacred Banquet, the Most Blessed Sacrament.

THE EUCHARIST AS A BANQUET

The Eucharist is the banquet to end all banquets. No earthly ruler or magnate’s efforts could ever measure up to the feast prepared by the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16). In the Eucharistic species, mere morsels of bread and a chalice of wine become a banquet more noble, satisfying, and desirable than any earthly king could offer. Christ himself is offering to each communicant his Body and Blood. On the altar, bread and wine become the source and summit of our faith.

Just as guests comment upon the delights of the earthly banquets, so too does the Church revel in the glory of the celestial one. The “O Sacred Banquet” presents in poetic form a deep theological exposition on the Blessed Sacrament in just four

lines. Many Dominican friars, nuns, and sisters commonly recite this antiphon before praying the Divine Office or the Rosary when in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. While this brief antiphon may be the shortest of St. Thomas' Eucharistic poems, these verses praise the Eucharist so excellently that it quickly directs all these prayers to the Real Presence before them.

The four short lines of the "O Sacred Banquet" embrace a threefold dimensionality that calls to mind the full grace and power of the Eucharist. St. Thomas explains in the *Tertia Pars*, the third part of his *Summa Theologiae*, that in each Sacrament "three things may be considered; viz. the very cause of our sanctification, which is Christ's passion; the form of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues; and the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal life" (ST III q. 60, a. 3). In the Eucharist we should be able to recognize the Passion, the action of grace, and a looking forward to the glory of heaven.

THE SACRED BANQUET

The Eucharist is a banquet of grace, and so the three aspects of a true banquet correspond well with the three dimensions of a sacrament. In fact, these are the three aspects praised by St. Thomas in the "O Sacred Banquet": a lived memorial, an abundance of grace, and a pledge of glory.

The memory of his Passion is celebrated. One of the things that makes a meal a banquet is the meaning with which it is invested. Just as a banquet commemorates some important person or event, so too "the Eucharist is a commemoration of Christ's death," St. Thomas writes, "in so far as the suffering Christ Himself is offered to us as the Paschal banquet, according to 1 Cor. 5:7–8: 'Christ our pasch is sacrificed; therefore let us feast'" (ST III q. 66, a. 9, ad 5). It is the cause or purpose of the feast that, in part, gives it meaning. The Eucharistic banquet recalls, celebrates, and makes present the redeeming sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, the victory of Jesus over death.

The soul is filled with grace. The typical feast centers around a table decked with every sort of food. The spiritual feast, the sacred banquet, provides a heartier fare and more perfect nourishment in hardly a mouthful. The fullness that this banquet offers us is Christ himself, his presence, and his grace. The strength the Eucharist lends has been referred to as *viaticum*, which is Latin for “supplies for a journey.” When this term is used in the context of Last Rites, it is to provide the dying with a happy and grace-filled death. Yet we are all journeying daily in the *sequela Christi*, the following after Christ, and rely on the nourishment of this Sacrament. Reflecting on the majesty of the Sacrament, St. Thomas writes,

What could be more wonderful than this? No other sacrament has greater healing power; through it sins are purged away, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift. It is offered in the Church for the living and the dead, so that what was instituted for the salvation of all may be for the benefit of all. (“Manducatur utique,” *In Festo Corporis Christi*, nocturn 1, lection 2)

And a pledge of future glory is given to us. Not only does the Blessed Sacrament harken back to the salvation won for us on Calvary and provide us with the graces for our present journey, but the Eucharist also gives us here and now a share in the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:6–9). While the dessert fork promises sweet delicacies, the Eucharist is a sort of glimpse and foretaste of the beatific vision: “One who eats and drinks in a spiritual way shares in the Holy Spirit, through whom we are united to Christ by a union of faith and love, and through him we become members of the Church. . . . ‘He who raised Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead, will raise our mortal bodies because of his Spirit, who dwells in us’ (Rom 8:11). And so our Lord says that he will raise up to glory whoever eats and drinks; to glory, and not to condemnation” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on John*. ch. 6, lecture 7). The

Eucharist, although it is not the full and direct possession of the eternal life to come, is still a partial share in that glory. It is, in this way, like the dessert fork which is with us throughout the meal, but only achieves its use in the final course. The best is yet to come.

CONCLUSION

To illustrate the bounty that the Lord offers us in the Blessed Sacrament, Aquinas appeals to the image of a banquet. It calls to mind a great hall full of guests, goblets brimming with wine, tables covered with sundry delights, and the infectious buzz of celebration. A true banquet, as distinguished from other kinds of feasts, involves commemoration, abundance, and a sweet conclusion. Compared to the earthly meals where we stuff ourselves on fine foods in honor of some grand occasion, the Eucharist far surpasses and overshadows such mundane events, because of the immense spiritual reality that is at hand in the Sacrament.

The “O Sacred Banquet,” brief and beautiful, develops a theologically rich devotional around this metaphor of a banquet. By taking a closer look at the abundant graces of the Eucharist, we better understand the spiritual dynamics at work under the appearance of bread and wine. Using both St. Thomas’s theological treatments and his poetic praises, we can gain a great wealth of wisdom and enkindle an ardent devotion. St. Thomas’s Eucharistic poetry truly presents the Church with much to contemplate, a feast for both mind and heart.

Br. Ignatius Weiss entered the Order of Preachers in 2014. He attended Franciscan University, where he majored in philosophy and minored in theology and Latin.

GESTA DOCTRINAMQUE

Let the brothers reflect on and make known the teachings and achievements (gesta doctrinamque) of those in the family of St. Dominic who have gone before them, while not forgetting to pray for them (See Liber constitutionum et ordinationum 160).

THE APOSTOLATE OF JESUS

Pierre-Thomas Dehau, O.P.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Pierre-Thomas Dehau was born August 5, 1870, in Bouvines, a small town in northern France, to Félix and Marie Dehau. He entered the seminary at St. Sulpice at the age of eighteen and was ordained at Cambrai in 1894. After a brief assignment as chaplain of an agricultural school in eastern France, he was sent for theological studies at Fribourg, Switzerland, where he met the Order of Preachers. He entered the Dominican Province of France in 1896, taking the religious name Thomas.

He took up an apostolate of preaching homilies and giving retreats. Partially blind from a young age, he was never able to write books—all the works of his that we have today come from notes of his lectures, homilies, and conferences. In many of these, we see his conviction that contemplation is not reserved to religious, but is rather a gift made available to all. He died in 1956, while serving the Dominican nuns in his hometown of Bouvines.

The selection that follows is taken from *The Apostolate of Jesus* (Tours: Maison Mame, 1954, 105–115). It is a commentary on St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 40. The question he treats here concerns Christ's manner of life.

