

## INTRODUCTION: FOOD



The shared enjoyment of a meal belongs to the distinctive dignity of human life. The need to eat is a reminder of the creature's dependence on divine providence, whose generosity always directs the world toward its flourishing. "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, you satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Ps 145:15–16). Man's unique task of sowing the earth and placing its bounty at the service of his family and community is emblematic of his participation in God's creativity, and every human culture is intimately shaped by the labor and ceremonies surrounding its food. The natural importance of eating is superabundantly confirmed when God gives himself to the Church "for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51) in the eucharistic sacrifice. In the face of commonplace reductions of food to a resource, whether of mere nutrition or of mere pleasure, the authors gathered here seek to recollect the dignifying goodness of food—in its cultivation on the farm, its reception in the home, and its offering in the liturgy.

In "Plenty of Food for Everyone": A Balthasarian Look at *Babette's Feast*," **Jacques Servais** contemplates the 1987 film adaptation of Isak Dinesen's short story. Servais draws attention to how the film is ultimately concerned with the incarnate embrace of creation. When the lives of various characters converge upon the film's climactic banquet, the joy of this embrace is shown to free its partakers for a richer companionship with one another. Drawing upon the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Servais discusses how Babette's efforts to provide this meal typi-

fies Christian mission, wherein one is prepared by grace for a fuller consent to and celebration of the goodness of being. “With such heat and hard labor, this is clearly no otherworldly feast. Rather, it takes part in the *work* of giving form to the world.”

**Patrick Fleming**, in “The Economy of a Small Farm,” presents the motivating purpose and salutary effects of small-scale agriculture. He begins by scrutinizing the logic of efficiency that stands behind modernity’s economics of specialization, whose structures divorce the worker from his labor, from the reason for his own life, and from the world as created gift. In conversation with Wendell Berry, Joel Salatin, and Michael Pollan, Fleming explores how the way of life on the small farm resists such fragmentation by recovering the goods of the home and a faithfulness to the place, and larger world, in which the family belongs. “That a farmer works within the given order, while at the same time applies all the intelligence and strength at his or her disposal for the good of the household—and, at best, for the good of the land itself, the local community, and the universal church—is a model for all household provisioning or *oikonomia*. Indeed, it is a model of all human work.”

**Sister Noëlla Marcellino** considers how the practice of cheesemaking exemplifies the Benedictine integration of work and prayer in “*Sacro Speco*—St. Benedict’s Cave: The Roots of Monastic Cheesemaking.” Marcellino tells how monastic communities took up the tradition of this craft, which has its roots in prehistoric civilizations, and infused it with the marks of the *Rule of St. Benedict*. The task of ripening cheese, she explains, acquaints the cheesemaker with the humility of the earth and the flesh. Cheesemakers follow St. Benedict’s exhortation to “To keep death daily before one’s eyes” in their “work in a cheese cave, because cheese reconnects us with a very earthy side of life—with decay and decomposition.” On Marcellino’s account, the monastic adoption of this ancient art represents at once human stewardship over creation and, as a form of *memento mori*, an exercise in Christian hope.

In “Reason for Being: Festivity, Perfection, and the ‘Very Good,’” **Erik van Versendaal** dwells on the place of the commemorative feast within man’s ordination to delight in the world and to offer it in grateful worship. “His praise of God, arising from his concrete fruition of particular creatures, is meant

to embrace representatively all things. Festivity is the communal act by which persons rejoice in being and together realize the meaning of creation by returning it to God." Fellowship and hospitality serve this end insofar as those who break bread together nourish one another by their convivial presence. In the end, Christ's oblation in the Eucharist reveals the sense in which festivity, and the gift of self it betokens, is the exuberant purpose of all life in the flesh.

In "Ordering All Things Well: The Role of Eating in the Old Testament," **Anthony Pagliarini** unfolds how food is situated within Sacred Scripture's vision of creation and covenant. According to biblical anthropology, "[e]ating is the practice wherein men and women exercise dominion and manifest their divine likeness," so that the family meal shares in God's ordering of the world. Pagliarini goes on to discuss how Israel's dietary regulations, and its cultic sacrifices, contribute to humanity's original vocation. "The keeping of Kosher extends God's creative activity of separating, and the table fellowship of the altar completes the creative work by drawing creation into the communion and rest of the seventh day." Thus purified, food serves the rectification and sanctification of postlapsarian man, offering a foretaste of his eschatological dwelling with God.

**Paolo Prosperi**, in "The Wine of the Wedding," explicates the first miracle of Jesus' ministry in John's gospel, the sign of Cana. Prosperi illustrates how the full meaning of Jesus' transformation of water into wine becomes manifest when illuminated by the Cross that it foreshadows. As Christ's Passover discloses the gravity of his gift of "good wine," moreover, this first sign reciprocally teaches the believer to perceive and savor in the blood of the Crucified the fulfilled joy of covenantal union. "Precisely the *radical difference* between wine and blood reveals the hyperbolic generosity of God's nuptial love—a love that leads the divine Bridegroom to pour out lavishly, for the accomplishment of his wedding, not simply his money, but his very blood."

Finally, picking up on the theme of nuptial love in a different context, **Antonio López** ponders the significance of marriage for the child's awakening to his own dignity as person in "Affirming Childhood: The Form of Familial Relations." López demonstrates why it is vital for the child to discover himself as the fruit of the conjugal love between his mother and

father. “The mystery of birth is a permanent reminder that man is given to himself and that he can be himself, know, and will only because he continuously receives his being.” Reflecting on the testimony of children of same-sex couples, López explains why such a household necessarily fails to affirm the mysterious gratuity of the child’s origin. Only the nuptial bond between man and woman can shelter and foster the child’s acceptance of his spiritual-corporeal existence as wholly good, and so offer the foundation upon which “one can be oneself in responding to this original gift with the gift of oneself.” □

—The Editors