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DOCTORAL THESIS

Summary

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**FOOD AND DRINK AS BASIC MATTER OF HUMAN
EXISTENCE AND THEIR VALUE IN THE SCRIPTURE**

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Introduction

We all eat to live and we are drawn by various culinary specialties which sweeten our lives. We enjoy having all sorts of goodies on our table and quite often we tend to spend a great deal of time in the kitchen to prepare our food. Food is God's blessing of which we benefit in communion with others. Gathered around the table, while eating various types of food, people communicate and interact with one another. It is no wonder that nowadays, websites, magazines and radio stations focusing on food and its preparation are in a constantly growing number.

The known saying "You are what you eat" was misinterpreted by people. Although one can't deny that we are what we eat in many ways, the food we eat also helps build what we are. Our blood, bones, fats, and tissues are nourished by the food we incorporate in our bodies. We are all aware that if we were to stop eating we would inevitably die. We also know the amount and the ways in which food influences our body.

Some people might say that it is useless to write about food what has not already been written in countless cooking books. It is much more convenient for us to see food as just nourishment for us and for animals than to admit the fact that they have a great symbolical strength and to see it as undeniable proof of God's infinite love and care for the world.

In the last decade, biblical scholars have begun to show interest in the mentions of food and drink presented in the Scriptures. In the last few years, there was an increased focus on the quality and variety of the food we eat. Perhaps the most obvious example of this increased interest was the emergence of various television programs and shows centered on ways of preparing various food dishes. Chefs from all over the world have become famous for watering the viewers' mouths.

There are a series of reasons for this enthusiasm concerning gastronomy: First of all, this interest for gastronomy can be regarded as an aspect of globalization, which, in the last decades was an important characteristic of the western world. Together with economic and financial globalization the circulation of peoples from one country to another was accompanied by an exchange of cultures including gastronomic culture. Many immigrants and refugees have managed to secure a promising financial start in their host country by opening a restaurant serving food specific to their country of origin.

A second reason for this gastronomic enthusiasm is directly linked to the increase in wealth of the middle class in the western world. The increase in income had an important impact on the purchase of food as well as people focused more on buying naturally grown and healthy products.

Another aspect which contributed to the development of gastronomy was tourism. It has led to an increase in the contact to food of the constantly growing number of people visiting other countries and has stimulated their curiosity to try new products and dishes.

With regard to the ratio of the consumption of foods and beverages there is a certain degree of inequality. A part of those who have a decent income can afford to pay certain sums of money to get certain types of food , some of them spending large sums on food and drink while other people from African countries for example barely have what to eat. It is also a well known fact that a significant part of the Earth's population is affected by obesity.

These are a few elements of the social context which should urge today's Christians to adopt a responsible attitude with regard to the food they consume. To them, the act of eating is not just a pleasant means to keep our bodies alive, as our society would have us believe but a means to live and fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

In distancing himself more and more from God, and implicitly refusing God as his nourishment, man has focused strictly on biological nourishment which can in no way satisfy his thirst for infinity. In this way, man falls into his own trap in holding the belief that if he eats more he will satisfy his hunger and thirst for infinity which in reality he is not even aware of. Each time he wants more but he does not realize that, in reality, his whole being aspires to eternity and that no biological nourishment or quantity can fulfill this aspiration. For anything that is finite cannot quench the thirst of the infinite.

This thesis analyses the matter of food and drink throughout time from the very beginning and proposes a change of our Christian attitude towards food.

Too few are those who are interested in the topic of food in relation to religion , who see food as a blessing from God and this is why I believe that a few arguments or warnings should be made in this respect. This warning is not about what foods we should or should not eat (although this issue does help to make a point) but one that raises awareness to the Scriptures' attitude towards this subject , it helps us see the connection between food, drink and theology.

We are living in a society where the pursuit for food and the eagerness to feed ourselves with all sorts of food varieties are more and more apparent in more and more of us,

in what seems like a repetition of the rich man's parable from the Holy Scriptures who told himself: "My soul, you have at your disposal plenty of good food that will last for many years. Rest, eat, drink and rejoice" (Lc. 12, 19). Therefore, the theme I chose is very up to date. As a consequence we must emphasize the values of the Christian faith as opposed to those that lead to the damnation of our souls.