COMMUNICATION BY WORD

The end of the Incarnation, we have said, required that Christ lead not a solitary life, but a common, social life—the very common life of humanity. He showed himself on the earth, *in terris visus est* (Bar 3:37), in order to converse with men in the most complete and intimate manner, in order to “be all in all” (1 Cor 9:22) as the Apostle says, and as all apostles must do. When one converses with people, he must first conform himself to them in the conversation itself and in all that it implies, *ut se eis in conversatione conformet* (ST III, q. 40, a. 2). Thus, for example, one attempts to take up their language as much as possible, even if he is not very habituated to it and must impose upon himself a certain constraint. We speak a dialect, that is to say not only a language, but something which includes even the minute details of the manner of speech. I recall during the last war [World War II] a conversation between farmers who came from two very distant parts of France, the Northern region and the Midi region. They spoke the same language and did not understand each other; their manner of pronouncing it was so different that a true conversation between them was impossible.

It is the *loquela* (“dialect”) in all the breadth of this word, with all its nuances, which alone allows this manifestation, the complete “epiphany” of someone: *loquela tua manifestum te facit* (“your dialect betrays you,” Mt 26:73), the servant of the high priest says quite rightly to Peter, who tries hard to hide his Galilean manner of speaking without success. It is often a nearly imperceptible accent which sheds light on the most secret recesses of you and me, *te facit*. It is only the *fiat lux* (“let there be light,” Gen 1:3) which can begin to dissipate the shadows on the surface

of this abyss that keeps us from everyone but ourselves. Man manifests himself only by that which comes from his mouth, and it is only by that that we can judge, *de ore tuo te judico* (“Out of your own mouth I will condemn you,” Lk 19:22). It takes not only a delicate politeness, but also a tremendous acumen to speak the same language in exactly the same manner as one’s interlocutor. Clearly, we must avoid wounding someone when they are inferior to us by the somewhat scornful condescension that would cause us to take up his manner of speech too exactly, the flaws and nuances of which are known only to him. This requires a great deal of tact, as is the case with all forms of condescension, which can too easily take a disagreeable tone. But excepting this case, we love to have a conversation with those who speak exactly like us, and one can say that the fullness of communication establishes itself on this fact alone.

What is more, for the truly intelligent, and even more for those who would be nothing other than intellectuals—the true intellectuals, who by definition search to penetrate in “the other as other”—it is a profound joy to be in communion with that which seems the most incommunicable and which is at the same time the most significant. The word is the sign *par excellence*. It has that which St. Augustine magnificently calls *principatum significandi* (“the pre-eminence in signifying,” *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.3.4). But for a word to reveal the infinite riches of its own significance, it must first possess those riches in their fullness, materially, from the simple musical and linguistic point of view. It has been rightly said that in the slightest word many things escape those who, though not exactly deaf, do not have “ears.” Perceiving the slightest of these harmonies, as well as these subtle nuances and allusions, is necessary for communication to go well. St. Albert the Great told us something very sweet concerning the Mother of the One whom certain Church Fathers have called *Christus musicus* (“musical Christ”). He tells us that Mary was also a musician, so that she would not lose any of the slightest nuances of the word of the Word, *fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum* (“let it be done to

me according to your word,” Lk 1:38). She was fully “tuned,” these little vibrations passing through her—*fiat mihi*—awakening in her an unbreakable harmony.

We have remarked that, without all that we have just said, communication does not go well. We do not forget the great doctrine of friendship, which is founded precisely on communication. All the faults, all the “almosts” which come up in communication, are inevitably found again in the imperfections and the reductions of the friendship based on this communication. Jesus is the friend *par excellence* and the friend of all, because he is the one who sympathizes perfectly, right to the end, with all and in all, *omnibus omnia factus sum* (“I have become all things to all men,” 1 Cor 9:22). He sympathizes right to the end because he loves right to the end, *in finem dilexit*.

We never come back and insist enough on this admirable word of St. Paul: He made himself all things to all men. Certain people give themselves generously to all, but this does not suffice: one must make himself all to all. “To make oneself” says more, and says something other, than “to give oneself”—something still more efficacious and even more intimate. Something of the other must make himself mine and in me—*fiat mihi*—something which is exactly according to him and according to his word, *secundum verbum tuum*. All of this is difficult. This totality, *omnia*, is difficult, this which entirely takes me and completely gives me, but more difficult, I dare say, is this otherness which takes another and gives him completely to me, until I become him.

Without this mysterious transubstantiation, we note well, not only is there not love, but there is not even familiarity, the slightest experiential familiarity; there is especially not an affective familiarity, the only one which is absolutely fecund and the mother of love. All familiarity already consists essentially in becoming the “other as other,” in an intentional manner—pardon us these technical words, but they say exactly what we want to say. The affective familiarity demands that one become the other not only in its abstract form, but in the fullness of its concrete reality.

Thus without all that which precedes, there is not even familiarity, and certainly there is not love. According to the beautiful Dionysian formula which St. Thomas saw fit to repeat, love is an ecstasy which draws us from ourselves, which throws us outside of ourselves, *ex*, in order to place that which we love, especially the one whom we love, in the place in which we would occupy ourselves. It is why those who are “full of themselves,” as we rightly say, are extraordinarily incapable of love. They would first need to cede their place, come out of themselves, or, according to a familiar but striking shortcut, come out of themselves so that another can enter. When one is full of himself, one inevitably leaves others at the door and the door remains closed, *clausa est janua* (“the door was shut,” Mt 25:10). One cannot respond to the joyous clamor that announces the spouse in the middle of the night, *media nocte clamor* (“in the middle of the night there was a clamor”), which commands us to come out of ourselves, *exite obviam ei* (“come out to meet him,” Mt 25:6).

We come out of ourselves in giving ourselves, in making ourselves all to all. Once again, this is very difficult! We shouldn’t surprise ourselves that it is so rare to succeed; we are so different from each other, such strangers, that even in giving ourselves to one another, we are only able to give ourselves partially to each other. It is this partialness which concerns itself with expanding, completing as much as possible by all the means, by all the ingenuities in our power.

THE WORD AND THE BREAD

It is through the mouth that the word comes. It is through the mouth that food enters, and it is especially about this food that St. Thomas wants to speak to us in the body of this second article (*ST* III q. 40, a. 2). Words and food are the two great means of human communication. *Convivere*, “to live with,” is especially to maintain oneself by the help of the same language and eating the same bread. The sacred text where the profound unity of these

two aspects, of these two means of *conversatio*—the word and the bread—is best shown to us, is perhaps the one in which Jesus victoriously casts away the tempter after the silence and fasting in the desert: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). The word which is the true bread, the bread which comes from heaven, is the word which comes from the mouth, and thus from the heart, of God. *Ego ex ore altissimi prodivi* (“alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven,” Sir 24:5), says the Word who is the universal bread. Nothing that comes from the mouth of God does not also come from his heart. The lying word is that which comes from the mouth without coming from the heart; if “all men are liars” (Ps 116:11) to quote the melancholic psalmist, then so much more are the human words which do not come from the heart. We can never be completely sure that every human word we hear coming from the mouth comes truly from the heart, or that it comes in the same manner as it does from the mouth. There is much, it is said, between the glass and the lips! One could say it even better: there is much between the heart and the lips! These imperceptible deviations, these disconcerting dissonances, these nuances, which seem to be nearly nothing—all serve too well to aggravate the pain of misunderstandings!

