

Editorial

Food. Religious, ethical and philosophical aspects



Eating and drinking are base requirements of human life, yet they are also an expression – if not the source of – social, cultural and religious identities. Food unites us and food divides us. Table manners and religious dietary rules define and bond social and faith communities. Additionally, globalisation has brought a new dimension to these cultural traditions of eating and drinking with a plethora of personal dietary lifestyles. However, even in predominantly secular societies, the fundamental link between food and religion remains.

The response to our call for papers on the topic of food was so numerous that we will be publishing two issues (the second one will follow in autumn 2022¹) to showcase the breadth of submissions. Both issues on food explore religious and cultural contexts and the central role food and drink play in creating and expressing meaning in our personal as well as collective lives.

Alessandro De Cesaris, Research Fellow at the Department of Philosophy and Educational Sciences at the University of Turin, opens the discussion with a philosophical perspective on food under the title “The Taste of Truth. A Mediological Approach to Eating“. De Cesaris proposes a “mediology” of taste to explore how a natural medium – the sense of taste – can shape human experience and which aspects of cultural and technological experiences are rooted in this sense. Focusing on Western cultural history, he investigates the scope of taste in three specific dimensions: physiology, aesthetics and symbolism. The aim of this philosophical approach is to uncover the extent to which taste influences human experience.

Gerhard Langer, University Professor at the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Vienna, shines a spotlight on the essential role food plays

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¹ The spring 2022 issue addresses fundamental cultural and socio-political tremors emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic under the title *A disinfected society*.

in Jewish culture and faith in his article “Food and drink as an expression of identity and diversity in (rabbinical) Judaism”. Starting with a review of Biblical source texts for Jewish dietary laws and their rabbinical interpretation in particular, Langer further analyses their function as identity markers. Externally, they establish and delineate community identity. Internally, they can reflect Jewish diversity, depending on whether and to what extent dietary rules are observed in daily life. Last but not least, Langer also highlights metaphorical aspects attributed to food and drink within the Jewish tradition.

Ulvi Karagedik, lecturer for Islamic Theology and Islamic Religious Education at the University of Education in Karlsruhe, explores the multidimensional aspects of Islamic dietary rules with a view to analysing the reasoning and purpose of dietary ethics in his article “Approaching a dietary ethics in Islam according to the Qur’an and hadith. A categorical examination of the primary scriptures to determine the relevance of food traditions today”. It becomes clear that any attempt at an Islamic dietary ethics must go well beyond a narrow focus on Muslim food criteria such as *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* to reflect its various nuances. Karagedik further incorporates environmental concerns, sustainability, and animal protection and welfare as central considerations and argues for an environmentally-conscious and animal-friendly shift in Islamic food traditions.

Claudia D. Bergmann, lecturer in Hebrew Bible Studies and member of the research team on Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice from Qumran at the Ruhr University Bochum, reflects on and explores the impact of crisis situations on religiously coded food cultures. In her article “Alone at the table? Ancient and modern Jewish responses to the looming disappearance of communal rituals in crisis situations”, she analyses ancient Jewish texts and their eschatological promise that the “meal in the world to come” will resolve all social and religious struggles experienced in this life. This analysis will be contrasted with a review of current Jewish strategies to celebrate Passover 2020/5780 and unite the community despite the restrictions during the pandemic. The comparison between ancient and contemporary approaches in the context of meal rituals and community building through rituals in a time of crisis reveals interesting connections and contradictions in search of solutions.

Agnethe Siquans, University Professor for Old Testament Studies at the Department of Biblical Studies at the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Vienna, delves deeper into the subject matter in her article “‘Eat the food of the word of God.’ The spiritual meaning of eating on the example of Origen’s

homilies on Leviticus”. She analyses sermons on Leviticus that Origen, an influential early Christian scholar and Church Father, wrote as a presbyter between 245 and 250 in Caesarea. On the example of pertinent quotations, Siquans offers insights into Origen’s scriptural interpretation, which is characterised by drawing links between the Old Testament and the New Testament and the quest for intrinsic spiritual meaning beneath the literal surface of Bible texts. The same spiritual interpretative approach is also evident in Origen’s understanding of dietary rules according to Leviticus. Siquans further shows how Origen frequently used images of eating and drinking in his teachings.

Dilek Bozkaya, coordinator for continued education at the Department of Alevitical Religion, and *Alfred Garcia Sobreira-Majer*, professor and co-director at the Research Centre for Intercultural, Interreligious and Interdenominational Learning at the University College of Christian Churches for Teacher Education Vienna/Krems, investigate how experiencing and sharing meals from the festive and fasting traditions of Alevist and Christian cultures can complement a comprehensive approach to interreligious teaching. In their article “Interreligious learning through culinary encounters. Food-based concepts of teaching. On the example of Alevist and Christian traditions”, they explain the concept of ‘culinary encounters’ as a teaching tool for interreligious learning, underpinned by classroom and teacher training experience. The starting point is the meaning attached to food and drink in the Christian and Alevist traditions, which finds expression in religious practice, as illustrated on selected examples. The constituent role of food in identity formation can offer a new perspective for and enrich interreligious learning processes. The authors point out the potential as well as limits of this approach.

Isabelle Jonveaux, post-doctoral fellow, sociologist and member of the Centres d’Etudes en Sciences Sociales du Religieux in Paris, concludes the academic discussion with her article on “The transfer of fasting. From monastic asceticism to holistic therapeutic fasting”. She explores the transformation of asceticism in religious and secular practices of fasting through a religio-sociological lens. Her analysis is based on field research she undertook in Austrian monasteries and observations at Buchinger-Lütznauer inspired fasting and walking retreats.

The *Open Space* section of this issue offers additional food for thought on the subject. *Michael Aldrian*, a Buddhist religion teacher, social pedagogue and adult education teacher in Graz, attempts “An investigation of food

and ritual in a Buddhist context” with “Ahara – Nourishment”. He shines a light on the subject from two sides: an external perspective relating to the conditions of food production and the interdependency of all life on Earth, and an internal perspective constituting a meditation on the absorption and distribution of life force (*prana*) as a form of spiritualisation of nourishment.

Kurt Remele, University Professor emeritus at the Institute of Ethics and Social Studies at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Graz, explores the central role of fish in the Christian fasting tradition and presents an ethical counter-argument in his article “A fish called Jesus. Between the real life and unnecessary suffering of a fasting meal and symbol of Christ”. Remele traces the history of fish as a Catholic meal back to Bible texts that specifically reference fish as well as the emergence of fish as a symbol of Christ during early Christianity. He also offers insight into monastic traditions that associate fish with sexual purity. Remele then goes on to argue against the assumption that fish are not sentient beings and appeals to the ethical conscience of Christians to abstain from eating fish (and meat).

Please join us in this culinary exploration of cultural and religious traditions of food. We hope you find something to your taste, discover different flavours, and find our latest issue inspiring and nourishing.

Edith Petschnigg and Peter Ebenbauer
Issue Editors, on behalf of the editorial team