I have chosen to analyze the issue of food and drink from the point of view of the Holy Scriptures in order to help clarify some of the questions that we could have in this matter such as: What should or shouldn't we eat? Are we allowed to drink alcohol? In what measure? What does our conscience tell us about our personal culinary choices? What are the things we can learn from the lives and nourishment of biblical characters? What do the Holy Scriptures teach us about food and drink?

In both a direct and indirect fashion, the Holy Scriptures addresses these issues and provides answers as well. Interestingly enough, the Holy Scriptures begins with describing food as one of man's most important occupations and it concludes with the idea of spiritual food and drink in the Kingdom of God.

In the Holy Scriptures there are several mentions of food, a fact which could determine some people to conduct a research on those passages referring to food in view of establishing an adequate and healthy diet, especially in the current social context where people are trying to eat as healthily as possible. Some foreign nutritionists even stated that in the Holy Scriptures there are many nutritional and dietary guidelines as well as certain restrictions from certain types of food. If we were to follow these instructions we would lead a much healthier life. Why is it that, according to the Holy Scriptures Christ ate just fish and no other type of meat? Why did Christ choose bread and wine as symbols for His body and blood?

If some of the Jewish prescriptions regarding meat rules proved to provide certain health benefits what could be said about the other instructions present in the Holy Book? The Holy Scriptures is filled with numerous revelations from God regarding hygiene healthy types of food and the prevention of diseases. Throughout the book are unraveled many secrets and mysteries relating to what the Jewish people should eat, advice on how to avoid contaminated foods or substances and what natural plants could be used for the purpose of healing.

The food and drink consumed by Jews in Biblical times were much healthier than those we consume today. Fathers invites us to a simple and easy dish. Scientists have identified dozens of food types that can help prevent ailments like cancer, heart diseases as

well as other conditions. A lot of these foods are mentioned in the Holy Scriptures.

Health is a very valuable possession. Our culinary habits play a vital role in the maintaining of our health. As a consequence, we must try to do the best we can to eat as healthily of possible. It is very important that we exercise a certain self-control mechanism and to eat only what we know will benefit our body. God has revealed important truths concerning the food we consume and if we chose not to take them into consideration we would be hurting our own selves.

The dietary laws in the Talmud advise various biblical characters how to prepare certain foods and which foods to avoid entirely. Instead of processed sugars the biblical characters used natural honey or various fruit pastes as sweeteners. They would eat grapes, figs, pomegranates, dates, cucumbers, small carrots, beans, lentils and healthy plants such as dill, cumin, coriander, mint, turmeric, cinnamon, saffron, mustard, etc.

According to the Holy Scriptures, the Promised Land was the land where milk and honey flowed in abundance. But the Promised Land was much more than just that. It was a land of plenty with all sorts of healthy types of food: “ a country in which there was barley, wheat, vine, figs and pomegranates; a country where there were olive trees, oil and honey, a land in which one could eat from one’s bread and not go hungry or want for anything: a land in which rocks contain iron and where mountains were filled with copper” (Deut. 8, 8-9).

Therefore, I believe that the research such as mine is very useful in a secularized society , a society whose people are always in pursuit of money, but who want to eat healthily and live long.

An approach to the theme of food and drink although it is a rather unusual one as it is from a theological perspective and an academic one, comes as a necessity but also as a novelty for society. The necessity consists in the fact that food and drink are day to day aspects of our lives, they maintain life and , above all, are a gift from God which should be used in an effective manner, for our welfare both bodily and spiritual. Although the soul does not require food and drink when man lives to eat and not eats to live then the soul is led to destruction. As a consequence, it can be observed that, although it might seem trivial , in reality, food and drink are very important for us, not only for our physical existence but for our spiritual one as well.

The novelty consists in the fact that, through this paper I tried to present a relatively common theme , that of food and drink, but in a different approach, from a theological perspective, anchored in biblical reality.