It is by the word which the unity of hearts and souls is fashioned and refashioned, *cor unum et anima una* (“one heart and one soul,” Acts 4:32). It is by the unity of the same bread, won by a father by the sweat of his brow, which fashions and refashions around the same table the unity of the family, the beginning of all social unity. The family is the most substantial social unit of all, St. Thomas tells us. It is rooted in its own being, in the production of being by generation, in its own conservation and development by education. The family shines around the nourishing hearth. The hearth, that is to say the fire, heats the heart and the body when it is cold, but is used especially to prepare food. It is because our life must perpetually maintain and repair itself by food that the flame must return to life without ceasing and be born again in

the hearth, so that the warmth of life is not extinguished in our veins. Before and after all the labors, all the distractions, all the dispersions caused by centrifugal forces, the unity of the hearth orders itself around the unity of the table, which always tirelessly reconstitutes, in spite of everything, through everything, the sacred unity of the family.

All that we have just said bursts forth particularly in the Church, at the same time the perfect family and society, becoming real especially in the Eucharist. The unity is fashioned and refashioned unceasingly around the holy table and around the “flesh of truth.” I deliberately make use of these last two words, which are so popular and venerable; we could say: the table of charity and the flesh of truth. All that comes down from the flesh of truth to nourish our faith orients us by love towards the holy table. It is necessary to lovingly sense and realize this profound unity of the preaching and the communion of the flesh, from which the word of life falls from the lips of the priest, and of the table where the hand of the priest puts to his lips the bread of life. The living bread comes down from heaven into our mouth by the communion of flesh and blood; it comes down to our ears by the communication of the Spirit living in the word. We are a multitude, *multi*, and yet we are a single body because we are united in the one bread. The bread is at the same time the Word, source of wisdom to the heights of heaven, *fons sapientiae . . . in excelsis* (Sir 1:5), and the flesh and the blood for all below, who, in communion with the little children, are too small to rise higher than the flesh and blood. The Word was truly made flesh precisely to dwell within us, *et habitavit in nobis* (“and dwelt among us,” Jn 1:14). The Word without flesh could only pass like lightning; we would not know, contain, or hold on to it. Thanks to the flesh, it can reside and dwell within our sick selves, who are so quickly rerouted by the promptings of the spirit, *spiritus quidem promptus est, caro autem infirma* (“the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,” Mt 26:41).

In the Eucharistic sacrifice, there are two great moments: that of the pronouncement of the all-powerful word, of the effecting of the flesh and the blood by the word of the priest, *verbo carnem efficit* (*Pange Lingua*) and that of the consumption, of communion. From the mouth of the priest come the words which transubstantiate; by the mouth and the hand of the priest, by the word and the gesture of the one who provides and distributes the Eucharistic marvel, the bread of heaven comes down, always comes down, to the depths of the poor life that he must raise up from the grip of death, because he is the living and essential bread, *panis vivus et vitalis* (Sequence of Corpus Christi: *Lauda Sion*).

Our two Creeds marked the diverse successive and progressive stages of the descent of the Son. *Descendit de caelis* ("He came down from heaven"), the Nicene Creed tells us; he descends first to the most pure breast of Mary, *de Maria Virgine*, infinitely far already, yet still very near to the breast of the Father on account of the divine affinity of the virginal mother; then, across all the sorrows and all the indignities, he descends to the base of the tomb, *sepultus est*, brought, so to speak, to the bottom by the weight of sin which burdened the Lamb of God and which crushes him. He descends always, *descendit ad inferos*, adds the Apostles' Creed, into the depths of hell from where he leads the captives finally freed from the prison of limbo: *tuos captivos redimens* ("redeeming all the captives"), sings the sublime old hymn conserved by the monastic liturgy. In the descent of the Eucharistic bread, something similar takes place. The living bread descends from heaven, brought dizzyingly down by the sacred weight of love, *amor meus, pondus meum* ("my love is my weight"), he descends also to hell and will seek in the depths of our most humble human and even bodily faculties all that can be purified, freed, and brought up towards heaven in the desire of our hearts, *sursum corda* ("lift up your hearts").

Thus as much as by the unity of word and language, it will be the unity of the food and drink which will express the community, the common life among men. The heart of St. Thomas's argument

in the body of this second article rests upon this last point. By this unity of food, man will convey, in the most striking and significant manner, his good will that is set upon being and showing itself perfectly similar in all things to others, *communiter se sicut alii habere* ("he should conform himself to others," ST III q. 40 a. 2). "Eat what is set before you," *manducate quae apponuntur vobis* (Lk 10:8), with the most perfect simplicity and the thanks of a smile. Jesus always did this, when he received from the hand of Mary at Nazareth the bread won by Joseph, or when he deigned to seat himself by an infinite condescension at the table of the publican. It is always a communion, already a prelude and symbol of the Eucharistic communion where he gives himself to all by his own hands, *se dat suis manibus* (*Pange Lingua*). We accept, eating the sacred body that he offers us through his other self, the priest; we accept it with the same simplicity, the same recognition with which the poor Jesus had received his food each day from the hand of the poor or the hand of the rich.

It was said of John the Baptist and his disciples that they neither ate nor drank. This is, remarks St. Augustine, because they did not eat nor drink the same things as the other Jews. Thus, if it was said of Jesus and of his disciples that they ate and drank, it is because they ate and drank as the others, the same things and in the same way. "The Son of Man came, eating and drinking" (Mt 11:19): it is precisely as the Son of man that he must do this, according to all that we have said. John the Baptist was not the Son of man. The common food was part of the common life, and it is the most striking sign and expression of it.

Translated by Stephen Ruhl, O.P.

Br. Stephen Ruhl entered the Order of Preachers in 2015. Before joining the Order, he studied French at Providence College.

THE LIVES OF THE BRETHREN

THE DIFFUSIVE GOODNESS OF BECOMING WHO ONE IS

THE LIFE OF FR. KURT PRITZL, O.P.

Barnabas McHenry, O.P.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It was a challenge to try to produce a portrait in prose about Fr. Kurt Pritzl, O.P. (1952–2011), a priest and educator who is loved by so many. What follows would have been impossible without the assistance of those who gave of their time and from the treasury of their memories.

I am thankful for the help of my Dominican brethren: Frs. Brian Shanley, O.P., Ken Sicard, O.P., Ed Gorman, O.P., Giles Dimock, O.P., John Vidmar, O.P., Brian Chrzastek, O.P., Stephen Ryan, O.P., John Langlois, O.P., and Br. Reginald Hoefer, O.P. A special note of thanks as well to Mr. Pat Nolan, whose friendship with Fr. Kurt has diffused into a friendship with the entire community.

I am also grateful for contributions from those to whom Fr. Kurt was a teacher, mentor, or colleague at The Catholic University of America: Sr. Anna Wray, O.P., Fr. Robert Sokolowski, Drs. John McCarthy, Angela Knobel, Greg Doolan, Therese Cory, Gloria Frost, Tim Noone, and Kevin White.

I am likewise pleased to acknowledge the assistance of those who knew Fr. Kurt during his studies at the University of Toronto: Sr. Joan Franks, O.P., Fr. Martin Chase, S.J., Dr. William Stoneman, and Dr. Jane Smith.

Lastly, I offer a word of thanks to Fr. Kurt's sister, Ms. Cathy Pritzl. I hope this article is a testament to how much Fr. Kurt spread the love of Christ to all he encountered.

INTRODUCTION

Each year, the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas gathers two communities from opposite sides of the same street together for Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.: the religious community of friars from the Dominican House of Studies and the academic community from The Catholic University of America. In the early afternoon on January 28, 2010, Fr. Kurt Pritzl, a Friar Preacher and Dean of CUA's School of Philosophy, walked measured steps to the ambo to deliver the homily for the annual liturgy.

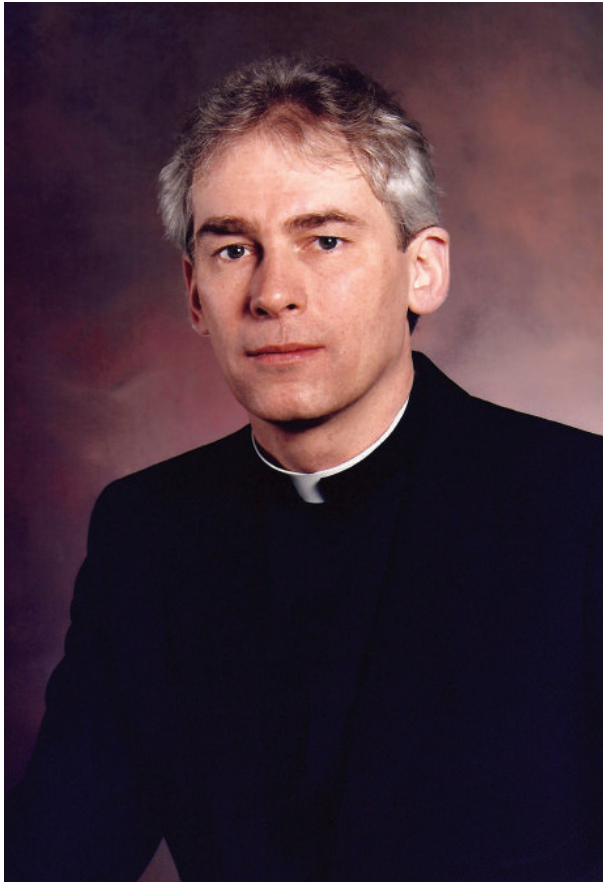
Moments before, those assembled had heard proclaimed a portion of St. Matthew's Gospel: "your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (5:16). For nearly three decades, Fr. Kurt's goodness had shone out, to the glory of God, on either side of Michigan Avenue. On that day, it shone out once more. Though the ravages of terminal cancer had taken his hair and thinned his face, it had not dulled the brilliance of his smile or the sharpness of his intellect.

As a Dominican, he had often heard the motto, derived from Aquinas's own reflection on the nature of our active and contemplative life: *contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere*. Roughly translated, the friar is obliged to contemplate and deliver to others the fruit of his contemplation. We cannot be certain of all the things that Fr. Kurt contemplated in the days and weeks prior to taking the pulpit, but his preaching affords us a glimpse that is profound, even if it is only partial. For at the climatic moment of the homily, this spirited, dying priest keenly observed:

We give our undergraduate students here a taste of Aquinas, hoping the flavor of it suggests to them why those who have devoted their lives to studying his thought fear for lack of time. These observations, however, only approach what we as a university acknowledge and celebrate today as we keep

the feast of Thomas Aquinas at this Mass. Yes—Thomas Aquinas is one of the few thinkers whose intellectual genius is of perennial importance—we can hold a symposium for that. He is something more . . .

I promise to give Fr. Kurt's decisive point at the conclusion. Our patience will be rewarded, for in first considering the life from which it ripened, we will be better prepared to savor the richness of this fruit. Let us begin our journey.



Fr. Kurt Pritzl, O.P.

IN MILWAUKEE

All men by nature desire to know. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.1)

After what we have said, a discussion of friendship would naturally follow, since it is a virtue or implies virtue, and is besides most necessary with a view to living. For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods. . . . But it is not only necessary but also noble; for we praise those who love their friends; and again we think it is the same people that are good men and are friends. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.1)

Fr. Kurt grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin as the second of six children in a Catholic, working class family. He liked to recount that when his father would go out, Mr. Pritzl would strike up a conversation with anyone who would listen. As a child, Fr. Kurt inherited his dad's gregariousness, which made him well-liked by nearly all, peers and adults alike. In high school, he became president of his class and a talented member of the football and debate teams. In the neighborhood, he and his sister both babysat for a nearby family, though the mother always made a special request—much to the sister's chagrin—for Fr. Kurt to come if he were available. Even at this early age, his confidence and down-to-earth manner of speaking attracted people to become his friends. What's more, he possessed a humility and considerateness that spoke to the genuineness of his character.

In 1970, Fr. Kurt began his undergraduate studies in his hometown at Marquette University. Majoring in both mathematics and philosophy, it was during these years that the latter seized his interest, particularly the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. Pursuing knowledge of the truth attracted him in much the same way that pursuing knowledge of others attracted him to friendship. He fell in love with the university, the context and locale in which he could

search after the answers he desired with other seekers—both those learned professors and colleagues of his own day, as well as the great thinkers whose works he diligently studied. By the time he completed his undergraduate degree, he knew he wanted to pursue and teach philosophical truth. This desire would take him next to Toronto, to begin his master's and doctoral studies.

IN TORONTO

Holding as we do that, while knowledge of any kind is a thing to be honored and prized, one kind of it may, either by reason of its greater exactness or of a higher dignity and greater wonderfulness in its objects, be more honorable and precious than another, on both accounts we should naturally be led to place in the front rank the study of the soul. (Aristotle, De Anima, I.1)

Drawn to the University of Toronto in order to pursue further studies in philosophy under the direction of Fr. Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R., a noted scholar of both Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, Fr. Kurt found in Aristotle's *De Anima* a key that threw open a certain portal, through which he could glimpse a deeper vision of the truth he had begun to pursue as an undergraduate. The *De Anima* considers the soul, and Fr. Kurt was particularly interested in what Aristotle had to say concerning the manner in which the human soul, as it comes to know some object, can be said to rest in its union with that object. This critical moment of knowing can all too easily be ignored as we quickly move to apply knowledge acquired toward some practical end.

In this ancient Greek man—twenty-five hundred years his senior—Fr. Kurt had discovered a kindred spirit: a friend whose words resonated as true and worthy of contemplation. For Aristotle's words unlocked a crucial insight: above and beyond any practical application, knowing is worthwhile in this life for its own sake. As Fr. Kurt would tell his students years later, "The delight

we take in seeing something or hearing something beautiful, apart from aiming to do anything at all, is an image and foretaste of heaven.” One gets a sense that Fr. Kurt saw his contemplative study of the union of the knower with the known as a sort of spiritual exercise. In carrying it out—letting its reality sink into his being and register in his innermost depths—it was his very soul that was drawing closer to a union with him who is Truth.