The first images that come to mind when we discuss food and drink are those of certain types of food and recipes that we enjoy eating or that we want to eat and are already beginning to enjoy inside our minds. That is why, throughout this paper I have encountered certain difficulties in finding the necessary bibliographical sources , because the majority of books that discuss various aspects of food and drink do not go farther than presenting different diets and recipes whereas the theological books approach this subject in a vague , superficial manner. In my thesis I tried to incorporate the main types of food and drink consumed by the Jewish people in the Old Testament as well as by the people during the time of Christ and by the first Christians in the New Testament. I thought it necessary to first present the types of food and drink described in the Holy Scriptures after which I presented their symbolical and theological interpretation.

In the very first chapter of Genesis the different types of food appear like an aspect of creation , while at the end of the Holy Scriptures in the last chapter of the Apocalypse it is mentioned that “ in the middle of the town square , on both sides of the river, grows the tree of life, bearing fruit 12 times in a year, once every month; and the leaves of the tree should be used for the healing of all people” (Apoc. 22, 2). Between the 1st and last chapters of the Holy Scriptures there are mentions of food in each biblical book. In the following pages we will identify some of the most significant of these references and we will try to emphasize their implications for our era.

The following chapters seek to examine the different types of food and drink consumed in the time of Christ in the New Testament foods that were present in the Old Testament as well as their methods obtaining them. There is a small number of studies that examine aspects of this topic of food and drink and that is why I tried to approach this theme using a pluralist method by which I tried to capture several aspects: literary, linguistic, historical, metaphorical and symbolical,. The current state of the studies and biblical researches and the questions I addressed regarding food in the New Testament with relation to the Old Testament and my attempt to obtain a well documented answer to them show the necessity of such a topic for our modern times. In my attempt to shed some light on some anthropological and historic-biblical studies I have used a pluralist method.

The first chapter, entitled *General date about procurance of food and drink* is trying to articulate a methodological approach for the study of food and drink in the Holy Scriptures showing first of all the way of obtaining food and drink in the case of the ancient Jews from the oldest times until the time when Jesus Christ lived.

The starting point of my research consists in the image of the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were rejoicing all the goods, without any effort since everything was received as a gift from God. This chapter focuses on what the first people ate, on the food that God gave them.

I could not omit the representation of Man in Heaven where he enjoyed good food and the prospect of living an endless existence filled with peace and joy. In choosing not to obey the command God gave them, the first people ate the forbidden fruit after which they were banished from Heaven which led to their working the land to obtain food.

Through a systemic approach, the 2nd chapter, *Biblical food*, deals with aspects regarding the anthropology of food products, the literary, semantic and historic – critical form of the biblical texts. I tried to include the types of food consumed by the Jews, which can be encountered in the Scriptures as well as in the tradition of the Church and in the history of the world. I gave a general presentation of the types of food beginning with the category of vegetables where I included cereals as well, the category of fruits from the tree encountered in the Holy Land, the category of spices and finally that of animal and dairy products. This chapter shows us how a careful coordination of historical and literary issues could increase our understanding of a problem, such as the foods consumed in the Old Israel and in the time of Christ. The Old Testament depiction of the land of Canaan as a country where “milk and honey flows” has triggered many evaluations of the Israeli diet.

Nowadays it is more than fitting that we should have certain dietary restrictions especially now that we no longer take for granted the quality of the foods we buy, given the presence of the wide scale preservatives added to our food. That is why I added another chapter called *Prevederi ale Legii mozaice cu privire la carne* in order to present the restrictions the Jewish people had on their diet and whether they are still applicable nowadays and what the reason was for imposing them in the first place.

The 3rd chapter lists the types of food presented in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, types of food which define the identity of the Chosen People in comparison to other presentations. By exposing the opinions of modern theologians and not only them, we tried to get to the core of these restrictions, to find a rational motivation for them, to understand them. We also presented the way in which the first Christians reacted to these restrictions as well as the way in which we would react to them nowadays.