It was also during those Toronto years that Fr. Kurt forged lifelong friendships with a number of people who lived within the same residence at Massey College. In addition to the warm affability that allowed him to transcend various social circles at the school, they remember him as being extraordinarily generous with his time. Fr. Kurt encouraged others to seek after the truth with the same fervor with which he sought it. When one of his friends in the doctoral program asked for help preparing for her dissertation defense, he took it upon himself to read her entire thesis in a matter of days and become familiar with the topic’s recent literature. So well prepared was she by his questions that, at the end of her actual defense, the head of the panel remarked that he had never had a candidate handle herself so exquisitely.

Throughout his time in Toronto, Fr. Kurt remained a devoted Catholic. In talking with those who knew him then, it is striking that many did not have any indication he was considering the priesthood. It seems as though Fr. Kurt only talked about his discernment with a small group of close friends—much of the wrestling remained within the realm of his interior life. Though he had come to know the Jesuits at Marquette, he did not feel called to their life. During those years, he wondered exactly how the calling he felt to study philosophy might fit into ordained ministry as a diocesan priest back home in Milwaukee. Uncertain that it would, he opted not to enter the seminary at that time. Instead, he joined the faculty at The Catholic University of America (CUA) in 1980. The decision would prove providential, for it would be in Washington that Fr. Kurt found a home: not only in the CUA School of Philosophy, but also in a religious order whose very motto

is *Veritas—Truth*. It would be as a Dominican that Fr. Kurt was to continue his devoted study of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas.

IN WASHINGTON

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20)

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col 3:14–16)

In 1986, after spending six years at CUA and having already served as the school's Assistant Dean for two years, Fr. Kurt was given his tenure as an assistant professor of philosophy. He had earned the esteem and friendship of colleagues and students alike, among whom there were great expectations that he would be a leader at the school for decades to come. Yet it was that same year that he was granted a leave of absence from the university in order to enter the Order of Preachers. When he returned to Washington after a year of novitiate formation in Cincinnati, he carried with him new responsibilities. In the several years that followed, the man with a doctorate would take master's-level theology courses with much younger friars who had come to the Order right out of undergraduate studies. During this period of his life, commitments to his Dominican formation and preparing for priestly ordination, which occurred in 1991, restricted both his teaching and his scholarship.



Fr. Kurt Pritzl with Pope Benedict XVI in 2008

To an observer, this stage of Fr. Kurt's life could appear like a squandering of his skills as a teacher and scholar. It might seem too like an unnecessary humiliation: the dignified professor being made to take choir practice and bus dinner tables. In truth, however, this period was perhaps Fr. Kurt's most joyful, for in responding to God's prompting, he found a deepening of his already-present virtues and a summons to share in Christ's pastoral activity as a priest. In coming to know friars, both from teaching them in the classroom and attending daily Mass at their chapel across the street, he had witnessed a group of intellectual men who centered their lives of apostolic ministry around the contemplation of Divine Truth—a more perfect practice of that restful union by which we savor here and now a foretaste of heaven. In becoming a friar, he entered into that life himself, a life that was wonderfully suited to his gifts. Several of his friends as well as his sister recall being initially surprised by Fr. Kurt's decision, but then quickly realized how much sense it made. There was no better way of life for him than the one into which he had entered.

After ordination, both the Order and CUA continually called upon Fr. Kurt to sacrifice the time he would have gladly spent in teaching and scholarship in order to step into administrative roles. Within the Province of St. Joseph, he served as Regent of Studies (1993–1997), as a member of the Provincial Council (1993–2002), the Intellectual Life Commission (1993–2002, 2004–2006), and its Vocation Council (2002–2006). In addition, from 1994 to 2002, and again from 2005 until his death in 2011, he was a member of the Board of Trustees of Providence College. Within the CUA School of Philosophy, he again served as Assistant Dean from 1992 until 1997, when he agreed to become Interim and then Acting Dean. In 2000, the University removed the provisional label and made him Dean, a position he would only step down from in the last months of his life.

With virtual unanimity, those with whom I spoke attested that they have never witnessed anyone bear such responsibilities so well or with such energy or friendliness. He never retreated behind the veil of administration, never ceased being present to his faculty, his students, or his Dominican brothers. He was famous for his correspondences—people came to expect a handwritten message from Fr. Kurt on their birthdays or anniversaries each year. He continued to see students for spiritual direction, directed numerous theses and dissertations, and never failed to teach at least one course each semester. In the classroom, his enthusiasm for whatever subject he taught and self-deprecating sense of humor would inspire a whole new crop of students to pursue the truth. Several of those former students are now professors themselves or have entered religious life.

Though the demands of his schedule as Dean often took him away from home, all knew his devotion to the fraternal life. When he would return to the priory late in the evening from his office on campus, he would often stop off in the common room to socialize with other friars gathered together. He made a faithful practice of attending the community Mass on Saturday mornings, even if he was so fatigued from a long week that it meant he would

have to return to bed after the liturgy to steal a few more hours of sleep. And when it would have been understandable for him to take Sundays to relax or catch up on things before another workweek began, each week he could be found in some area parish saying Mass. He loved being in the midst of the people of God, handing over the fruits of his contemplation by his preaching.

A reservoir of contemplation of the sheer goodness of God and his works: herein lies the secret to Fr. Kurt's stamina and apostolic zeal. Supporting the feverish activity of his nearly twenty-five years as a Dominican and twenty years as a priest was a solid foundation built in silent prayer and the unceasing, loving study of Scripture, St. Thomas, and human nature. Had it not been so, he would never have been as prepared as he was when the winds of illness and loss came to buffet him at the end of his life. For the witness of his last years was to be the ultimate lecture that Fr. Kurt—the consummate teacher—would offer.

IN VALLE MORTIS

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (Jn 13:1)

In 2008, at age fifty-six, Fr. Kurt was diagnosed with cancer. Though the initial round of chemotherapy proved to be effective in curtailing the spread of the disease, it would return soon after, causing his body to slowly waste away. For three years, Fr. Kurt would suffer, until his death on February 21, 2011. Beyond the physical pain, there must certainly have been the natural pain of knowing that so many plans, so much potential, would go unrealized in his life. There was also the grief of burying his only brother, who died unexpectedly around the same time that it became clear that Fr. Kurt's illness was terminal.

Despite this tremendous suffering, Fr. Kurt stood firm in the face of difficulty and constant in his pursuit of all that is good and true. That is to say, Fr. Kurt showed possession of the moral virtue of fortitude. For what was remarkable to those around him was that he changed so little in those last years. He had spent his life cultivating virtue and being of service to others. When the Lord called him to this final stage of his life, he did not cease to act in a manner true to who he had become. He did not cease being the Dean of the School of Philosophy. He did not cease to preach the mystery of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. He did not cease to be a friend, whether that meant travelling across the country for a colleague's wedding, or mailing out a congratulatory card to a couple who had just given birth to their daughter, a card that would arrive only after the sender's death.

Remaining tranquil and self-forgetful in the midst of his suffering, Fr. Kurt made a return donation of love to God and to those whom God had given him to befriend in the world. Truly, he loved to the end. His was not the death of a martyr in the sense of shedding blood for the faith. And yet in another sense, he was a *μάρτυς*: a witness. In death as in life, Fr. Kurt witnessed in words and deeds to the truth of the Gospel. We are *in via*: pilgrims on a homeward journey toward him who is Truth. Truth is our end or *τέλος*, to use a favored term of Aristotle. And Truth has a name: God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Fr. Kurt was blessed to learn this on his own journey, and his life was a blessing because through it he shared with others the Triune God's invitation to respond to grace and divine friendship.

INCLUSIO

But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. (Jn 16:13)

Since, then, the Holy Spirit constitutes us God's friends, and makes Him dwell in us, and us dwell in Him (as was shown),

it follows that through the Holy Spirit we have joy in God and security against all the world's adversities and assaults.

(St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV.22.3)

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. (Jn 15:5)

Fr. Kurt Pritzl was a bright intellectual light who shone for a time. But ultimately, Fr. Kurt the academic was an unhistoric figure. His scholarly work will not enjoy the perennial importance of St. Thomas Aquinas. But this is a relatively small matter: for it is helpful to remember that the great Aquinas remains an ignored or even unknown figure to the vast majority of human beings living over seven centuries after his death.

Worldly honor and esteem did not matter to Fr. Kurt as he preached on that brisk January afternoon in 2010. For many friends whose lives he touched, what Fr. Kurt preached on St. Thomas could be applied to himself:

He is something more, something more profound, more worthy, more essential to all that matters. He is a saint. Thomas Aquinas, in all gentleness and humility, responded fully to the grace of God. He knew and lived what the Book of Wisdom says: "For [God] is the guide of Wisdom and the director of the wise. For both we and our words are in his hand, as well as all prudence and knowledge of crafts." And whatever Thomas learned was gained as a gift by the prayer and pleading for "prudence" and "the spirit of wisdom" that is preferable to scepter and throne, riches, health and good looks.

In a lovely little book, *The Silence of St. Thomas*, fellow philosopher Josef Pieper asserts, "nothing characterized Thomas

the teacher so strongly as his prayer and hope that his life would not outlast his teaching.” Fr. Kurt taught others to seek after the truth—natural and supernatural—that he had sought his entire life. He taught others to foster friendship—natural and supernatural—



*Fr. Kurt Pritzl preaching at the Mass in Honor of
St. Thomas Aquinas on January 28, 2010*

just as he had. The teaching of Fr. Kurt has indeed outlasted his life, because it can still be found in the hearts of those with whom he taught, worked, and lived.

I have little doubt that Fr. Kurt must have contemplated the last lines of his favorite novel, *Middlemarch* by George Eliot, countless times throughout his life. They speak of the story’s protagonist, Dorothea Brooke, a woman with talent and goodness, but who nevertheless fails to reach the pinnacle of societal fame. The narrative ends in this way:

Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

Like Eliot's Dorothea, Fr. Kurt lived a life that never rose to worldly fame and yet was saturated with goodness. He actualized who he always was in potency, which is a philosophical way of saying that he became what he was made to be—a friend of God. It is no wonder then that all those I interviewed about Fr. Kurt attest to the “incalculably diffusive” goodness which they received from him and which continues to steadily weave its way through this world by channels known only to God.

Perhaps you, like I, feel a bit unlucky. We would like to question him ourselves today, to have the chance to pick his brain, to glean from his wisdom. But I imagine such a request would be met with a characteristic smile and a hearty laugh. Like a good scholar, he would refer us to his source, a first-century Galilean man who went about doing good that has not ceased to diffuse in incalculable ways. *Follow Him.*

Br. Barnabas McHenry entered the Order of Preachers in 2014 after graduating from The George Washington University with a bachelors degree in international affairs, concentrating on development in Latin America.

ORIGINAL WRITINGS

LITTLE BY LITTLE

Isaiah Beiter, O.P.

There sat a silver cigarette case in a drawer of the small table next to the bed. It bore two sets of fingerprints. Many machines had also touched the case—or one great machine, perhaps—and it had been carried briefly by a gloved hand, from one conveyor to another. Machines do not leave fingerprints.

The silver case also bore three letters: R. A. W. One set of fingerprints belonged to these letters, and the letters belonged to the man in the bed, Robert Walters, still under the thin blankets. He used to look at trees and fields and all sorts of green and living things. Then for a while he could see the yellow buzz in the ceiling. Now he saw nothing, except in sleep. But Robert could hear the beeping machine beside him. Its job was to keep a rhythm, telling his soul to stick around. It had another job, too: to make a loud sound and let his soul know it was time to leave. But Robert's hearing was already starting to fade.

Robert was in third grade. He watched his mother open a little paper pack of white candles. She took out half the candles and set them in a neat circle along the edge of the cake; he was ten years old. There was cheering and a song, and he made a wish and blew and blew as he knew how, but one still burned. His face was

red and he changed his wish. Then his mother blew out the last candle.

Later, he heard Jack's mother ask, "Was that a trick candle?"

"It wasn't supposed to be," Mrs. Walters said.

Robert woke up and pressed a button on the side of his bed. Gloved hands came and lifted him up, walking his cold socks across the smooth, plastic floor. Gloved hands brought him back to bed again, and in the dark he was ashamed.

He stood on the high-dive at the Elks for the first time. He wanted to climb down, but they were all watching. The peeling, green spring-board cast him up with a *twung*, and at once he was a galaxy in empty space, turning slowly with two arms outstretched. He looked, and he saw the tops of the cars in the parking lot and the tips of the trees and the roof of the snack stand, and maybe his mother would buy him an ice-cream sandwich once he came back to earth—gravity was already working on that. He held his breath, and in an instant, with nothing between, he was In! And then he came up, gasping.

He lay proud and poolside on the plastic reclining chairs, warm in the sun. He let the tender red light work through his eyelids, and he waited, but not for anything in particular. He was still lying in his wet trunks when the gloved hands came in to clean him.

"I'm sorry," he said, for he was ashamed, but he wished he hadn't said it. A soft voice had come into the room before and taken his hand and chirped: "If you're sorry for your sins you'll be let to live forever," as if what killed everyone in the end was unrepentance. Living forever was about the last thing that Robert wanted.

The gloves' voice sounded like she had just been crying, or as though she wished she had been. He thought of Virginia and

home. He saw the unmade bed and the cluttered little table. He heard the baby screeching and Virginia speaking softly to him. Alan grew quiet, but still whimpered. Virginia paid Robert no mind, and no sound either, except for a “hey.” He had been at the office since eight. Now he was home and weary, and there was no beer in the fridge and no attention left for him, and he was angry. Virginia ate in silence again. Then Robert heard her put Alan to bed.

“Goodnight,” she whispered in the dark.

He was in his wet trunks on the floor. The gloved hands lifted him and set him in a little swimming pool.

“I’m sorry,” he managed, “I tried.”

“Don’t try,” responded the gloves.