If in the previous chapters we focused more on food, in the 4th chapter *Beverages in biblical times* we will discuss the topic of drink. Here, I described the main types of beverages

presented in the Holy Scriptures, the way they were made, the purpose for which they were made, their significance and terminology. At the end of this chapter I wanted to show modern man's attitude towards food and drink in order to compare it to what the Holy Scriptures teaches us and to what would be useful for us to know.

The 5th chapter, *The social dimension of food and drink*, deals with various issues of interpretation of the biblical texts, the understanding of the role of meals and food products in peoples's lives beginning with the characters from the Holy Scriptures. In the previous chapters, we have identified the main types of food and beverages and now we must focus on understanding their social, theological and symbolical aspects. We all know how important the act of eating is to all of us because it is the only means for us to continue living therefore there is an unbreakable tie between us and food and drink products. In this chapter I wanted to show what is the connection between the world, beverages and food products and the relations this connection engenders.

Anthropology in particular offers several useful models for the understanding of food and drink in comparison to different aspects of practice and society suggesting that food does not only have an economic importance but also a symbolical and ritualistic one as well. This is why, for some thinkers, talking about food means talking about a network and a system of meanings as food and drink represent a code of society. This is what I wanted to write about in this chapter by discovering the code of food and communication in 5 different perspectives: meals as ceremonies, meals and the purity system, meals and the symbolism of the body, meals and social relationships, meals and reciprocity. As I stated previously, food and drink are essential to live and this is why, in this chapter, I wrote about hunger and thirst as natural ailments, which are necessary to our being and which help us preserve it. As theologians when we refer to hunger and thirst we also refer to the spiritual aspect, the hunger and thirst for God which is more necessary and which makes us want He who feeds us all and who gives us all.

God gives us everything on the condition that we help ourselves with preparing the food. In this chapter I have managed to capture certain elements related to the practical utility of meals: the Jewish kitchen, tables, the serving of the meal the position taken during meals, instruments used in serving meals and the blessing of the meal. These elements help us understand different types of social meals from the time of Christ which I presented in a sub chapter.

A representative aspect of the first Christians' life, which the modern man should consider, consists in the availability of welcoming "strangers", of housing the traveller and, even more, the herald of the Gospel. I referred to this and to the correct use of food and drink on the occasion of different feasts in *Chapter 6. The balanced use of food and drink within the feasts*.

In this chapter I talked about hospitality, which is a trait adopted by the patriarchs of the Old Testament and their descendants and it is also present in the New Testament and it was practiced and recommended by Jesus Christ himself.

The chapter firstly presents the principles and reasons of hospitality, strategies to adopt in front of strangers, hospitality and friendship protocols for guests specific for Jewish people which are emphasized in the Scriptures.

Hospitality lies at the basis of God's request to us to feed the poor. Although nourishment is often seen as a conservatory element, in society it can contribute to social change although not everyone is hospitable towards their peers. This can also be observed in the Scriptures. This is why, in several sub chapters, I chose to approach the theme of hospitality as it is presented in the parables of the Christ, in Saint Luke's Gospel and in the Lives of the Apostles.

The chapter ends with a short analysis of the way in which certain aspects of biblical hospitality are present or not nowadays and what are the things we should do to fill in the gaps.

Food and drink are elements of hospitality and through them we show that we ourselves are blessed with God's hospitality and so we manifest our love to our peers by offering this hospitality to everyone who asks it.

The last chapter of my thesis, *Chapter 7. Spiritual food and drink*, presents the spiritual value of matter which ensures the physical existence. In other words, there are two types of food and drink, one for the body and another one for the soul. In order not to mix the material and the spiritual, a correct distinction must be made always giving priority to the eternal food and drink, which helps in the spiritual ascent. Physical and spiritual work are two aspects which lead to the procurement of both material and spiritual food.

Through this paper, I believe to answer many questions concerning food and drink, that even if nowadays are changed because of numerous reasons, they sustain life; the use of this matter depends entirely on man, if he uses it to maintain his earthly existence or to gain spiritual life.

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