Alan was going to be sent to Ashworth Academy. Robert was steel. Alan, thirteen years old, wasn’t keen, and Virginia despised the idea, but Robert knew best. He saw Virginia crying and realized he’d been yelling. “Well, you weren’t listening,” he remarked. He cared about his son. The boy would have the best schooling that his father could buy.

Robert was home again. It used to be only the important companies that took computers, and their contracts were thick. He could see them signing with dark black ink. Today it was all Jacks and Toms, and he was just tired—tired of driving and grinning and compliance.

He heard the door close. Had Virginia been here? He couldn’t remember. He couldn’t remember much anymore. But he could remember Virginia in her green dress, in a white bed with her eyes closed.

The beeping was only getting faster and louder. "I'm sick!" he moaned, and he coughed. Gloved hands were trying to wake him.

"I'm tired, Virginia," he complained. "Would you turn it off?" He was crying. The alarm clock was shouting at him, but Virginia was looking with waiting eyes. "Good morning," she said, and he could see in her face that she had woken long before him.

"Let me sleep. Turn off the lights, Virginia." The beeping quieted and slowed to a whimper.

The cigarette case had never been opened, and there was a small, clean paper package underneath it, with twenty cigarettes inside. Alan had known they would never be smoked. His father would never step outside again. Maybe they would be taken away by gloved hands. But this little white pack had made his father smile for a minute. Robert Walters had kept his smile well-preserved for many years, so it shone then like it had when he saw the candles in a neat circle on his cake.

The machine cut on, cut off. On. Off. Robert didn't hear the On or the Off. He just heard the beeps, one after another, the violent vibrations of a thin membrane in a little cone. There were other beeps beyond the door, keeping other souls around. He heard them between the *click* of opening and the *click-tap* of closing. Most boats died when their onboard motors stopped working. Some died when they ran *smash-bang!* into another boat, or a wall, or anything else. But some sat in a hard garage until their hulls rusted out. Waiting—for what?

He saw Virginia weeping again, and he didn't know why. Her tears were small and quiet and somewhat distant, as if she knew they went unheard. The baby was screaming and wouldn't stop. Robert didn't know how to make him stop. He just wanted

to rest—he should have been asleep a long time ago. He was half-crazy, but strangely far from anger.

“Why are you crying, Virginia? How can I make him stop? Help me!” She looked at him, and his heart walked into the wall. Her hunched shoulders, thin hair, wrinkled forehead—her quivering hands.

It only happened once.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

The beeping stopped. Robert was quiet, holding his breath. The beeping had stopped. He pressed the button. Nothing happened. The water came closer and closer. He called, but he had no breath left. He pressed the button so Virginia would come. “Help me . . . I don’t know how,” he whispered, quiet and still under the thin blankets.

The sound was On. On and fading. No gloves were on her hands.

Alan took the glasses, the golden watch, and the cigarettes with the case. He offered the cigarettes to a nurse passing by. “Oh thanks, but I only smoke Pall Malls,” she replied with a wave. So Alan left the little paper pack in the drawer. He looked at the silver case, putting new fingerprints over his old ones. He explored the initials, carved into the surface by a hundred tiny strokes. He opened the case for the first time, and it was smooth, shining, untouched except by the machines that made it. He closed it again. He put the case in his breast pocket, shut off the yellow light, and slowly stepped outside.

Br. Isaiah Beiter entered the Order of Preachers in 2014. Before joining the Order, he received a bachelors degree in philosophy from the Franciscan University of Steubenville.

FRIARS' BOOKSHELF

SILENCE WILL SAVE THE WORLD

Robert Cardinal Sarah with Nicolas Diat, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2017.

*For ah! we know not what each other says,
These things and I; in sound I speak—
Their sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.*

– Francis Thompson, *The Hound of Heaven*

After the death of Pope St. John Paul II in 2005, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger addressed the conclave of cardinals, warning them that relativism is “letting oneself be tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). The clamor of competing ideas and beliefs push, pull, and tug on the ears of man, transforming him into a relativist separated from God. Over a decade later, in *The Power of Silence*, Robert Cardinal Sarah diagnoses the effects of relativism’s tyranny, which Ratzinger denounced in *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*. He claims, “[man] gets drunk on all sorts of noises so as to forget who he is. Postmodern man seeks to anesthetize his own atheism” (229–

230). In other words, the dictatorship of noise follows upon the dictatorship of relativism.

Hoping to reach these individuals in desperate need of salvation, Sarah writes with prophetic urgency. Paralleling Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky's cry, "beauty will save the world," Sarah himself cries, "Prayer and silence will save the world" (167).

Numbered paragraphs amounting to 365 organize the extensive interview conducted by French journalist Nicolas Diat. The numbering—not just a convenient reference tool—suggests a spiritual program: reflect daily on silence for one year. With over eighty works cited in his book—ranging from Church Fathers, to modern novelists, to eremitic monks—Sarah approaches the mystery of silence in a spiral. He returns to ideas, but always with an additional viewpoint and further depth. Sarah probes many subjects—the Cross, mystery, liturgy, evil, suffering, religious life, and the hiddenness of God—creating a broad reflection on silence. Each paragraph, or each day, provides one idea or thought varying in length from several pages to one sentence. The shortest idea appears near the end of the meditation: "Sickness is an anticipation of the silence of eternity" (182).

This succinct, recondite sentence—and the whole book—sprouts from Sarah's friendship with a quiet, infirm canon unknown to the world but known to God. Brother Vincent-Marie of the Resurrection, a member of the Canons Regular of the Mother of God, suffered from multiple sclerosis silently in the Abbey of Sainte-Marie de Lagrasse in France. The disease had rendered him paralyzed, mute, and bedridden. Even his very breath became laborious. Diat's introduction elaborates on the moving friendship between the canon and the cardinal, which grew in the midst of prayer, suffering, and silence. The two men visited with each other in the presence of God until Brother Vincent's passing. Prior to that day, Sarah noted that his canon friend exhibited a paradoxical sign of hope: "Brother Vincent's bloodshot eyes already had the brightness of eternity" (9).

The cardinal proclaims that the fruits of silence, prayer, and trust in God triumph over the trials of life and the violence of rebellion. Two horrors of life, natural devastation and human violence (natural and moral evil), require prayer, a silent turning toward God; other responses fall short. He claims that the rosary prayed by the Church and Pope St. John Paul II to Our Lady of Fatima brought down Marxist Communism (167). No political system or mere human action could do the same. (This is a timely reminder during the one-hundredth anniversary of the Fatima apparitions.)

The book begins with a description of a religious, a silent canon, enduring his cross away from the noise of the world. The book closes with another religious, a silent hermit enduring his cross in the French alps. Dom Dysmas de Lassus, prior of the Grande Chartreuse, opened the doors of the charterhouse for the interview, a rare accommodation and a fitting location for silence. In addition to sharing his abode, Dom Dysmas shares his wisdom. With clarity and concision, one of his analogies, using a familiar image, illustrates the silent presence of God within the soul:

During one annual visit of my family to the monastery, my sister was pregnant, and suddenly, in the middle of a conversation, she smiled a beautiful smile. Since the context did not explain it, I asked her: "Irene, why are you smiling?" She then answered me: "He is moving." It was not necessary to ask who "he" was. (193)

The Power of Silence describes the immeasurable and irreplaceable importance of the interior life spent with God. Similar to his first book, *God or Nothing*, Sarah contrasts two ends that man may choose: exterior noise or interior silence. If man looks outward for power, rebellion ensues. If man turns inward, he discovers the silent presence of God within the soul. This silence requires more than quiet, the absence of exterior noise. Sarah speaks of an interior silence void of disruptive passions and preoccupations. This silence

comes from a solitude, but not a solitude which is the mere absence of others. There is a solitude found in communion with God, God alone and alone with God. We see the choices: silence or rebellion, reality or fantasy, communion or isolation, God or nothing. In this communion, this interior silence, one finds meaning and purpose in life by praising God. Sarah writes, “True life is not in rebellion but in silent adoration” (173).

Reviewed by Irenaeus Dunlevy, O.P.

Br. Irenaeus Dunlevy entered the Order of Preachers in 2013. Before joining the Order, he received a bachelor and masters of architecture from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and practiced for a religious architecture firm in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

THE STING OF THE WASP

THE NECESSITY OF A CHRISTIAN CULTURE IN A POST-PROTESTANT AMERICA

R. R. Reno, *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Faith, 2016.

When America (or the West more broadly) finally collapses, be it in ten or 10,000 years, researchers will not be lacking for source material explaining her downfall. The cottage industry producing reductionist theories about how “civilization started to fall when” has been at work since at least Nietzsche (or possibly Gibbon). They are the clickbait narratives for the self-indulgent. And, I must admit, they are fun to read. Yet, often the narratives succeed more in telling us about the author’s preoccupations than addressing our present cultural woes. Enter R. R. Reno’s recent publication, *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society*. Reno, the current editor of the popular magazine *First Things*, gives a different outlook on the state of our culture. Rather than diagnosing when society began its long decline and fall, he instead presents images of our state of crisis and possible hope of resurrection. Reno provides us an accessible read that is both culturally relevant and classically informed.

Reno approaches our cultural decline and malaise from an alternative perspective. Instead of establishing ground zero, Reno argues that there are inherent problems in the way our society is organized. Although the book’s observations could be extrapolated to diagnose problems throughout the West, Reno only focuses on particularly American issues. In doing so, he traces many of our present woes to distinctly American ideals. Because of this, he cedes much ground to his supposed political contraires. Issues such as equivocal understandings of marriage, inter-class conflict, and our present inability to engage in dispassionate dialogue are all presented as possible results of certain conceptions of the

“American Dream.” In a society that prizes the freedom of self-determination, one can see how it could easily go wrong.

And Reno is keen to show that things have gone horribly wrong. The greater part of the work consists of anecdotes pertaining to the broad cultural problems we find ourselves in today. Drawing upon the thought of political scientist Charles Murray, Reno analyzes likely outcomes for Americans in typical towns. While the upper and upper-middle classes are thriving, things have rarely been worse for everyone else. Much of America is rife with poverty, drug-use, and broken families. Beyond the moral evils now permitted in America, the expected outcomes of those who are not well-off should give us pause. Divorce rates continue to rise, stable employment continues to fall, and community bonds have progressively weakened. As Reno states, “there’s a word to describe this trend: collapse” (47).

America seemed to work for a couple hundred years. But, as Reno argues, this was not simply a result of American ideals. In fact, those American ideals, when removed from the Christian soil in which they grew, are harmful. Americans were virtuous because Christianity helped develop virtuous people. That is not to say Americans have always been good Christians. Far from it. However, the collective influence of Christian virtues, and the corresponding social shame that deviating from such norms entailed, allowed for a flourishing society. For America to once again enjoy its success, a return to such roots is necessary.

Self-consciously following T. S. Eliot’s *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Reno seeks to show that not only is a Christian society necessary, but it is indeed possible. Eliot gave his lectures on the importance of a Christian society at the dawn of the Second World War—a time when few imagined that Christianity would exert influence in the coming decades. However, that is exactly what happened. Reno thus tries to undertake the same genre as Eliot, but adapted to the present.

After six chapters of describing our present woes, in the final chapter of the book Reno argues that there is still yet hope.

This chapter could stand on its own, as it contains the entirety of the book's arguments and proposal. As Reno succinctly puts it, the book is essentially an argument that post-Christian culture in America "is failing" since "it promises freedom, but delivers tyranny" (181). However, such a failure could occasion a chance for growth. Time will provide Christians with an opportunity to exert influence. While "sit-and-wait" may seem like an insufficient method for resurrecting a Christian society, Reno is confident that the right moment will inevitably present itself. Eliot's own example should suffice to convince us that openings for Christianity will arise. When it does, Christians should be confident that they possess the tools and truths that can best "resurrect" society.

Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society is ultimately less a broad cultural criticism than a reassurance that Christianity will again have its day. Post-Christian societies do not work. Reno offers abundant evidence to this effect. They can be healed, but it requires embracing their Christian influence. Reno argues that when this influence becomes vital, society can again flourish. His presentation is convincing, even if he admits that he may be overly optimistic. Nevertheless, this book, while not a manual for action, merits a read. It is a prescient work on the state of our culture and the inescapability of Christianity's impact upon it.

Reviewed by Constantius Sanders, O.P.

Br. Constantius Sanders entered the Order of Preachers in 2013. Before joining the Order, he studied philosophy and mathematics at Boston College.

CLOISTER CHRONICLE

The Hillbilly Thomists, a band of Dominican student brothers and priests, have released their debut, self-titled album. The album samples bluegrass and folk classics, as well as a bit of Irish music. Highlights include an original a cappella arrangement of “Amazing Grace.” It can be purchased at www.dominicanajournal.org.

Fr. Aquinas Guilbeau, O.P., was elected as the new prior of the Dominican House of Studies, and he made the Oath of Fidelity on Sunday, September 17. An assistant professor in Moral Theology at the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception, Fr. Aquinas entered the Order in 2005 and received his PhD from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, in 2016.

On September 29–30, the Thomistic Institute sponsored a conference here at the Dominican House of Studies on the Holy Spirit, featuring lectures from Fr. Gilles Emery, O.P., Dr. Boyd Taylor Coolman, Fr. Joseph d’Amécourt, O.P., Dr. Joseph Wawrykow, and the PFIC’s Fr. Dominic Legge, O.P.

On October 27–29, the Dominican House of Studies hosted an interprovincial studentate gathering, welcoming student brothers from the other three U.S. provinces as well as brothers from the provinces of Canada, Poland, and Southern Germany/Austria. Fr. David Songy, O.F.M. Cap., President of St. Luke’s Institute, spoke to the brothers on the subject of how to live a healthy fraternal life.

The student brothers enjoyed an especially successful soccer season this autumn. Early in the semester they pulled off a rare upset, earning a road victory at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, MD. They went on to defeat neighborhood challengers St. John Paul II Seminary and Theological College.

The Master of the Order, Fr. Bruno Cadoré, O.P., stayed at the Dominican House of Studies on December 1–6, during the first part of his visitation of the Province of St. Joseph (December 1–15).

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